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# Managing Sustainable Tourism for Tourist Satisfaction: Evidence from Tropical Destination in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study investigates the influence of four key dimensions of sustainable tourism—environmental, institutional, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability—on tourist satisfaction in two of Indonesia’s leading tropical destinations: Bali and Lombok. Using a quantitative explanatory approach and data from 210 domestic and international tourists, the research applies Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via WarpPLS 6.0. The findings reveal that socio-cultural and economic sustainability have a significant positive impact on tourist satisfaction. Tourists value authentic cultural interactions, local community involvement, and the perceived economic benefits their visit generates. In contrast, environmental and institutional sustainability do not significantly affect satisfaction, suggesting a gap between destination-level sustainability practices and tourists’ direct perceptions. These findings highlight the importance of integrating sustainability efforts into tangible tourist experience and underscore the need for better communication and visibility of sustainability initiatives. The study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing empirical insights into how sustainability dimensions shape tourist satisfaction in tropical tourism contexts. At the same time, it offers actionable strategies for destination managers to promote sustainable tourism practices. Sustainable tourism development should therefore focus on aligning sustainability programs with tangible tourist experiences, while also enhancing education and communication strategies to improve visitor awareness and appreciation of less visible sustainability dimensions.

*Keywords:* Tourist satisfaction; Socio-cultural; Economic; Institutional; Environmental; Sustainability

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a strategic sector in Indonesia’s economic development. The country’s natural beauty, cultural richness, and biodiversity have positioned Indonesia as one of the most attractive tropical tourist destinations in the world. Among its many destinations, Bali and Lombok hold a prominent position as key hubs of national tourism growth. According to data from Statistic Indonesia, Bali received over 6.3 million international tourists in 2019, while Lombok recorded significant growth, with tourist visits increasing by

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nearly 20% annually over the five years preceding the pandemic. These two destinations serve a concrete representation of the rapid expansion of the tourism industry in Indonesia's tropical regions.

However, this growth has not come without consequences. Bali, for instance, has experienced significant environmental pressure due to the increasing number of tourists, including water and air pollution, rising plastic waste, and coral reef degradation (Ridho et al., 2021). A report by the World Bank (2023) states that the demand for clean water in Bali has exceeded the available supply, largely driven by tourism-related consumption. In Lombok, similar concerns have emerged with the development of the Mandalika area, designated as a national super-priority destination. This large-scale project has raised concerns about the potential marginalization of local communities, loss of indigenous cultural values, and environmental exploitation, which have not yet been adequately addressed by strong regulatory systems or effective governance mechanisms (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

In this context, sustainable tourism has emerged as a necessary alternative approach to address the long-term challenges faced by the tourism industry. The concept of sustainable tourism encompasses four key dimensions: economic, environmental, socio-cultural, and institutional sustainability (Jasrotia et al., 2023). Ideally, these aspects should function in harmony to ensure that tourism activities generate economic benefits for local communities, preserve ecosystems and cultural heritage, and are supported by participatory and transparent governance mechanisms. Various studies have attempted to explore these issues, although most remain limited in scope. Research by Asmelash & Kumar (2020) found that socio-cultural and environmental sustainability had a significant influence on tourist satisfaction, while the economic dimension showed no strong relationship. Similarly, Trišić et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of environmental sustainability in shaping tourist loyalty. Meanwhile, Marchi et al. (2022) identified that sustainable tourism experiences have a positive impact on tourists' evaluation and revisit intentions. In the Indonesian context, existing studies tend to focus on only one or two dimensions of sustainability, without examining their comprehensive interrelationship with tourist satisfaction (Thipsingh et al., 2022).

To date, no empirical study in Indonesia has simultaneously examined the influence of all four dimensions of tourism sustainability on tourist satisfaction, particularly within the context of tropical destinations such as Bali and Lombok. Most previous studies have only partially addressed environmental or socio-cultural aspects, without considering the interactions between dimensions or how these collectively shape tourists' perceptions as the primary consumers of tourism services and experiences (Juandi et al., 2018; Thipsingh et al., 2022). Furthermore, the prevailing research approaches have predominantly focused on the perspectives of destination managers or local government authorities, rather than capturing the voices of tourists themselves, who directly experience the outcomes of sustainability practices on the ground (Stojanović et al., 2024).

Several studies in Indonesia have explored sustainable tourism, yet their scope remains limited and has not fully integrated all dimensions in a comprehensive manner. For instance, research by Kurniawan et al. (2023) focused solely on the relationship between sustainable tourism development and tourist satisfaction in the context of cultural preservation. Sahabuddin et al. (2024) examined social and sustainability determinants of satisfaction and revisit intention but concentrated only on social and environmental aspects. Meanwhile, a study by Yap et al. (2018) in Malaysia indicated that destination governance influences international tourist satisfaction but did not directly link it to the four pillars of sustainability. Another study by Chin et al. (2022) placed greater emphasis on destination development strategies without addressing the tourist experience dimension. These findings suggest that research directly connecting all four dimensions of sustainability—economic, environmental, socio-cultural, and institutional—with tourist satisfaction based on actual experience, particularly in tropical destinations such as Bali and Lombok, remains scarce within the Indonesian tourism literature.

This condition presents a significant scientific urgency, as global demand continues to rise for destinations that are not only attractive but also sustainable. Modern travelers are increasingly considering social and

environmental responsibility when selecting travel destinations. If Indonesia—particularly Bali and Lombok—fails to adapt to this trend, its competitive position as a leading tropical destination may gradually decline. Therefore, a comprehensive, locally contextualized academic inquiry is needed to understand how the four pillars of sustainability can genuinely shape satisfying tourist experiences. Such research would not only enrich the theoretical discourse in sustainable tourism but also provide practical, strategic recommendations for local governments, destination managers, and tourism industry stakeholders in developing destination management models that are adaptive, equitable, and resilient to socio-environmental pressures in the future.

Such research would not only enrich the theoretical discourse in sustainable tourism but also provide practical, strategic recommendations for local governments, destination managers, and tourism industry stakeholders in developing destination management models that are adaptive, equitable, and resilient to socio-environmental pressures in the future. In this regard, the study is also relevant to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which emphasizes the creation of sustainable cities and communities. By linking sustainability practices in tourism with broader urban and community resilience, this research underscores how destination management can contribute to global development agendas while simultaneously enhancing local tourist experiences.

## **2. Methods**

This study employed a quantitative explanatory approach to analyzing the relationship between dimensions of sustainable tourism and tourist satisfaction. The research was conducted in the context of tropical destinations in Indonesia, with a particular focus on two leading regions: Bali and Lombok. The study was designed to examine the structural relationships among variables, with the aim of providing a basis for managerial policy development in the management of tropical tourism destinations in Indonesia.

The population of this study consisted of both domestic and international tourists who visited Bali and Lombok within the past year. To obtain relevant and representative data, a purposive sampling technique was employed, using the following criteria: (1) tourists who had completed a minimum stay of two days at one of the destinations, and (2) individuals aged 18 years or older. This sampling approach was chosen because not all tourists have sufficient experience to assess destination sustainability comprehensively. The sample size was determined based on minimum guidelines for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, which recommend a range of 200 to 400 respondents. In this study, a total of 210 qualified respondents participated, which meets the recommended minimum sample size for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, and their data were deemed suitable for further analysis.

Data were collected using a closed-end questionnaire designed based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: the first covered the independent variables, which include four dimensions of sustainability—economic, environmental, socio-cultural, and institutional sustainability; the second covered the dependent variable, which is tourist satisfaction. Each sustainability dimension was measured using indicators adapted from Jasrotia et al. (2023) and adjusted to suit the Indonesian tourism context. To ensure content validity, the indicators were reviewed by academic scholars in the field of tourism and hospitality from leading Indonesia universities, as well as practitioners affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia. Their expert feedback confirmed that the indicators were contextually relevant and appropriate for assessing sustainable tourism practices in Bali and Lombok. The collected data were then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the assistance of WarpPLS 6.0 software. This method was selected as it accommodates the complexity of latent variable relationships and provides robust parameter estimations, even when the data does not fully meet the assumptions of normal distribution.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Convergent Validity Test

Convergent Validity in this study was assessed through the AVE value. An indicator is considered to have convergent validity if the AVE value for each construct exceeds 0.50. The analysis results using WarpPLS show that all indicators have an AVE value greater than 0.50, indicating that each construct has adequate convergent validity.

Table 1. Nilai AVE dan Construct Reliability

| Variable                     | AVE   | Composite Reliability | Cronbach's Alpha | Notes              |
|------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Environmental Sustainability | 0.698 | 0.902                 | 0.853            | Valid and Reliable |
| Institutional Sustainability | 0.726 | 0.888                 | 0.812            | Valid and Reliable |
| Sociocultural Sustainability | 0.757 | 0.925                 | 0.892            | Valid and Reliable |
| Economic Sustainability      | 0.548 | 0.877                 | 0.831            | Valid and Reliable |
| Tourist's Satisfaction       | 0.759 | 0.926                 | 0.894            | Valid and Reliable |

Source: procced data in 2025

Based on the results above, all constructs in the research model have met the criteria for convergent validity and internal reliability, indicating that the indicators in the questionnaire have measured their respective constructs accurately and consistently.

#### 3.2. Discriminate Validity Test

Discriminant validity was tested by comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct with the correlation values between constructs. Discriminate validity is considered adequate if the square root of the AVE of a construct is higher than the correlation between that construct and the other constructs.

Table 2. Correlation between constructs and the square root of AVE

|     | ENV   | INS   | SOC   | ECO   | TS    |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ENV | 0.836 | 0.879 | 0.826 | 0.686 | 0.346 |
| INS | 0.879 | 0.852 | 0.828 | 0.674 | 0.352 |
| SOC | 0.826 | 0.828 | 0.870 | 0.641 | 0.303 |
| ECO | 0.686 | 0.674 | 0.641 | 0.740 | 0.776 |
| TS  | 0.346 | 0.352 | 0.303 | 0.776 | 0.871 |

Source: procced data in 2025

Based on the data above, the results indicate that each construct has a square root of AVE greater than the correlation between constructs, which indicates that discriminant validity is satisfied.

#### 3.3. Goodness of Fit Model

The overall model fit evaluation was conducted through the Goodness of Fit (GoF) test, which included several indicators.

Table 3. Goodness of Fit Model SEM

| No | Fit Model and Quality Index | Result | Note |
|----|-----------------------------|--------|------|
|----|-----------------------------|--------|------|

|    |        |             |          |
|----|--------|-------------|----------|
| 1  | APC    | 0.272       | Accepted |
| 2  | ARS    | $p < 0.001$ | Accepted |
| 3  | AARS   | 0.627       | Accepted |
| 4  | AVIF   | $p < 0.001$ | Accepted |
| 5  | AFVIF  | 0.619       | Accepted |
| 6  | GoF    | $p < 0.001$ | Accepted |
| 7  | SPR    | 3.026       | Ideal    |
| 8  | RSCR   | 4.611       | Ideal    |
| 9  | SSR    | 0.661       | Large    |
| 10 | NLBCDR | 0.750       | Accepted |
|    |        | 0.914       | Accepted |
|    |        | 1.000       | Accepted |
|    |        | 1.000       | Accepted |

Source: procced data in 2025

The values above indicate that the model used in this study has a good fit, is statistically acceptable, and possesses substantial predictive power.

### 3.4. Determinant Coefficient ( $R^2$ )

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) is used to measure the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables. In this study, the tourist satisfaction variable has an  $R^2$  of 0.63 (source: data processed in 2025), meaning that 63% (moderate) of the variance in the satisfaction of tourist about the sustainability of tropical destination can be explained by the sustainable tourism attributes. This value indicates that the model has a reasonably strong explanatory power in the context of complex social and managerial settings.

### 3.5. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the direct influence of each independent variable on the adoption decision. The testing was performed by examining the path coefficient values, significance values, and the direction of the relationships.

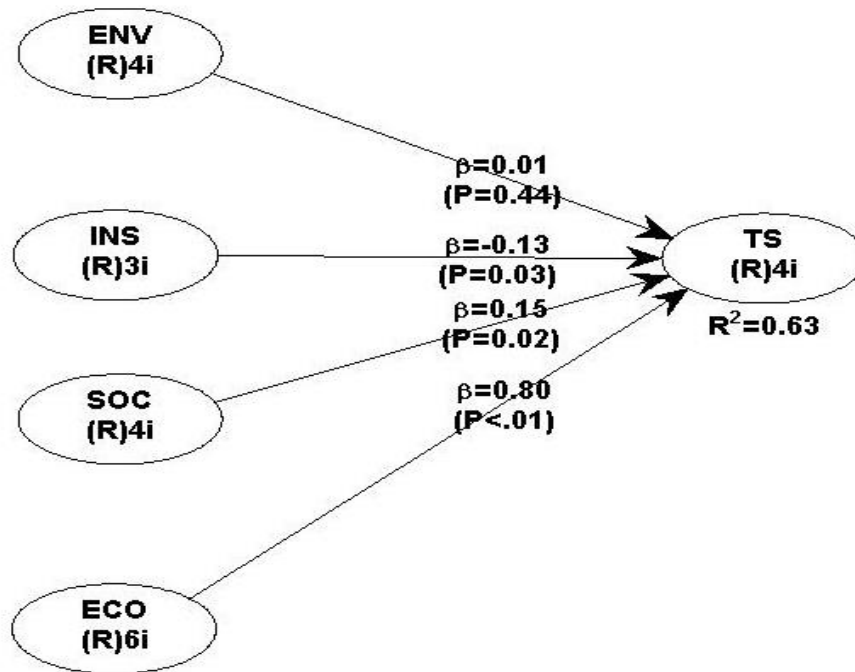


Fig. 1. Research Model

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Environmental Sustainability to Tourist Satisfaction

The results of this study indicate that environmental sustainability does not have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction in the tropical destinations of Bali and Lombok. This is evidenced by a path coefficient value of 0.012 with a p-value of 0.435, indicating that the hypothesis was rejected. Thus, the implementation of environmental sustainability principles—such as waste management, nature conservation, emission reduction, and ecosystem preservation—was not statistically proven to influence the level of satisfaction among tourists visiting these two destinations. This finding stands in contrast to initial expectations, which assumed that environmental sustainability would be a key factor in shaping tourists' positive perceptions of a destination.

This finding contradicts most previous studies that have positioned environmental aspects as key determinants of tourist satisfaction. A study by Aman et al. (2019) found that tourists' awareness of environmental values is positively associated with loyalty and satisfaction, particularly in ecotourism destinations. Similarly, Liu et al. (2016) confirmed that environmentally friendly tourism experiences enhance satisfaction and increase the intention to revisit. However, there are also studies that support the current findings. Liro (2024) demonstrated that environmental sustainability does not always have a direct impact on tourist satisfaction, especially when other factors—such as cultural value or service quality—play a more dominant role in shaping tourist perceptions. This suggests that the influence of environmental sustainability is highly context-dependent, relying on visitor characteristics, travel motivations, and the type of destination being visited.

Field findings from this study revealed that many tourists were not directly aware of the environmental conservation efforts implemented by destination managers. For example, programs such as plastic waste reduction, beach conservation, or coral reef restoration were often either not visible or insufficiently communicated to visitors. Furthermore, most tourists stated that their primary motivation for visiting Bali and Lombok was to enjoy natural beauty, relaxation, and recreational activities—not to assess the extent to which sustainability principles were being applied. Some visitors also expressed that, despite the presence of environmental issues at tourist sites, these did not significantly disrupt their overall holiday experience.

#### *4.2. Institutional Sustainability to Tourist Satisfaction*

The results of the study indicate that institutional sustainability does not have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction in the tropical destinations of Bali and Lombok. The path coefficient was  $-0.134$  with a p-value of  $0.026$ , indicating that although the relationship is statistically significant, the negative direction of the coefficient leads to the rejection of the hypothesis. This means that improvements in institutional aspects do not positively contribute to tourists' perceptions of their satisfaction during visits. In fact, the findings may implicitly suggest that strong regulatory frameworks or institutional interventions could be perceived by some tourists as obstacles or irrelevant elements in shaping a positive destination experience.

Most previous studies have indeed tended to position institutional sustainability as a long-term supporting factor in destination management, rather than as a direct determinant of tourist satisfaction. A study by Asmelash & Kumar (2019) emphasized the importance of governance in enhancing destination competitiveness; however, its direct influence on tourist satisfaction was not statistically significant. Similarly, in the study conducted by Jawabreh et al. (2023), regulatory frameworks and the role of government were presented as part of the policy background, rather than as factors that explicitly shaped the tourist experience. Consequently, the institutional dimension is more commonly examined in the context of long-term destination sustainability, rather than in relation to the immediate satisfaction experienced by tourists during their visit.

Field findings revealed that most respondents were either unaware of or did not pay direct attention to the role of institutions in destination management. When asked about local government regulations or policies related to sustainable tourism, most respondents stated that they were unfamiliar with them or did not consider them as part of their tourism experience. In fact, some tourists even expressed complaints about certain regulations, which they perceived as too rigid or restrictive.

#### *4.3. Sociocultural Sustainability to Tourist Satisfaction*

The findings indicate that socio-cultural sustainability has a significant and positive effect on tourist satisfaction in the tropical destinations of Bali and Lombok. A path coefficient of  $0.145$  with a p-value of  $0.018$  confirms that the hypothesis is statistically accepted. This suggests that the better the preservation of local culture, community involvement, and protection of social and traditional values, the higher the level of tourist satisfaction. These results imply that tourists do not visit solely for natural beauty, but also greatly value the richness of local traditions, cultural identity, and authentic interactions with the community, which are hallmarks of the tourism experience in Bali and Lombok.

This finding is consistent with Hamid & Isa (2020), who showed that tourists' perceptions of cultural respect and local social values significantly influence their loyalty and satisfaction. Similarly, Cai et al. (2023) emphasized that the social dimension plays a major role in creating meaningful tourism experiences. (Uslu et al., 2020) found that direct interactions between tourists and local communities, particularly through cultural performances, are a dominant factor in shaping positive impressions. The consistency of these results

highlights that the strength of Indonesian tourism, particularly in Bali and Lombok, lies in its ability to preserve local identity while providing opportunities for tourists to experience it firsthand.

Based on respondents' feedback, many tourists stated that the presence of traditional ceremonies, cultural dance performances, and the hospitality of local communities were among the most memorable aspects of their visit to Bali and Lombok. This indicates that the successful preservation and integration of local socio-cultural values into the tourism experience is a key factor in developing destinations that are not only visually appealing, but also emotionally and culturally fulfilling.

#### *4.4. Economics Sustainability to Tourist Satisfaction*

The results indicate that economic sustainability has a significant and positive effect on tourist satisfaction in Indonesia's tropical destinations, particularly Bali and Lombok. A path coefficient of 0.799 with a p-value  $< 0.001$  strongly supports the acceptance of the hypothesis. This finding confirms that the higher tourists perceive the economic contribution of tourism activities, the greater their satisfaction during their stay. Economic sustainability in this context includes the participation of local businesses and the direct economic benefits felt by communities surrounding the destination. These factors clearly leave a positive impression and foster a sense of tourist involvement in local empowerment.

de Oliveira et al. (2021) also found that local economic benefits from tourism activities are a key factor in fostering tourist loyalty. Similarly, Shamim et al. (2024) noted that tourists reported higher satisfaction when they perceived that their spending had a positive impact on local communities. In the context of community-based tourism, Dibiku (2023) further emphasized the importance of local economic involvement in enhancing tourists' perceived value and satisfaction. Although some studies have yielded varying results, a general pattern suggests that in developing countries, economic aspects are a primary concern for tourists in evaluating the quality of the destination they visit.

Based on respondents' feedback, many tourists expressed their satisfaction when engaging directly with local businesses, purchasing regionally crafted souvenirs, or receiving services from local tour guides. They also appreciated the narrative that their visit directly supports the livelihoods of local communities. Therefore, the connection between tourists and local economic impact serves as a key foundation of satisfaction, highlighting that economic sustainability is not only vital for the community but also a critical element in destination management strategies that prioritize the quality of tourist experiences.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study found that only two out of four dimensions of sustainable tourism significantly influenced tourist satisfaction in Bali and Lombok: socio-cultural sustainability and economic sustainability. Tourists reported higher satisfaction when they experienced authentic cultural interactions and perceived that their visits contributed directly to the well-being of local communities. In contrast, environmental sustainability and institutional sustainability did not have a significant effect on satisfaction. This suggests that tourists may not fully perceive or appreciate environmental management efforts or governance mechanism during their visits, possibly due to limited visibility or ineffective communication by destination managers. Overall, the findings highlight that tourist satisfaction is more strongly shaped by aspects they encounter directly. Sustainable tourism development should therefore focus on aligning sustainability programs with tangible tourist experiences, while also enhancing education and communication strategies to improve visitor awareness and appreciation of less visible sustainability dimensions.



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