



## The Contribution of the Tourism Sector to Economic Growth in East Nusa Tenggara: Addressing Sustainability and Infrastructure Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism is a strategic sector with great potential to drive economic growth, especially in areas rich in natural and cultural beauty such as East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). As a leading destination in Indonesia, NTT offers a variety of tourism attractions, ranging from Komodo National Park and Lake Kelimutu to cultural heritage such as ikat weaving and traditional dances. Despite its great potential, the sector faces various challenges such as limited infrastructure, low quality of human resources, and sustainability issues. This research aims to analyze the contribution of the tourism sector to NTT's economic growth and identify the opportunities and challenges it faces. This research uses a mixed methods approach, employing quantitative techniques including descriptive statistical analysis and multiple linear regression to examine the effect of tourism indicators (tourist arrivals, tourism revenue, and employment in the tourism sector) on Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), alongside qualitative thematic analysis based on a stakeholder-oriented framework. Quantitative data was obtained from official reports of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and local government reports related to the tourism sector's contribution to Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) and job creation. Qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with tourism actors, local communities and stakeholders. The research locations include major tourist destinations such as Labuan Bajo, Komodo Island, and Kelimutu National Park. The results show that tourism makes a significant contribution to the NTT economy. This contribution can be seen in the increase in GRDP, job creation in supporting sectors, and the multiplier effect on MSMEs and local community income. However, constraints such as limited accessibility, lack of trained labor, and environmental sustainability challenges hinder further development. This research recommends strengthening infrastructure such as road construction and airport development, improving the quality of human resources through training, and sustainability-based tourism management. Local governments need to involve local communities in destination management and prioritize environmental sustainability. In conclusion, the tourism sector has an important role as an economic driver in NTT. With the right management strategy, this sector can become the main pillar of regional development while maintaining the sustainability of local ecosystems and culture.



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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has long been recognized as one of the strategic sectors that has a major contribution to the global economy. In Indonesia, tourism has become a development priority because of its potential to increase regional income, create jobs, and promote local culture internationally. One of the regions in Indonesia that has great potential in this sector is East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). NTT is a province rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage. Tourist destinations such as Komodo National Park, Kelimutu Lake, and Pink Beach, as well as various traditional villages, are an attraction for domestic and foreign tourists to visit NTT. In addition, cultural wealth such as ikat weaving, traditional dances, and local festivals further strengthen the attractiveness of NTT as a leading destination. Each region in

NTT has different advantages and cultural uniqueness, both natural tourism attractions, cultural tourism, artificial tourism, etc.

However, despite this abundance of tourism assets, the economic performance of NTT remains relatively low compared to other tourism-based provinces in Indonesia. According to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), NTT consistently records one of the lowest Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) per capita levels nationally, and its poverty rate remains above the national average. Moreover, although tourist arrivals to destinations such as Labuan Bajo have increased significantly in recent years, the contribution of tourism to regional GRDP and employment absorption has not shown proportional growth. This imbalance indicates structural problems in tourism governance and value distribution.

Despite having great tourism potential, the tourism sector in NTT still faces various challenges that hinder its development (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulfaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulfaidah, et al., 2025). One of the main obstacles is limited infrastructure, such as inadequate access to transportation and tourism support facilities, and the low quality of human resources in the tourism sector is a challenge in providing quality tourism services to tourists. Sustainability development is also a concern, especially related to the preservation of the environment and local culture amid increasing tourism activities. For example, increasing tourist flows to Komodo National Park have raised concerns about environmental degradation, waste management, and pressure on local ecosystems, while commercialization of cultural performances risks reducing their authenticity and community ownership. These conditions underline the urgency of conducting a comprehensive study that not only measures tourism's economic contribution but also examines structural bottlenecks and sustainability risks. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the tourism sector in driving economic growth in NTT. By looking at tourism's contribution to Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) and job creation. This research aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of the tourism sector in improving the economy in NTT (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). This research also seeks to identify opportunities and challenges faced in tourism development in NTT, so that this research can provide strategic recommendations for the management and development of tourist attractions so that their utilization can improve the economy which can contribute income to the community.

This research uses a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to policy makers for business actors, and local communities in maximizing tourism potential in NTT. The results of this research are not only relevant to the economic development of NTT, but can also be a model for tourism management in other regions in Indonesia that have the same characteristics of attractiveness as NTT.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Tourism and Economic Growth**

Tourism has been recognized as one of the economic sectors that can drive the economic growth of a region. According to Archer (1973), tourism provides a significant multiplier effect, where income generated from tourist activities can encourage growth in other sectors, such as transportation, accommodation, and trade. Another study by Mathieson and Wall (1982) added that the contribution of tourism is not only direct through foreign exchange earnings, but also creates an indirect impact through increasing the competitiveness of supporting sectors.

In Indonesia, tourism is one of the main pillars of national economic development, as stated in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). Tourism potential in regions such as East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) is one of the opportunities to increase regional income and reduce development inequality between regions. However, this achievement is highly dependent on effective and sustainable tourism management.

### **Tourism Sustainability**

Sustainability is one of the key principles in modern tourism development. The Brundtland Report (1987) states that sustainability involves managing resources to meet the needs of the present without

compromising the capabilities of future generations. In the context of tourism, this concept includes environmental, social, and economic aspects. Dodds and Butler (2010) emphasized the importance of ecosystem preservation and local community empowerment as keys to ensuring tourism sustainability in a destination.

Tourism destinations such as NTT that have natural and cultural wealth are vulnerable to the negative impacts of tourism, such as environmental degradation and cultural exploitation. Suprihatin et al. (2019) in their research showed that a community-based tourism approach is an effective way to preserve the environment while improving the welfare of local communities.

### **Tourism as a Driver of Regional Development**

Tourism not only contributes to economic growth, but also plays a role in driving regional development. Weaver (2006) explains that the tourism sector can improve infrastructure, open accessibility to remote areas, and introduce local cultures to the global market. The study by Bramwell and Lane (2000) highlights that tourism development can be a tool for equitable development, especially in previously isolated areas such as NTT. However, regional development through tourism often faces challenges such as a lack of coordination between stakeholders, budget limitations, as well as potential conflicts between economic goals and environmental sustainability. Therefore, tourism management must be carried out in an integrated manner, involving various parties, including the government, local communities, and the private sector.

### **Challenges of Tourism Development in NTT**

Research by Rofian et al. (2020) identified several key challenges faced in tourism development in NTT, including:

1. **Infrastructure Limitations:** Most tourist destinations in NTT are difficult to access due to the lack of transportation facilities and tourism support facilities.
2. **Low Quality of Local Human Resources:** Local labor in the tourism sector often lacks sufficient competence in providing quality services to tourists.
3. **Sustainability Issues:** An uncontrolled increase in tourism activities has the potential to cause negative impacts on the environment, such as damage to ecosystems and an increase in waste volume.
4. **Lack of Promotion:** The tourism potential in NTT is not yet fully recognized by domestic and international tourists due to the lack of effective promotion and marketing strategies.

### **Strategic Recommendations for Tourism Development in NTT**

Based on various literatures, sustainable tourism development in NTT requires strategic steps, such as:

1. **Infrastructure Improvement:** Improved access roads, airports, and public facilities to support tourist mobility.
2. **Human Resource Development:** Training and education for local labor in the tourism sector.
3. **Digital Tourism Promotion:** Utilize digital platforms to expand the promotional reach of tourist destinations.
4. **Environmental and Cultural Conservation:** Implementation of policies that support the preservation of natural resources and local culture, including restrictions on the number of tourists in sensitive areas such as Komodo National Park.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research Approach**

This research uses a mixed methods approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of the tourism sector to economic growth in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), and to explore in depth the opportunities and challenges in tourism development. A mixed methods design was considered appropriate because the quantitative component enables the measurement of macroeconomic contributions of tourism, while the qualitative component provides contextual explanations of

underlying socio-economic dynamics. The integration of both strands strengthens the explanatory power and methodological rigor of the study.

## **Research Design**

The research was designed in two main stages:

### **1. Quantitative Analysis**

This stage was conducted to measure the contribution of the tourism sector to NTT's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), job creation, and regional economic growth. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple regression to identify the relationship between economic variables.

The quantitative design relied on secondary time-series data covering a ten-year period (e.g., 2013–2022) obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and the NTT Provincial Tourism Office. The use of a ten-year dataset was intentionally selected to ensure sufficient statistical power and temporal stability in regression estimation, as recommended in regional economic analysis studies. Rather than determining sample size through individual respondents, the quantitative “sample” refers to aggregated annual macroeconomic indicators, where the full available population of official annual data within the selected timeframe was utilized (total sampling of available time-series data). This approach eliminates sampling bias and enhances representativeness at the provincial level.

### **2. Qualitative Analysis**

This stage aims to explore the perceptions of local communities, tourism actors, and stakeholders towards the opportunities and challenges of tourism sector development. This approach was conducted through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis.

## **Research Location**

The research was conducted in several major tourist destinations in NTT, namely:

1. Labuan Bajo and Komodo National Park as nature-based tourism icons.
2. Lake Kelimutu as a natural tourist destination with historical and cultural values.
3. Wae Rebo Traditional Village as an example of a cultural and community-based tourism destination.

The selection of these locations was based on the strategic potential and economic contribution of each destination to NTT's tourism sector.

## **Population and Sample**

### **1. Population**

The population in this study includes tourism industry players (hotels, restaurants, tour guides), local communities living around tourist destinations, and domestic and foreign tourists visiting NTT.

### **2. Sample Quantitative**

Samples were taken using purposive sampling method to obtain data from relevant agencies, such as the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and regional tourism offices. The data used includes the contribution of the tourism sector to GRDP, the number of tourists, and the number of workers in the tourism sector.

In the quantitative strand, the study employed total population sampling of official macroeconomic records within the selected timeframe (2013–2022). The rationale for using total sampling is that provincial-level economic indicators are limited and standardized; therefore, including all available annual observations ensures completeness and minimizes estimation bias. The unit of analysis is yearly provincial data, not individual respondents.

### **3. Sample Qualitative**

The sample for in-depth interviews consisted of:

- 10 tourism actors (tour operators, accommodation owners, and destination managers).
- 5 stakeholders from local and provincial government, and local communities.

- 5 domestic and foreign tourists as respondents to understand their perspectives on tourism services in NTT.

### **Data Collection Technique**

#### **1. Primary Data**

Primary data was collected through:

- In-depth Interview: Using a semi-structured interview guide to explore respondents' perceptions and experiences related to tourism management.
- Field Observation: Observations were made to observe the physical conditions of the tourist destination, interactions between tourists and local communities, and sustainability practices implemented.
- Secondary Data
- Secondary data is obtained from official documents such as statistical reports from BPS, annual reports of the tourism office of NTT Province, and relevant previous research.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

#### **1. Quantitative Analysis**

- Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software (SPSS or Excel). The analysis included descriptive statistics to illustrate trends in the contribution of the tourism sector to GRDP and employment, as well as regression analysis to examine the relationship between the number of tourists and economic growth.

#### **2. Qualitative Analysis**

- Qualitative data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method. This process included coding the data, identifying the main themes, and interpreting the results based on relevant theories and literature.  
Coding was conducted in two stages (open coding and axial coding) to systematically organize emerging categories. To enhance analytical reliability, coding consistency was reviewed iteratively during data analysis.

#### **3. Validity and Reliability**

- **Data Validity**  
Triangulation of methods was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and secondary data to ensure consistency and validity of findings.
- **Data Reliability**  
Reliability was maintained by using standardized interview guidelines and recording all data systematically.
- **Research Ethics**

This research was conducted with due regard to ethical principles, including:

1. Obtain official permission from the local government and tourist destination managers.
2. Obtain consent from respondents through informed consent.
3. Maintain anonymity and confidentiality of information provided by respondents.

This research methodology is expected to produce valid and reliable findings, as well as make a significant contribution to understanding the role of the tourism sector in economic growth in NTT.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Contribution of the Tourism Sector to Economic Growth in NTT**

The results showed that the tourism sector made a significant contribution to the economic growth of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Based on data from the NTT Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the tourism sector directly contributed around 8.5% to NTT's GRDP in the period 2018 to 2023. This contribution comes from the spending of domestic and foreign tourists who visit leading destinations in NTT, such as Labuan Bajo, Komodo Island, and Lake Kelimutu. The revenue generated from the

tourism sector then flows to other sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and culinary services, which help strengthen the local economy.

In addition, the tourism sector also plays a role in creating jobs in various sectors. Based on the labor data collected, the tourism sector has absorbed around 12% of the total labor force in NTT. This shows that many jobs are created, both directly in the tourism sector such as tour guides and hotel staff, and indirectly, for example in the transportation sector and food traders. This increase in employment certainly has a positive impact on the local economy and the livelihoods of local communities.

### **Potential for Nature and Culture-Based Tourism Development**

NTT has enormous potential to develop the nature and culture-based tourism sector. Several leading destinations such as Komodo National Park, Lake Kelimutu, and Flores Island attract domestic and international tourists because of their extraordinary natural uniqueness. Komodo National Park, for example, is home to Komodo dragons, an ancient species that only exists in Indonesia, and is one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites. NTT's natural beauty in the form of beaches, small islands, and rich culture such as ikat weaving, music, and traditional dances are tourist attractions that cannot be found anywhere else. In addition to natural potential, local culture in NTT also acts as a major attraction for local and foreign tourists.

Many traditional villages have distinctive traditions and ceremonies that can become cultural tourism objects. Wae Rebo Village, West Manggarai Regency is one example of a traditional village that is already widely recognized as a cultural tourism destination that offers an authentic experience for tourists. This cultural diversity, if managed well, can increase the attractiveness of NTT as a global cultural tourism destination.

### **Challenges in Tourism Development in NTT**

Despite its great potential, the tourism sector in NTT faces a number of significant challenges. One of them is limited infrastructure. Some tourist destinations in NTT, especially those in remote areas such as Komodo Island, have limited accessibility. Damaged roads and poor transportation infrastructure are major obstacles for tourists who want to visit these destinations. This problem reduces tourist convenience and limits the growth of the tourism sector, as limited access makes NTT less attractive compared to destinations in other areas that are easier to reach.

In addition, another challenge that is no less important is the quality of human resources (HR) in the tourism sector. Based on interviews with tourism industry players, most of the workforce involved in this sector lack the skills to provide quality services. Specialized training for workers in hospitality, welcoming tourists, as well as an understanding of good tourism culture and ethics are still urgently needed. This low quality of human resources risks reducing tourist satisfaction and can damage the image of tourist destinations in NTT, which in turn can have a negative impact on the tourism sector itself.

Another challenge in tourism development is environmental sustainability, which is often overlooked in tourism management. Uncontrolled tourism activities, especially in highly popular tourist destinations such as Komodo National Park, can damage local ecosystems. Environmentally unfriendly tourism practices, such as poorly managed plastic waste and coral reef damage due to excessive snorkeling and diving activities, have become major issues in some destinations. Therefore, sustainable tourism management is essential so that nature and local culture can be preserved and NTT tourism can still provide benefits in the long run.

### **Economic Impact of Tourism on Local Communities**

Tourism not only has a positive impact on GRDP and macroeconomic sectors, but also plays an important role in improving the welfare of local communities. Most communities in NTT, especially in areas close to major tourist destinations, such as Labuan Bajo, benefit directly from the tourism sector. Small traders, farmers, and local craftsmen enjoy increased income from selling local products to tourists (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). Handicraft products such as ikat

weaving, wood carvings, and other typical items are increasingly in demand by tourists, which helps boost the economy of families around tourist destinations.

In addition, the tourism sector also provides opportunities for MSME players in the accommodation and restaurant sectors. Many small businesses are established to meet the needs of tourists, such as food stalls serving local cuisine, souvenir shops, and local transportation services. The development of an MSME-based tourism sector also supports the diversity of the local economy, creating opportunities for local communities to earn additional income and improve their quality of life.

### **Sustainable Tourism Potential in NTT**

The tourism sector in NTT has great potential to develop through sustainable tourism, which can provide long-term benefits without damaging the environment and culture. Sustainable tourism practices have shown positive results in other countries, as seen in the model used in Bhutan. The sustainable tourism approach prioritizes the preservation of nature and local culture as the main attraction. In Komodo National Park, for example, komodo dragon conservation programs involving local communities can help raise awareness about the importance of maintaining ecosystems and biodiversity. In this case, sustainability is not only aimed at preserving the environment, but also at creating more equitable economic opportunities for local communities.

This sustainable tourism approach covers several aspects, such as better waste management, carbon footprint reduction, and ecotourism promotion. Local communities, as key stakeholders, are also involved in every stage of destination management, from planning to implementing tourism activities (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). This model can be applied not only in Komodo National

Park but also in other destinations with high ecological value, such as Lake Kelimutu and Flores Island. Thus, tourism in NTT can develop by prioritizing sustainability principles that are not only economically beneficial, but also preserve nature and culture.

### **Recommendations for Tourism Development in NTT**

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be suggested to maximize the potential of the tourism sector in NTT. First, infrastructure improvement is a top priority. The construction of roads connecting the main tourist destinations with economic centers in NTT is very important to improve accessibility. Improving the quality of transportation, both air and sea routes, is also needed to make it easier for tourists to access various tourist destinations. The central and regional governments need to continue to strive to improve existing infrastructure so that NTT is more accessible.

Second, improving the quality of human resources in the tourism sector is also urgently needed. The government and the private sector need to work together in providing more specific training and education for the local workforce, so that they can provide quality and professional services. Training programs in hospitality, culinary, tour guiding, and destination management should be further enhanced to improve NTT's competitiveness as a tourist destination. Third, sustainability-based tourism should be the main focus in the development of this sector. Measures such as waste management, nature conservation, and the involvement of local communities in destination management must be strengthened (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023). The government, industry players, and communities need to work together to keep NTT tourism sustainable without damaging existing natural and cultural resources. With the right strategy, the tourism sector in NTT can continue to grow and make a greater contribution to the regional economy, create jobs, and improve the welfare of local communities, while preserving nature and culture.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research shows that the tourism sector has a significant contribution to economic growth in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). This sector not only plays a role in increasing NTT's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), but also creates many jobs in various supporting sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and culinary. NTT's unique nature and culture, including Komodo National

Park, Flores Island, and Lake Kelimutu, make the province a top destination that attracts domestic and international tourists.

However, tourism development in NTT also faces various challenges, including limited infrastructure, low quality of human resources, and environmental issues that could threaten the sustainability of the tourism sector. To address these challenges, policymakers and tourism managers should prioritize investments in infrastructure development, focusing on improving transportation networks, waste management systems, and public amenities to enhance the tourist experience. Moreover, enhancing the quality of the local workforce through targeted training programs can help improve service standards and promote sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, a strategic approach to managing environmental impacts, such as promoting eco-tourism and implementing conservation initiatives, is essential to safeguard the long-term viability of tourism in the region. Nonetheless, with the right approach, such as infrastructure improvement, workforce training, and sustainability-based tourism management, the tourism sector in NTT has great potential to develop further and provide greater economic benefits to local communities.

### **Advice**

Based on the findings of this study, there are several suggestions that can be considered to increase the contribution of the tourism sector to the NTT economy:

#### **1. Infrastructure Improvement**

Infrastructure development and improvement, especially transportation and accessibility to major tourist destinations, needs to be a priority. Local and central governments need to work together in improving roads, airport facilities, and connectivity between islands in NTT so that tourist destinations are more accessible to tourists.

#### **2. Improving the Quality of Human Resources**

The government and tourism industry players need to improve training and education for the local workforce in the tourism sector. Training programs in hospitality, culinary, and tour guide can help improve the quality of services and competitiveness of NTT as an international tourist destination.

#### **3. Diversification of Tourism Products**

NTT can develop more varied tourism products, such as cultural tourism, educational tourism, and ecotourism, to attract more tourists with various interests. Promotion of local culture-based tourist destinations, such as traditional villages, handicrafts, and traditional festivals, can enrich the tourist experience

#### **4. Collaboration between Government and Private Sector**

Closer collaboration between the government, private sector and communities is essential to ensure more inclusive and sustainable tourism development. This increased cooperation can accelerate tourism development and ensure greater benefits for all parties concerned.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently without any financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. The authors confirm that there are no affiliations, funding sources, or financial involvements with any organization or entity that could influence the objectivity, integrity, or interpretation of the research findings presented in this study.

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