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Strategic Approaches to the Optimization of Marine Tourism Destinations

Naila Nur Nafisah Syarif^{†*}, Moch Fasha Khairy Alghifary¹

¹Faculty of Economics and Business Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung 40154, Indonesia

*Correspondence: E-mail: nailanurnafisah@upi.edu

ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors that contributes significantly to both national and local economic growth. This article highlights the importance of the tourism sector, particularly marine tourism, in supporting sustainable development in Indonesia. Employing a descriptive approach and secondary data analysis, the article examines trends in foreign exchange earnings from Indonesia's tourism sector between 2015 and 2024. The data reveal that although there was a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign exchange earnings from this sector increased significantly in the following years. Beyond its economic impact, the tourism sector also plays a vital role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as poverty alleviation, decent economic growth, responsible consumption and production, and the protection of marine ecosystems. This study recommends enhancing the appeal of both man-made and natural tourist attractions to support the sustainable development of marine tourism in Indonesia.

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CONTACT: ✉ nailanurnafisah@upi.edu

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a complex and dynamic human activity that involves temporary travel undertaken by individuals or groups who leave their usual place of residence to visit specific destinations (Li et al., 2021). These journeys may be motivated by a variety of purposes, including recreation, leisure, cultural enrichment, religious obligations, health and wellness, business commitments, or social engagement. Unlike permanent migration or routine commuting, tourism is inherently temporary in nature, and the tourist eventually returns to their place of origin. It not only encompasses the act of traveling but also involves a broad system of services, infrastructure, and interactions that facilitate and shape the overall travel experience.

Etymologically, the term “*tourism*” is believed to originate from the Sanskrit language, specifically from the combination of two roots: “*pari*,” meaning many, around, or repeatedly, and “*wisata*,” which refers to a journey or movement from one place to another (Dillenia et al., 2021). Taken together, these elements conceptualize tourism as an activity that is centered on movement through space, the exploration of new environments, and the repetitive pursuit of experiences across various destinations. This linguistic origin underscores the idea that tourism is not only about physical displacement but also about cultural and experiential exchange.

Tourism destinations themselves are highly diverse and span a wide geographical spectrum, including but not limited to coastal beaches, mountain ranges, deserts, forests, rivers, and urban landmarks (Jovičić, 2019). The selection of destinations is typically shaped by the interests, motivations, socio-economic background, and expectations of the travelers. For instance, some may seek relaxation and natural beauty, while others are driven by historical exploration, culinary adventure, or spiritual fulfillment.

According to Figini & Patuelli (2021), tourism serves as a major contributor to both local and national economic systems, functioning as a strategic sector that has the capacity to generate foreign exchange earnings, stimulate investment, create employment opportunities, and revitalize regional economies. In many developing nations, including Indonesia, tourism has emerged as a key driver of socio-economic transformation. It not only contributes to economic growth but also fosters infrastructure development, empowers local communities, supports the preservation of cultural heritage, and enhances a country's visibility on the international stage.

The significance of tourism is further evident in its quantifiable impact on foreign exchange earnings. As shown in *Table 1*, data from 2015 to 2024 indicate a general upward trend in tourism revenue, highlighting the sector's robust growth prior to the pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, however, brought the global tourism industry to an unprecedented halt, causing severe disruptions in travel flows, hotel occupancy, international flights, and tourism spending (Gössling et al., 2020). In 2021, the tourism sector recorded its lowest performance, with foreign exchange earnings dropping to a mere 0.54 billion USD, reflecting both international travel restrictions and domestic health concerns (Matthew et al., 2018).

Despite this dramatic downturn, the tourism sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience. By 2022, the industry began to show early signs of recovery, bolstered by easing restrictions, vaccine rollouts, and the gradual reopening of borders. Recovery initiatives, such as digital transformation in tourism services, health-based travel protocols, and targeted destination marketing, played a pivotal role in regaining tourist confidence. By 2024, foreign exchange earnings are projected to reach 16.7 billion USD, signaling a near return to pre-pandemic performance levels and reaffirming the strategic importance of tourism as a pillar of Indonesia's economic and developmental landscape.

In summary, tourism is more than a leisure pursuit; it is a multifaceted sector that intersects with economic, social, environmental, and cultural domains (Abbas et al., 2022). Its potential to stimulate inclusive development, promote international cooperation, and preserve cultural and natural heritage makes it a powerful instrument for achieving sustainable growth. For nations like Indonesia, where rich biodiversity, cultural plurality, and geographic uniqueness abound, maximizing the benefits of tourism requires careful planning, community involvement, innovation, and sustainable practices to ensure that growth is both equitable and environmentally responsible in the long term.

Table 1. *Foreign Exchange Earnings from the Tourism Sector (2015–2024)*

Year	Foreign Exchange (in Billion USD)
2015	10.76
2016	11.21
2017	13.14
2018	16.40
2019	16.91
2020	3.31
2021	0.54
2022	7.03
2023	14.00
2024	16.70

These figures clearly indicate that, despite the severe disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia's tourism sector is steadily recovering, showcasing signs of resilience and adaptability. As an archipelagic nation consisting of over 17,000 islands and home to an exceptional range of natural and cultural resources, Indonesia possesses enormous potential for the growth of nature-based tourism, particularly within the domain of marine and coastal tourism. This vast geographical diversity, coupled with rich marine biodiversity and cultural plurality, positions Indonesia as a global hotspot for sustainable tourism development.

Given its strategic significance to national development, the tourism sector has been designated as a priority area within Indonesia's National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024 (Li et al., 2024). The government's vision for tourism extends beyond economic growth, aiming to holistically support three interconnected pillars of development: enhancing community welfare, strengthening economic structure, and preserving environmental and biological diversity. In this framework, tourism is not viewed as a standalone economic sector, but rather as a multidimensional driver of sustainable national progress.

Moreover, tourism is increasingly recognized as a vital contributor to the realization of multiple targets within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Bappenas (2019), tourism development in Indonesia directly supports goals such as poverty eradication (SDG 1), promotion of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), encouragement of responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and most notably, the conservation of marine ecosystems (SDG 14). This intersection between tourism and sustainable development places considerable responsibility on both policymakers and industry actors to ensure that tourism initiatives are environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable.

Among the various forms of tourism, marine tourism emerges as a particularly strategic sub-sector due to Indonesia's exceptionally long coastline, spanning over 95,000 kilometers, and its location within the Coral Triangle, which is known as the global epicenter of marine biodiversity (McLeod et al., 2010). This unique positioning enables Indonesia to offer unparalleled marine experiences, such as coral reef exploration, diving among exotic marine species, cultural coastal heritage tours, and eco-friendly maritime adventures. As a result, marine tourism holds the potential not only to attract high-value international tourists but also to generate sustainable income for coastal communities and contribute to the conservation of marine ecosystems.

However, the development of marine tourism is contingent upon several foundational requirements. First and foremost is the existence of attractive and competitive tourism offerings, which encompass both natural and cultural assets. As outlined by Tang et al. (2024), key elements that shape tourism appeal include the lifestyles and traditions of local communities (way of life), man-made infrastructure and tourism facilities (man-made supply), and the inherent beauty and richness of natural environments (natural amenities). These components must be not only present but also well-integrated, preserved, and promoted to create an authentic and engaging tourist experience.

Furthermore, the successful development of marine tourism requires strategic policy interventions, cross-sectoral coordination, and inclusive planning. McKinley et al. (2019) emphasizes that the full potential of marine tourism can be unlocked through integrated approaches that align economic growth with social and environmental priorities. For instance, infrastructure development must be complemented by community empowerment programs, conservation policies, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms. In this regard, the local wisdom and

traditional ecological knowledge of coastal communities play an indispensable role. These cultural assets enrich the exoticism and authenticity of marine tourism while also acting as catalysts for environmental stewardship and guardians of marine conservation practices.

In essence, marine tourism in Indonesia is not just a vehicle for attracting international attention or generating foreign exchange, it is a strategic lever for sustainable and inclusive development. With the right blend of community participation, ecological consciousness, and institutional support, marine tourism can serve as a powerful engine for protecting Indonesia's coastal heritage while improving the quality of life for its people.

Table 2. *International Tourist Arrivals via Sea Ports (2015–2024)*

Year	Arrivals
2015	2,102,284
2016	1,980,554
2017	2,782,655
2018	3,214,420
2019	4,160,632
2020	1,024,601
2021	415,472
2022	1,726,836
2023	2,704,377
2024	2,810,979

The data on international tourist arrivals through seaports reinforces the same overall pattern observed in the trend of foreign exchange earnings from tourism. Between 2015 and 2016, there was a slight decline in the number of international visitors arriving via maritime entry points, possibly due to logistical limitations, fluctuating travel trends, or regional economic shifts. However, from 2017 to 2019, the sector experienced a steady and significant increase, culminating in a peak just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This upward trajectory reflected growing international interest in Indonesia's maritime destinations, supported by ongoing infrastructure improvements, destination marketing, and enhanced port accessibility.

The situation shifted dramatically in 2020 and 2021, when the global health crisis led to the implementation of stringent travel restrictions, the suspension of cruise and ferry operations, and widespread public health concerns (Gössling at al., 2020). As a result, sea-based tourist arrivals plummeted, mirroring a broader global tourism collapse. Despite these setbacks, Indonesia began to show signs of recovery

starting in 2022, with a gradual and consistent rise in the number of international tourists arriving through seaports. Although the post-pandemic growth rate has been moderate rather than exponential, the consistent upward trend reflects a positive momentum and the underlying resilience of Indonesia's tourism sector, particularly in the face of external shocks and uncertainties.

Nonetheless, the development of marine tourism cannot rely solely on natural attractions or visitor demand. It must be supported by a comprehensive set of enabling factors, including robust infrastructure, efficient accessibility, reliable transportation networks, and adequate public facilities such as sanitation, safety services, and visitor information centers. The lack of such foundational elements can limit the competitiveness of marine destinations, hinder tourist satisfaction, and ultimately reduce economic returns. Therefore, the formulation and implementation of a well-structured, evidence-based development strategy is crucial to advancing marine tourism in a way that is not only profitable but also ecologically sustainable and socially inclusive.

In this context, a targeted and strategic approach is needed to identify, strengthen, and promote the latent and manifest potentials of Indonesia's marine tourism sector. This includes recognizing areas with high ecological value and cultural uniqueness, addressing infrastructure bottlenecks, improving service standards, and promoting sustainable business models that involve and benefit local communities. Only by integrating these various dimensions can Indonesia position its marine tourism offerings as globally competitive while ensuring long-term benefits for its people and ecosystems.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore effective strategies for the sustainable development of marine tourism in Indonesia. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method is employed as the principal research approach, enabling a structured and comprehensive examination of previous academic studies, policy documents, and strategic frameworks. Through this method, the research aims to synthesize best practices, identify key success factors, and formulate actionable recommendations for optimizing marine tourism development. The ultimate goal is to support Indonesia's broader efforts to increase foreign exchange revenue, enhance the international competitiveness of its marine destinations, and contribute meaningfully to the achievement of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in relation to economic growth, marine conservation, and poverty alleviation in coastal regions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Strategy

The term "strategy" is derived from the ancient Greek word *strategia*, which originally denoted the art or science of military command, specifically, the leadership and planning skills of a general (*strategos*) in organizing and directing troops to achieve victory on the battlefield (Tjiptono, 2006). Historically, strategy was inherently associated with warfare, conquest, and territorial dominance. However, as

societies evolved and organizational complexity increased, the concept of strategy gradually transcended its martial origins and found relevance in various non-military domains such as politics, economics, management, education, and especially business and organizational development.

In contemporary contexts, strategy is widely understood as a carefully devised plan or approach aimed at achieving specific long-term goals through the optimal allocation and utilization of available resources within a particular system or environment. This definition highlights not only the intentionality behind strategic actions but also the importance of aligning such actions with internal capacities and external dynamics. Within the business and management discipline, for example, strategy is often linked to efforts aimed at sustaining competitiveness, enhancing organizational performance, and navigating market uncertainties.

Rangkuti, as cited in Nainggolan & Kampana (2015), frames strategy as a conscious and systematic effort to align an organization's internal strengths and capabilities with external opportunities and challenges, including potential threats. This perspective positions strategy not merely as a survival mechanism, but as a proactive and adaptive tool for innovation, growth, and competitive advantage in a rapidly changing environment. In such a view, organizations must continuously engage in strategic analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation to remain relevant and resilient.

A more nuanced and influential framework was offered by Mintzberg et al. (2020), who introduced the “5 P’s of Strategy”, namely:

1. Plan, which refers to a deliberately intended course of action designed in advance;
2. Ploy, meaning a specific tactical maneuver aimed at outsmarting competitors;
3. Pattern, denoting a consistent stream or sequence of behaviors and decisions that emerge over time;
4. Position, referring to how an organization situates its products, services, or identity within a competitive market environment; and
5. Perspective, which involves the organization’s ingrained worldview, culture, or collective mindset shaping how it perceives and reacts to its external environment.

These five dimensions reflect the multifaceted nature of strategy as both a conceptual framework and a practical guide for action. Importantly, they underscore that strategy is not a static document, but rather a dynamic, context-sensitive process of continuous learning, adaptation, and alignment between internal intentions and external realities. In the realm of public sector development and tourism, the 5 P’s provide a powerful lens for understanding how strategies are constructed, implemented, and iterated over time to ensure relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

In the specific context of marine tourism development, strategic planning becomes even more complex and multidimensional. It must balance economic ambitions with environmental preservation, integrate community interests with national and global tourism agendas, and embrace technological innovation while respecting cultural and ecological sensitivities. As such, strategy in this field must be deeply rooted in participatory governance, long-term sustainability principles, and flexible institutional mechanisms capable of responding to fast-evolving challenges such as climate change, shifting tourist preferences, and geopolitical uncertainties.

Therefore, understanding strategy not merely as a singular plan but as a set of interrelated orientations and adaptive practices is crucial for actors in tourism, policy, and development sectors. Strategy, when crafted and executed well, enables destination stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and communities, to collectively navigate uncertainty, seize opportunities, and foster resilient and inclusive growth over the long term.

2. Tourism

Etymologically, the term "tourism" is believed to have its roots in the Sanskrit language, derived from the combination of *pari*, meaning "many," "repeatedly," or "around," and *wisata*, meaning "journey" or "travel from one place to another" (Heymann et al., 2013). When synthesized, the term refers to the activity of moving across places for various purposes such as leisure, exploration, education, or spiritual fulfillment. Over time, the term has evolved to encompass not only the act of travel itself but also the entire system of services, infrastructure, and socio-cultural interactions surrounding it.

From a legal and policy standpoint, Indonesia's Law No. 10 of 2009 defines tourism as a travel activity undertaken by individuals or groups to visit a specific location for the purpose of recreation, personal development, or learning about the unique attractions of a destination, generally carried out over a temporary period (Muzychenko et al., 2024). This legal framework provides the basis for the development and governance of tourism in Indonesia, emphasizing that tourism is not merely a private leisure pursuit but also a public sector of strategic importance.

Scholars such as Xu et al., (2021) have identified several core characteristics that differentiate tourism from other forms of human mobility. First, it is temporary in nature; second, it involves a movement from one location to another; third, it is not oriented toward earning income or permanent relocation; and fourth, it is often motivated by recreation or personal interest rather than economic compulsion. This definition has been further refined by Zhao dan Agyeiwaah (2023), who highlights that the motivations behind tourism are diverse and can include educational pursuits, religious pilgrimages, health tourism, cultural enrichment, political missions, or familial obligations.

In the contemporary global economy, tourism has developed into one of the largest and fastest-growing industries, with far-reaching implications for national and local development. It plays a multifaceted role, not only in driving economic growth

through foreign exchange earnings, employment creation, and infrastructure investments but also in shaping social structures, influencing cultural preservation, and encouraging cross-cultural communication. The tourism industry stimulates related sectors such as transportation, hospitality, handicrafts, agriculture, and creative industries, generating multiplier effects that amplify its overall contribution to regional and national economies.

In Indonesia, tourism has been positioned as a strategic sector with transformative potential. The government's commitment to tourism is evidenced by regulatory instruments such as Ministerial Regulation No. 29 of 2015, which outlines the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Tourism for the 2015–2019 period (Jenkins, 2020). This regulation underscores the importance of tourism not just as a contributor to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but also as a key element in national development planning. The vast archipelagic geography, rich biodiversity, and immense cultural heritage of Indonesia provide a solid foundation for developing a wide array of tourism products, from nature-based ecotourism and marine tourism to heritage, culinary, and spiritual tourism.

According to the Deputy of Destination and Tourism Industry Development, the national strategy for tourism development in Indonesia is structured around three main pillars, commonly referred to as the “3A” framework:

1. Attractions, which include the natural, cultural, and man-made features that draw tourists to a particular destination;
2. Accessibility, referring to the ease of reaching and moving within destinations, including transportation infrastructure and digital connectivity; and
3. Amenities, which cover the range of supporting facilities and services such as accommodations, restaurants, information centers, and public utilities that enhance the visitor experience.

However, these core indicators alone are not sufficient to ensure tourism success. They must be supported by strategic marketing and branding efforts tailored to specific market segments, be it domestic or international travelers. The effective promotion of tourism requires targeted storytelling, digital outreach, and the development of strong brand identities for destinations, particularly for those that are lesser-known or located in remote areas. Tourism marketing strategies must be dynamic, data-driven, and responsive to global trends in traveler behavior, environmental sustainability, and technological innovation.

Moreover, the rise of sustainable and responsible tourism has shifted the focus from mere tourist numbers to the quality and impact of tourism activities. Local community participation, cultural sensitivity, and environmental stewardship are increasingly being emphasized in both policy and practice. The social interactions that occur between tourists and local communities are particularly significant, as they can foster mutual understanding, economic inclusion, and cultural appreciation, or, if mismanaged, result in tension, commodification of culture, and ecological degradation.

In conclusion, tourism in the modern era represents far more than recreation or leisure. It is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that intersects with economic development, environmental sustainability, and socio-cultural transformation. For countries like Indonesia, where tourism holds immense promise, the challenge lies in designing integrated strategies that ensure inclusivity, resilience, and long-term benefits for all stakeholders involved.

3. Marine Tourism

Marine tourism, also referred to as coastal and ocean-based tourism, represents a significant and rapidly growing segment within the broader category of nature-based tourism (Lepoša, 2020). It draws its core appeal from the aesthetic, ecological, and recreational value of marine and coastal environments, making it highly dependent on the preservation and responsible management of these ecosystems. The intrinsic relationship between marine tourism and natural resource sustainability positions this form of tourism as both an economic opportunity and an environmental challenge (Basri et al., 2025).

According to Basri et al. (2025), marine tourism comprises a range of attractions and activities that are situated within marine, coastal, or ocean-adjacent areas, where the ocean and its biodiversity serve as the primary features of interest. This includes both active engagement with the marine environment, such as snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing, and marine wildlife observation, and more passive forms of enjoyment like beach leisure, coastal sightseeing, and seaside cultural festivals. The ocean, thus, serves not only as a backdrop for recreation but as a living ecosystem that shapes the tourist experience.

Basri et al. (2025) expands on this by categorizing marine tourism as a form of special-interest tourism, wherein the geographical, ecological, and cultural uniqueness of marine and coastal zones become the focal points of travel motivation. Tourists engaging in marine tourism are often seeking not only relaxation or entertainment, but also educational and experiential enrichment, which can include learning about marine biodiversity, engaging in conservation practices, or exploring historical underwater relics and archaeological sites.

In a more detailed typology, Hidayat (2020) outlines the diverse activities encompassed by marine tourism, such as underwater photography, observation of coral reef ecosystems, recreational fishing, diving at historical shipwrecks, visiting marine protected areas, and participating in eco-educational excursions. These activities often blend leisure, adventure, and education, providing multi-dimensional value for tourists while simultaneously presenting complex challenges for destination managers regarding sustainability, safety, and ecological protection.

Marine tourism is characterized by several defining features:

1. It requires physical movement to coastal or marine areas,
2. It is typically temporary and recreational in nature,

3. It often involves interactions with fragile natural systems, and
4. It provides experiential value that is often enhanced by the uniqueness of marine flora and fauna.

The scope of marine tourism is expansive, ranging from land-based coastal experiences (such as sunbathing, beach volleyball, or dining in seafront restaurants) to water-based engagements (including snorkeling, surfing, yachting, and diving). This breadth of activity positions marine tourism as a highly inclusive domain, accessible to a wide demographic spectrum, while also reinforcing the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination in its management.

Technological advancement plays a transformative role in the expansion and enhancement of marine tourism (Zheng & Wu, 2023). Innovations such as underwater drones, marine GIS systems, sustainable marine transport, and virtual reality experiences have revolutionized how tourists explore and interact with marine environments. For example, advanced diving equipment has significantly increased safety and accessibility for underwater exploration, while digital platforms facilitate real-time environmental monitoring and visitor management. Without such technologies, many forms of marine tourism would remain niche, unsafe, or environmentally harmful due to lack of adequate oversight (Yan, 2020).

However, the rapid growth of marine tourism is not without consequences. Coastal ecosystems, particularly coral reefs, mangrove forests, and seagrass beds, are highly sensitive to human disturbance (Lu et al., 2018). Over-tourism, unregulated construction, marine pollution, and climate-related stressors such as ocean acidification and rising sea temperatures can degrade these ecosystems, thereby undermining the very resources that marine tourism depends on. Moreover, without appropriate management, tourism development may also contribute to the marginalization of local communities, cultural commodification, and socio-economic disparities.

Thus, sustainability must be placed at the heart of any marine tourism development strategy. This includes ecological sustainability (e.g., marine biodiversity conservation, pollution control, responsible resource use), economic sustainability (e.g., equitable benefit distribution, livelihood diversification), and socio-cultural sustainability (e.g., community empowerment, cultural integrity). Effective management strategies should incorporate carrying capacity assessments, marine spatial planning, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder participation to ensure the long-term viability of marine destinations.

In the context of Indonesia, a country with over 17,000 islands and one of the world's highest levels of marine biodiversity, the potential for marine tourism is both vast and largely untapped. Despite this richness, many coastal regions face challenges such as weak infrastructure, limited human capital, inadequate conservation policies, and lack of community involvement (Toimil et al., 2020). Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop strategic, evidence-based approaches that balance ecological integrity with economic development.

The present study seeks to contribute to this agenda by exploring strategic pathways for advancing sustainable marine tourism in Indonesia. Through the application of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, the research aims to synthesize scholarly insights, policy frameworks, and practical innovations to identify best practices in marine tourism development. This includes examining how Indonesia can leverage its marine assets, attract international visitors, increase foreign exchange revenues, and at the same time, protect its marine ecosystems and empower coastal communities (Hakam et al., 2024).

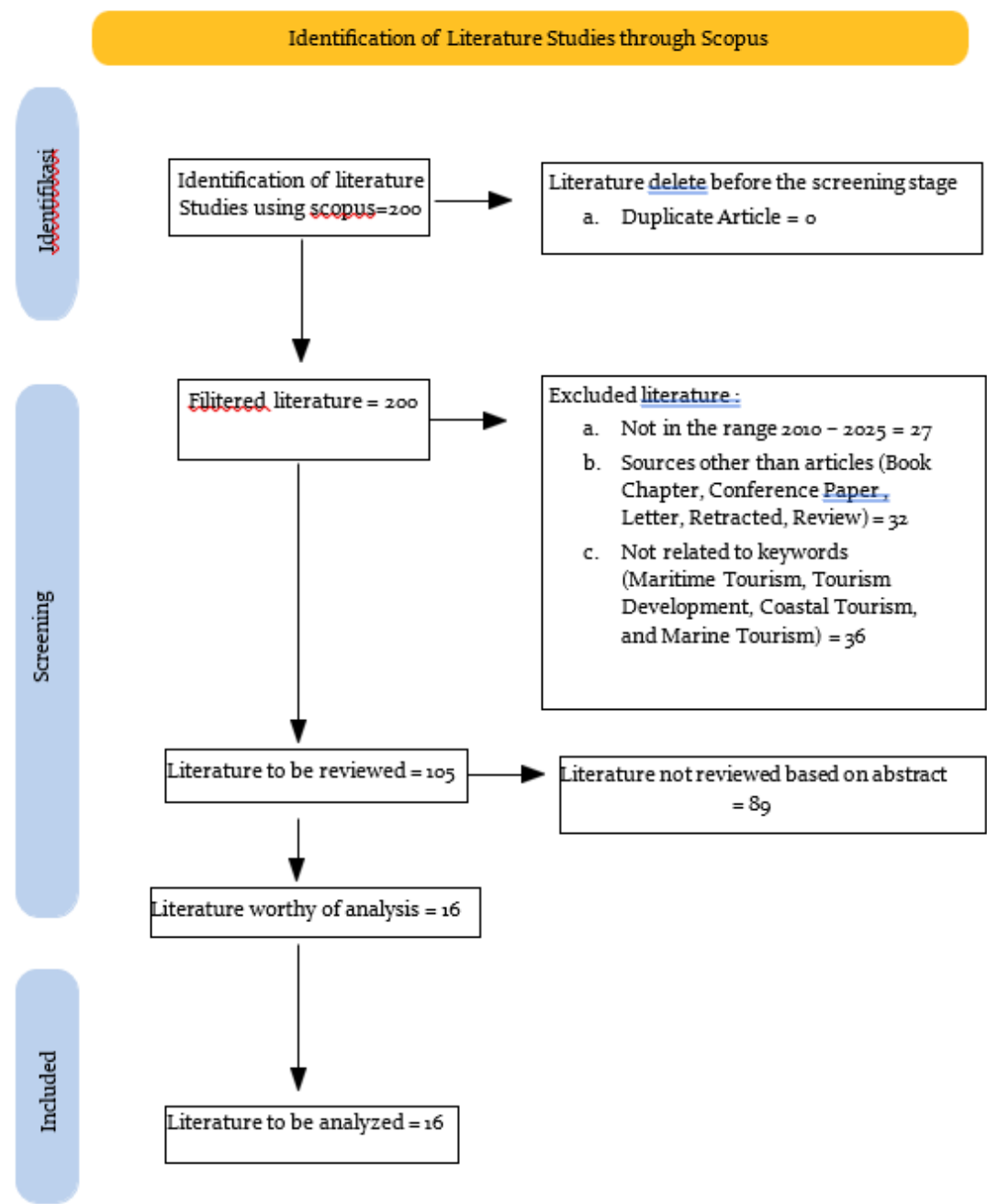
Ultimately, the integration of sustainability principles into marine tourism strategies is not only critical for environmental conservation but also essential for securing the long-term socio-economic resilience of the coastal populations who rely on tourism for their livelihoods (Hakam et al., 2024). By embedding ecological consciousness into tourism planning, Indonesia can position itself as a global leader in blue economy development, where the ocean becomes a source of prosperity without compromising its future health and vitality.

METHODS

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) refers to a structured methodological approach designed to collect, evaluate, and synthesize a wide range of scholarly research related to a specific topic. According to Lusiana and Melva Suryani, SLR is a method used to identify, assess, and interpret all relevant studies that address a particular research question, domain of interest, or phenomenon. This evidence-based method aims to minimize bias by applying a transparent and replicable procedure in selecting, reviewing, and synthesizing the literature to answer predefined research objectives (Hakam & Hakam, 2021).

In this study, the SLR method was applied to explore, gather, and analyze academic literature concerning the development of marine tourism destinations. The process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which consists of several phases: identification, screening, and inclusion.

Figure 1. PRISMA Framework



3.1 Identification

The identification phase of this study, which serves as the foundational stage in the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) process, was conducted with the primary objective of determining, refining, and delineating the central focus of the research specifically concerning the exploration of strategies and policies aimed at optimizing the development of marine tourism destinations in Indonesia and involved a rigorous and systematic approach to literature retrieval by utilizing the Scopus database, one of the most widely recognized and reputable academic indexing platforms globally,

through which an extensive search was carried out using carefully selected and thematically relevant keywords such as “Marine Tourism,” “Tourism Development,” “Coastal Tourism,” and “Maritime Tourism,” with the intent to capture a broad yet precise corpus of scholarly works that address both theoretical and practical dimensions of the topic under investigation, resulting in the initial identification of 200 research articles, each of which was recorded and prepared for the subsequent stages of methodological scrutiny, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that the body of literature reviewed would comprehensively represent the current state of academic discourse on marine tourism strategy while adhering to strict academic standards of quality, relevance, and transparency.

3.2 Screening

The screening stage, which served as a critical phase in refining and narrowing the scope of the literature identified during the initial search, was conducted through the systematic application of both inclusion and exclusion criteria, wherein the inclusion criteria required that the articles be published within the timeframe of 2010 to 2025 to ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of the data; be written in either English or Indonesian, thus making the content accessible and comprehensible within the linguistic scope of this study; be open access to maintain transparency and ensure that the findings and methodologies could be fully reviewed and reproduced; be in the form of scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles to uphold academic credibility and eliminate less rigorous sources such as book chapters, conference proceedings, letters, or reviews; and finally, address topics directly related to strategies for optimizing marine tourism, including but not limited to coastal development, marine ecotourism, sustainable tourism planning, and destination management, while conversely, the exclusion criteria eliminated any studies that did not meet these qualifications, such as those published outside the selected publication range (which resulted in the removal of 27 studies), those not presented in article format (leading to the exclusion of 32 sources), those with topics or keywords unrelated to marine tourism strategy (accounting for the dismissal of 36 entries), and, after an in-depth review of abstracts and thematic alignment, an additional 89 studies were disqualified due to their insufficient relevance or conceptual disconnect from the objectives of this research, ultimately leaving a refined and manageable corpus of 16 high-quality articles that demonstrated both thematic alignment and methodological suitability for comprehensive synthesis in the next stage of the review process.

3.3 Inclusion

Based on the outcomes of the identification and screening phases, a total of 16 studies were ultimately included for in-depth analysis, as each of them fulfilled the established inclusion criteria namely, that the articles must have been published within the designated timeframe of 2010 to 2025, must be accessible in open access format to ensure transparency and reproducibility of findings, must be written either in English or Indonesian in order to accommodate the linguistic scope of the research, must be presented in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles to guarantee academic credibility and methodological rigor (thus excluding book chapters,

conference papers, and other non-article formats), and most importantly, must focus explicitly on the topic of marine tourism development, particularly in relation to strategic approaches, policy implications, sustainability practices, or optimization efforts, so that the selected literature not only aligns with the research objectives but also provides a reliable theoretical foundation and empirical insight for further synthesis and interpretation within the context of enhancing Indonesia's marine tourism sector through structured, evidence-based strategies.

RESULT

The findings of this systematic literature review, which draws upon studies conducted across a variety of national and regional contexts, reveal a recurrent and interlinked set of structural, ecological, and social challenges that significantly hinder the optimal development of marine tourism destinations. These challenges, while context-specific in their manifestations, display a notable degree of similarity across both developing and developed coastal nations, underscoring the global nature of the barriers to sustainable marine tourism.

From a structural perspective, the limited availability and quality of basic and supporting infrastructure emerges as one of the most consistent impediments to marine tourism development. This includes inadequate transportation networks, such as poor road conditions, lack of reliable ferry services, and insufficient port facilities, as well as the absence or unreliability of sanitation systems, electricity supply, and digital connectivity in many coastal and island-based destinations. According to Rogerson (2020), these deficiencies are especially acute in remote or geographically isolated areas, such as certain coastal regions of South Africa and eastern Indonesia, where the lack of investment in foundational infrastructure results in restricted tourist access, reduced length of stay, and diminished visitor satisfaction. This in turn limits the economic viability of tourism operations and discourages private-sector investment.

The ecological dimension of the problem is equally critical. Many studies underscore that marine and coastal ecosystems are increasingly under threat from unsustainable tourism practices, unregulated resource exploitation, pollution (both land- and sea-based), and the impacts of climate change, including sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and increased frequency of extreme weather events. Narendra (2022) highlights that conservation of marine ecosystems is not merely a complementary element of tourism policy, but rather a central pillar of sustainable development strategies in marine contexts. Nevertheless, the disconnect between tourism development initiatives and environmental protection efforts is a common issue. In many cases, local governments and tourism operators fail to adequately integrate conservation mandates into destination planning, resulting in habitat destruction, coral reef damage, and loss of marine biodiversity. This lack of integration further exacerbates vulnerability and reduces the long-term viability of tourism destinations, particularly those heavily reliant on nature-based appeal.

Adding to these challenges are managerial and institutional shortcomings, particularly in less-developed regions. As illustrated by Hasan (2023) in his study of

South Buton Regency, the successful implementation of tourism policy frameworks, such as the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA), has often been hampered by weak administrative coordination, lack of professional capacity among destination managers, and insufficient promotional strategies to attract visitors. Despite the formal existence of supporting policies and training programs aimed at strengthening human resource capacity, the translation of these policies into effective action remains limited, largely due to funding constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and a lack of sustained political will.

This is echoed in the work of Kurniawan et al. (2016), who emphasize the institutional fragility present in many Indonesian marine tourism destinations. Their findings suggest that there is a persistent gap between policy formulation and ground-level implementation, particularly in relation to community participation, destination governance, and the promotion of conservation-based tourism models. In numerous cases, opportunities for leveraging marine tourism to support conservation and local economic development are underutilized, primarily because of poor inter-sectoral coordination and the absence of long-term vision.

Equally important are the social challenges that hinder inclusive and equitable tourism development. One of the most pressing concerns is the low participation of local communities, who are frequently excluded from decision-making processes and often find themselves on the periphery of the tourism value chain. As noted by Sulistyadi (2024), local residents are seldom integrated as stakeholders with meaningful roles or economic benefit-sharing arrangements. Instead, they are often relegated to marginal service roles, with limited access to the skills, capital, or market linkages needed to establish community-based enterprises. This exclusionary dynamic contributes to growing inequality, fosters local resistance to tourism development, and diminishes the social legitimacy of tourism-related projects.

The barriers to community empowerment are further compounded by limited access to education, vocational training, and microfinance, all of which are essential for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in coastal areas. Without these enablers, the capacity of local populations to respond to tourism opportunities remains stifled. However, there are examples of success in other regions that offer transferable insights. One such example is the inclusive tourism model in Eastern Europe, examined by Tihomir (2019), which demonstrates how participatory tourism governance, especially those involving women, youth, and persons with disabilities, can strengthen both destination sustainability and social cohesion. These models highlight the transformative potential of inclusive approaches, which can be adapted to the Indonesian context to improve governance, ensure more equitable distribution of benefits, and enhance long-term community resilience.

In summary, the review reveals that the development of marine tourism in Indonesia and similar contexts is constrained by a triad of deeply interwoven challenges: infrastructure inadequacies, environmental degradation, and weak social-institutional structures. These factors must be addressed holistically through multi-level collaboration, inclusive policy design, and strategic investment in marine

tourism is to serve as a viable engine for sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and community empowerment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, based on an extensive review of prior literature and empirical case analyses, affirm that the development of sustainable marine tourism cannot be approached through isolated or fragmented strategies. Instead, it requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and collaborative approach that accounts for institutional readiness, community participation, technological innovation, and cultural-contextual relevance. Several previous studies have emphasized that the success of marine tourism development hinges on institutional strengthening, enhancement of local human resources, digital transformation, and active engagement of communities in environmental stewardship.

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the literature is the need for a digital transformation of marine tourism governance. As highlighted by Haiyat (2023), digitalization should not be confined solely to promotional efforts or marketing campaigns. Instead, it should encompass a broad spectrum of functions, including the management of tourist data, real-time environmental monitoring systems, integrated destination analytics, and the delivery of accessible and up-to-date information to travelers and stakeholders. When developed in a participatory and locally anchored manner, digital systems can enhance data accuracy, transparency, and the responsiveness of tourism policies. Importantly, digital platforms also create opportunities for smaller, lesser-known, or remote destinations to increase their global visibility, compete more effectively in the international tourism marketplace, and manage tourist flows more sustainably.

Moreover, studies such as those by Rosadi et al. (2023) underline the importance of tourist experience and destination image as critical determinants of visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term destination competitiveness. This implies that strategies for marine tourism development must go beyond the provision of physical infrastructure; they must also foster emotional connection, cultural immersion, and memorable experiences. To achieve this, tourism management should integrate high service quality, inclusive storytelling, and community involvement into destination planning. Such an approach ensures that tourism is not only economically productive but also culturally respectful and socially empowering.

The literature also confirms that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) provides a powerful framework for marine tourism optimization. The CBT model positions local communities not as passive beneficiaries but as active agents and co-managers of tourism development. This approach emphasizes the necessity of inclusive governance mechanisms, such as the formulation of marine spatial zoning, the establishment of community tourism groups (Pokdarwis), and the building of strategic alliances between governments, NGOs, the private sector, and civil society. The introduction of tourism activities that combine recreation with education, such as conservation snorkeling, cultural coastal ecotourism, and marine biodiversity tours, plays a crucial role not only in attracting tourists but also in promoting

conservation ethics and environmental awareness among both visitors and host communities.

A compelling illustration of this approach is found in the case study by Salmi Mohd Isa and Lizana Raml (2014) on the management of Togean Islands Marine National Park, Indonesia. This case highlights the tangible benefits of co-management systems, where local communities, government authorities, and environmental organizations collaborate on zoning policies, marine species protection, and sustainable livelihoods. The inclusion of environmental education, coupled with diversification of community income sources through ecotourism, has led to enhanced conservation outcomes and improved local well-being. Such a model is highly replicable across other Indonesian marine destinations, especially when adapted to local ecological conditions and socio-cultural dynamics.

At a broader level, the synergy between natural assets, local culture, technology, community engagement, and institutional policy forms the backbone of a holistic tourism governance system. Marine tourism should not be limited to scenic consumption or surface-level leisure activities; rather, it must reflect the maritime heritage, coastal identity, and lived experiences of local populations. In this regard, destination branding must move beyond promotional slogans to adopt storytelling approaches rooted in local wisdom, folklore, seafaring traditions, and ecological uniqueness. Such branding helps distinguish one destination from another while reinforcing community pride and preserving cultural authenticity.

Drawing upon the comprehensive review, this study proposes five key strategies that are crucial for optimizing the sustainable development of marine tourism destinations:

1. **Formulating Progressive and Responsive Policy Frameworks**
Central and regional governments must prioritize the establishment of supportive policy environments. This includes investment in green and digital infrastructure, such as eco-friendly transportation systems, conservation-based sanitation, and reliable digital networks. Additionally, fiscal tools, such as incentives for ecotourism businesses, subsidies for clean energy adoption in tourism, and targeted allocations for community development, are essential in translating policies into action.
2. **Enhancing Local Human Resource Capacity**
The success of tourism development heavily depends on the competence and readiness of local stakeholders. This calls for the integration of training programs, professional certification pathways, and tourism entrepreneurship incubators that are tailored to local contexts. Collaboration between government agencies, higher education institutions, and private sector actors can play a transformative role in building a skilled and knowledgeable tourism workforce.
3. **Strengthening Community-Based Marine Conservation Regulations**
Empowering communities to take ownership of marine resources requires the

provision of legal recognition and incentives. Local regulations should support traditional ecological practices, such as customary fishing zones and indigenous marine rituals, while protecting community rights to manage and benefit from natural resources sustainably.

4. **Developing Attractions Based on Marine Ecosystems and Coastal Cultures**
Cross-sectoral collaboration is essential to design tourism experiences that are both culturally rich and ecologically sensitive. Partnerships between tourism authorities, cultural heritage agencies, and marine science institutions can help develop high-quality offerings such as maritime festivals, traditional boat-building exhibitions, or coral garden tours that not only attract tourists but also educate and inspire.
5. **Institutionalizing Collaborative Governance Mechanisms**
Marine tourism governance must become multi-stakeholder, evidence-based, and adaptive. The creation of destination-level forums that bring together government officials, community representatives, business leaders, and academics can facilitate transparent decision-making, continuous evaluation, and policy innovation. These platforms should serve as vehicles for inclusive planning, shared accountability, and knowledge co-production.

In conclusion, the future of marine tourism in Indonesia, and in comparable coastal nations depends on the ability to harmonize economic goals with ecological limits and social justice. Sustainable marine tourism is not an automatic outcome of natural beauty or rich biodiversity; it is the result of deliberate, coordinated, and inclusive efforts among stakeholders who share a long-term vision for marine conservation, cultural preservation, and equitable development. Only through such an integrated and forward-thinking strategy can marine tourism destinations achieve resilience, competitiveness, and enduring impact.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a comprehensive analysis conducted through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, it was found that optimizing marine tourism destinations requires the implementation of several key strategies. These strategies are interrelated and must be applied in an integrated and sustainable manner to ensure the long-term success of coastal and marine tourism development.

First and foremost, sustainable management of natural resources is essential, particularly in terms of conserving marine ecosystems and preserving biodiversity. Many studies emphasize that without a solid foundation of environmental stewardship, the attractiveness and ecological balance of marine destinations are at risk. This includes efforts to reduce pollution, regulate tourist activities in sensitive areas, and implement marine conservation programs that involve local stakeholders.

Second, improving the quality of human resources, both among tourism destination managers and local communities, is a crucial component. Training and capacity-building initiatives are necessary to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills to provide high-quality tourism experiences while maintaining

environmental integrity. Education about responsible tourism practices can also foster a sense of stewardship among locals and reduce harmful behaviors that may threaten marine life and ecosystems.

Third, the development of supporting infrastructure plays a pivotal role in enhancing visitor experience and accessibility. Well-planned infrastructure, such as reliable transportation networks, clean and comfortable accommodations, and adequate public facilities, contributes to the overall appeal of a destination. Infrastructure development must, however, be carried out with careful environmental consideration to prevent ecological degradation.

Fourth, effective promotion and marketing, particularly through the use of digital technologies and social media platforms, can significantly increase the visibility and attractiveness of marine tourism destinations on a global scale. Strategic marketing campaigns that highlight the unique features of marine destinations, such as coral reefs, pristine beaches, and cultural heritage, can help attract both domestic and international tourists. Digital storytelling and influencer marketing have also emerged as powerful tools in shaping travelers' perceptions and decisions.

Lastly, active community involvement in the management and development of tourism activities is key to achieving sustainability and maximizing the socio-economic benefits for local residents. Empowering communities to take ownership of tourism initiatives not only fosters a sense of pride and responsibility but also ensures that economic gains are distributed more equitably. Community-based tourism models, where local people are directly involved in guiding, hosting, and producing goods and services, have shown positive impacts on both livelihoods and environmental conservation.

In conclusion, the research findings indicate that the successful optimization of marine tourism destinations hinges on the harmonious integration of environmental management, human resource development, infrastructure enhancement, targeted promotion, and community engagement. These components must be continuously monitored and adapted to changing conditions to ensure the long-term resilience and sustainability of marine tourism sectors.

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