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Functionality, Limitation, and **Future of Homestays** in Kampung Adat Wologai

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Abstract

This study explores the cultural and spatial limitations surrounding the use of traditional houses (Sa'o) as tourist accommodations in Kampung Adat Wologai, a cultural village in Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. While rural tourism and desa wisata development often promote homestays in vernacular architecture, the sacred function of the Sa'o renders such usage inappropriate in Wologai. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research draws on field observations, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders—including Mosalaki, village officials, tourism groups, and the local tourism office and secondary data from academic and government sources. The findings reveal that the Sa'o are central to ancestral rituals and cannot be opened to outsiders for overnight stays. In response, the Dinas Pariwisata proposed a terminological and spatial distinction between rumah adat and rumah tradisional to guide future accommodation planning. A SWOT and SOAR analysis shows potential for homestay development through modern houses located outside the ritual core, reflecting cultural respect while meeting tourism demands. This research highlights the need for localized policy approaches and the vital role of customary leadership in sustainable tourism planning. Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on heritage and tourism, while practically, it offers a culturally sensitive model for accommodation development in desa wisata with strong ritual traditions.

Keywords: Community-based Tourism; Desa Wisata; Homestay; Rural Tourism; Traditional House

Introduction

Rural tourism has increasingly gained prominence in the global tourism discourse as a sustainable and culturally grounded alternative to mass tourism (Ngo & Creutz, 2022; Simeanu et al., 2025; Yulius, 2023). This form of tourism emphasizes the unique values of rural communities — including their landscapes, traditions, agricultural systems, and architectural heritage, offering travelers an opportunity to experience authenticity while supporting local livelihoods (Liu et al., 2023; Sutomo et al., 2024). Rural tourism also plays a key role in diversifying rural economies, fostering local entrepreneurship, and encouraging the preservation of cultural practices that are often overlooked in mainstream tourism development (Rosalina et al., 2023; Šťastná et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, rural tourism is often facilitated through a government-led initiative known as desa wisata or tourism villages (Kurniansah, 2023). These villages are structured to integrate tourism services with the everyday life of local communities, involving local stakeholders in the delivery of cultural experiences, agro-tourism activities, handicrafts, and traditional performances (Junaid, 2023; Kirana & Artisa, 2020). Although the term desa wisata is frequently used interchangeably with rural tourism, it is actually a more specific form of community-based tourism within rural contexts (Pickel-Chevalier, 2018; Putra, 2023). Not all rural tourism takes place in *desa wisata*, but every *desa wisata* is inherently part of the rural tourism domain.

Accommodation is a key component of rural tourism, shaping not only the comfort of the visitor but also the depth of interaction with the host community (Sánchez-Ollero et al., 2022; Sofiani et al., 2024). In rural settings, conventional accommodation models such as hotels or guesthouses are often out of place — both physically and culturally. Tourists visiting rural destinations tend to seek immersive, participatory experiences that align with the host community's lifestyle and values (Li et al., 2024). Therefore, accommodation in rural tourism is not just a logistical need but a medium for cultural exchange and social integration (Tang & Xu, 2023).

Among the various accommodation options, the homestay model is widely considered the most appropriate for rural tourism (Janjua et al., 2021; Pasanchay & Schott, 2021; R. Singh et al., 2021). It allows visitors to reside with local families, participate in daily routines, and develop personal connections that enrich their understanding of the destination (Singh et al., 2024). Homestays facilitate direct economic benefits for rural households and encourage communities to remain rooted in their traditions while participating in tourism (Zamzuki et al., 2023). They also promote small-scale, environmentally sensitive tourism that aligns with the goals of sustainability and inclusivity (Supian et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, homestays are often associated with traditional houses, which represent the vernacular architecture of specific ethnic groups (Andiani et al., 2020; Ramele & Wongso, 2021; Sumardiyanto & Marsonia, 2025; Vitasurya et al., 2024). These houses are built using indigenous materials and techniques, and they reflect cosmological beliefs, social hierarchies, and local environmental adaptations (Puspita et al., 2025). Their aesthetic and symbolic value makes them attractive for tourism development, especially in destinations where architecture is a central element of cultural identity (Runa et al., 2020). The adaptation of such houses into homestays is frequently encouraged as a strategy to preserve cultural heritage while generating income.

However, using traditional houses as tourist accommodation is not without its challenges. Many of these structures are deeply embedded in the cultural and ritual systems of their communities (Erdoğan, 2017; Panjaitan, 2017). In several regions of Indonesia, traditional houses are not merely dwellings, but sacred spaces used for ancestral worship, ceremonies, and community governancev(Segara et al., 2023; Widianti & Santosa, 2021). Their function and meaning are therefore not always compatible with tourism use. The transformation of these spaces into homestays must be approached with caution, as it raises concerns about commodification, authenticity, and the potential erosion of cultural integrity (Sharma & Sodani, 2024).

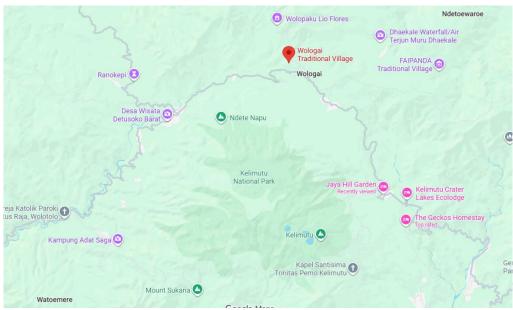


Figure 1. Approximate Location of Wologai Tengah Village (Google Maps, 2025)

One of the most illustrative examples of these complexities can be found in *Kampung Adat* Wologai, a *desa wisata* part of Wologai Tengah Village, Detusoko District, Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. This village is recognized for its well-preserved Lio cultural heritage, unique circular spatial organization, and striking conical-roofed houses called Sa'o (Jadesta, n.d.; Rosalia et al., 2023). *Kampung Adat* Wologai is also known for its rich ritual life, where ancestral ceremonies, community deliberations, and seasonal rituals are still actively practiced (Rosalia et al., 2023). Its cultural and architectural authenticity has led to its designation as a desa wisata, attracting growing interest from both tourists and development planners.



Figure 2. Sa'o of Kampung Adat Wologai

The Sa'o in Wologai are not simply homes but important social and spiritual institutions (Anita, 2023; Lori et al., 2021). They are places where lineage, ritual obligations, and customary law converge. Each house has a specific role in maintaining the social and ceremonial order of the

village (Rero & Maryani, 2022). The spatial layout of the kampung, centered around sacred structures such as the Tubu Musu and Keda, reflects the village's cosmological worldview and intergenerational values (Priantara, 2023). These characteristics make Wologai a unique site for exploring the intersection of tourism, tradition, and space.

In the broader context of rural tourism development in Indonesia, the case of Wologai raises important questions about the role of traditional architecture in tourism accommodation. While the visual appeal and cultural richness of such villages make them attractive to tourists, not all traditional houses can — or should — be adapted into homestays (Andiani et al., 2020; Aritama & Putra, 2021). The need to balance tourism objectives with cultural preservation presents a critical area for research, especially in destinations where traditional structures are still in active ceremonial use.

This study addresses these concerns by examining whether the Sa'o, as traditional houses in Kampung Adat Wologai, can be used as homestay accommodations within the context of rural tourism development. It also aims to identify the conceptual and functional differences between *rumah adat* (ritual houses) and *rumah tradisional* (traditional-style residences), and to explore future possibilities for homestay development that align with the community's cultural values and spatial structure. The research is guided by the following questions: To what extent can traditional housing in Kampung Adat Wologai support homestay-based tourism, how can the distinction between sacred and non-sacred spaces inform sustainable rural accommodation planning, and what is the future of homestays development in Wologai?

Methods

This study applied a qualitative approach with a design of case study (Çakar & Aykol, 2021; Risfandini & Mustika, 2023) to explore the cultural, spatial, and institutional dimensions of traditional house use in Kampung Adat Wologai, Ende Regency. The case study method was chosen for its ability to capture the unique and complex characteristics of a single site, particularly where tradition, governance, and tourism intersect. As one of the most intact traditional villages in East Nusa Tenggara, *Kampung Adat* Wologai offered a compelling setting to investigate the opportunities and limitations of using traditional houses for tourism accommodation.

The research was cross-sectional in scope, focusing on the conditions and perspectives present at the time of fieldwork (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Data collection relied on both primary and secondary sources, selected through purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020) based on their relevance to the themes of tourism, housing, and heritage. Primary data were collected through field observations and semi-structured interviews with key informants, including the village head, representatives of Pokdarwis (*Kelompok Sadar Wisata*), local Mosalaki (customary leaders), and officials from the Tourism Office of Ende Regency.

Observations focused on the spatial structure of the village, architectural features of the Sa'o (traditional houses), and how these interact with tourism and ritual functions. Interviews explored stakeholder views on tourism development and the cultural significance of traditional houses.

Secondary sources, such as academic articles and regional reports from *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS), supported the contextual understanding and helped validate findings. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring ideas and concerns across stakeholder groups, particularly regarding cultural values, spatial practices, and governance roles. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the social and strategic implications of tourism in a culturally sensitive environment.

Results & Discussion

The Sacred Function of Sa'o and the Incompatibility with Homestay Use

One of the core findings of this research is that the traditional houses (Sa'o) in Kampung Adat Wologai, although still inhabited by local families, cannot be used as homestay accommodations. Conversations with key stakeholders, including Mosalaki (customary leaders) and representatives of the Tourism Office of Ende Regency, affirmed a shared understanding: the Sa'o are sacred spaces deeply embedded in the community's ritual life, ancestral connection, and customary governance. Any form of commercial adaptation, including use as tourist lodging, is viewed as inappropriate and culturally unacceptable. This issue was first raised in 2019, during the official designation of Wologai as a desa wisata, and the proposal to open the Sa'o for tourist stays was firmly declined by traditional leaders.

The restriction is grounded not only in cultural symbolism but also in sacred spatial order. The Sa'o are situated at the heart of the kampung, encircling key ritual sites such as the Tubu Musu (central offering stone) and Kanga (ritual courtyard) (Priantara, 2023). These elements form a spiritually charged environment where community ceremonies and ancestral rites are regularly conducted. Inviting outsiders to sleep within this space is believed not only to violate adat law but also to disturb the spiritual harmony of the village. According to local belief, such actions could result in unseen consequences — not only for the hosts but also for the guests themselves — as these spaces are imbued with ancestral presence and spiritual energy.

From the Lio perspective, allowing a tourist to stay inside a Sa'o could expose the guest to unintended spiritual effects. The house is regarded as a living entity, closely tied to the clan's lineage and metaphysical well-being. Outsiders unfamiliar with the codes of conduct within adat space may unknowingly disrespect sacred protocols, leading to what the community considers dangerous spiritual disturbances. For this reason, prohibiting tourists from sleeping in a Sa'o is not a matter of hospitality or infrastructure, but a form of cultural protection — safeguarding both the sanctity of the house and the safety of the visitor.



Figure 3. Mosalaki of Kampung Adat Wologai

In this context, the role of the Mosalaki is indispensable. As guardians of customary law and spiritual order, they are entrusted with maintaining the balance between tradition and change (Ndoa et al., 2022; Prioharyono, 2013). Their firm stance on the inappropriateness of homestay use within the Sa'o reflects a deep commitment to preserving the integrity of adat life in Wologai. This decision also sets a precedent for how sacred spaces should be respected within tourism development frameworks in other cultural villages across Ende Regency.

Clear Distinction between Rumah Adat vs Rumah Tradisional

In response to cultural restrictions surrounding the use of *rumah adat*, Dinas Pariwisata of Ende Regency proposed a clear terminological and functional distinction between *rumah adat* (customary or ritual houses) and *rumah tradisional* (traditional-style houses not used for rituals). This differentiation is crucial in Wologai and other cultural villages across Ende, where traditional architecture still plays an active role in community life. According to this framework, *rumah adat* must be preserved for ceremonial and ancestral purposes, while *rumah tradisional*, typically located outside the sacred kampung core, may be adapted as homestays.

The goal of this dichotomy is to reduce misunderstandings among tourists and tourism developers while protecting the sanctity of sacred spaces. In Wologai Tengah, many families have shown willingness to open their modern homes (located near the *Kampung Adat*), which reflect traditional aesthetics but are free from ritual function, to accommodate visitors. These houses offer practical flexibility and cultural appropriateness, making them a viable alternative for homestay development that respects local customs.

However, the term *rumah tradisional* itself requires contextual nuance, as its interpretation varies across regions. In Ende, it may refers specifically to non-sacred dwellings with traditional architectural characteristics. Related terms such as *rumah bergaya adat, rumah bergaya lokal*, or *rumah bercorak tradisional* may also be used to describe these houses without implying ritual significance. Ensuring clarity in such terminology is vital to avoid conflating sacred and secular spaces, especially as tourism initiatives expand throughout Flores. Respecting these distinctions can supports both cultural preservation and responsible tourism planning.

Comparative Context: Wologai and Other Villages

The case of *Kampung Adat* Wologai stands in contrast to other well-known tourism villages in East Nusa Tenggara, such as Wae Rebo in Manggarai Regency, where tourists can stay overnight inside traditional houses (Hakim et al., 2023). According to the *Dinas Pariwisata* of Ende, such practices are context specific. In Manggarai regency, the Mbaru Niang houses, although architecturally traditional, are not simultaneously used for sacred rituals in the same restrictive sense as the Sa'o in Wologai. This difference highlights the importance of local cultural governance in shaping tourism practices (Harfst et al., 2024).

Thus, policies on tourism accommodation in traditional settings must be tailored to local cosmologies, leadership structures, and community readiness (Soták-Benedeková et al., 2025). In Ende Regency, particularly in Lio communities like Wologai, the line between the sacred and the functional remains clearly drawn — and intentionally protected. This reaffirms the importance of involving customary leaders in every stage of tourism planning and reinforces that not all "traditional villages" are the same, even within a shared regional framework (Rosalina et al., 2023).

Given these differences, *desa wisata*—especially those built upon the foundation of *kampung adat*—can pursue alternative models of accommodation that align with both tourism development and cultural preservation. One viable strategy is to encourage the use of modern or non-ritual houses as homestays, particularly those located outside the sacred core of the village. These houses can be designed or renovated to reflect traditional architectural styles while remaining flexible in function, offering tourists a culturally immersive experience without compromising local spiritual values. This approach allows *desa wisata* to grow sustainably while maintaining the integrity of their living heritage.

Future of Homestays in Kampung Adat Wologai

To assess the strategic direction for tourism accommodation in Wologai, a SWOT & SOAR analysis was conducted. The matrix below presents both the internal and external factors influencing homestay development:

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong cultural identity and intact traditions	Sacred nature of Sa'o limits accommodation options
High interest among visitors in cultural tourism	Limited infrastructure outside ritual areas
Support from Dinas Pariwisata	Lack of standardized homestay facilities
Community interest in tourism	Low English proficiency among some residents
Opportunities	Threats
Growing interest in rural and cultural tourism	Risk of cultural commodification if not managed well
Development of modern houses as homestays	Confusion between rumah adat and rumah tradisional
Support for tourism from local government	Overdependence on tourism as an income source
Proximity to Kelimutu National Park	Tourism seasonality affecting income stability
Source: Data Analysis 2025)	

(Source: Data Analysis, 2025)

The SWOT analysis highlights the internal and external factors that will shape the future of homestays in Kampung Adat Wologai. Among its strengths, Wologai benefits from a strong cultural identity, active traditions, and high visitor interest in cultural tourism, all underpinned by support from the Dinas Pariwisata and enthusiastic community involvement. However, significant weaknesses temper these advantages: the sacred nature of the Sa'o houses severely limits accommodation options, infrastructure outside the ritual core is underdeveloped, standardized homestay facilities are lacking, and low English proficiency among some residents may hinder effective communication with international guests. These factors must be addressed to capitalize on Wologai's potential without compromising its cultural essence.

On the opportunity side, Wologai stands to gain from growing global interest in rural and cultural tourism, the promotion of modern houses as homestays, government backing for tourism infrastructure, and its proximity to the renowned Kelimutu National Park. Yet, threats loom in the form of possible cultural commodification, ongoing confusion between *rumah adat* and *rumah tradisional*, an overreliance on tourism for income, and the impacts of seasonal visitor fluctuations. Together, these external conditions call for a balanced strategy that leverages Wologai's unique assets while guarding against development risks.

Table 2. SOAR Analysis

Strengths	Opportunities
Active customary leadership (Mosalaki)	Differentiation of homestay zones (outside ritual core)
Willingness of families to open modern homes	Policy support for rural tourism infrastructure
Cultural authenticity as a tourist attraction	Partnerships with NGOs and universities for capacity building

Aspirations	Results
To develop respectful, community-based homestays	Increased household income through tourism
To maintain the sacredness of Sa'o and adat spaces	Preservation of ritual traditions and cultural pride
To educate visitors about local culture without intrusion	Improved tourist understanding of local customs

(Source: Data Analysis, 2025)

The SOAR framework builds on this foundation by identifying actionable strengths and opportunities for Wologai's tourism development. Key assets such as active customary leadership (Mosalaki), the willingness of families to host guests in their modern homes, and the village's rich cultural authenticity can be leveraged through zoning homestays outside the sacred core, government support for rural tourism infrastructure, and partnerships with NGOs and academic institutions. These factors support aspirations to develop respectful, community-based homestays, preserve the sanctity of Sa'o and ritual spaces, and foster meaningful cultural exchange with visitors. If implemented effectively, these efforts could result in increased household income, strengthened cultural pride, and deeper understanding of Lio traditions among tourists—contributing to a tourism model that is both sustainable and culturally grounded.

To translate these aspirations into practice, targeted capacity building within the community is essential. Training programs in hospitality, communication, and intercultural engagement can enhance service quality while reinforcing local ownership of tourism initiatives. Developing clear operational guidelines—co-created with village leaders and endorsed by the Mosalaki—can help ensure that homestay practices remain aligned with cultural values. Over time, Wologai's SOAR-based strategy may serve as a model for other desa wisata with strong ritual identities, demonstrating that tourism can coexist with heritage when grounded in mutual respect and community leadership.

Conclusion

This study concludes that traditional houses (Sa'o) in Kampung Adat Wologai cannot be used as homestay accommodations due to their sacred function and central role in the community's ritual life. The findings affirm that any tourism development involving traditional architecture must respect local cosmology, spatial order, and customary authority. The proposed distinction between rumah adat and rumah tradisional, supported by the Dinas Pariwisata of Ende Regency, offers a culturally sensitive framework that can guide tourism planning in Wologai and similar villages. The willingness of local residents to open their modern homes for homestays also signals a practical and respectful path forward for developing accommodation without compromising spiritual values.

This research also contributes to the discourse on rural heritage-based tourism by highlighting the importance of context-specific approaches to traditional architecture in tourism planning. Empirically, it provides a model of how local wisdom, institutional policy, and tourism aspirations

can be harmonized through spatial differentiation and stakeholder collaboration. The findings may serve as a reference for other *desa wisata* in the island of Flores and beyond, especially those navigating similar tensions between cultural preservation and economic opportunity.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest in the writing, review, or editorial process of the article titled "Homestay or Heritage? Exploring the Functionality and Limits of Traditional Houses in Kampung Adat Wologai." The author declares that this manuscript is free from any form of conflict of interest and has been prepared and processed in accordance with the applicable rules and policies of the journal to prevent any form of publication ethics violations.

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