

THE ROLE OF FORT DE KOCK IN HERITAGE TOURISM AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Rezy Eka Puti Riansyah¹, Fadlul Rahman²

Tourism Study Program, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Padang Panjang
Email: Rezyekaputri68@gmail.com¹, fadlulrahman@isi-padangpanjang.ac.id²

Abstrak

Keywords:

Fort de Kock,
Heritage Tourism,
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Bukittinggi.

Fort de Kock is a Dutch colonial heritage site that plays a significant role in the development of heritage tourism in Bukittinggi. As a defensive fort built in 1825, its presence not only bears witness to the Padri War but also shapes the cultural identity of the Minangkabau people to this day. This study aims to understand how Fort de Kock functions as a heritage tourism destination while simultaneously fostering the growth of the local creative economy. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study illustrates the fort's role in historical preservation, education, and enhancing tourist appeal. The study reveals that the fort does not stand alone but is connected to the Kinantan Wildlife Park, the Baanjuang Traditional House Museum, and the Limpapeh Bridge, forming an integrated tourism area that reinforces Bukittinggi's image as a heritage city. The authenticity of the fort's structure, the minimal alterations that could damage its historical value, and the availability of facilities and tourist attractions contribute to increasing tourist interest. Economically, the growing tourist flow provides opportunities for the community to develop MSMEs and businesses based on local creativity, such as handicrafts, culinary delights, souvenirs, and cultural performances. This creative economy growth is supported by coordination between the government, tourism operators, and the community in area development, facility provision, and maintaining the quality of products and services. This collaboration not only helps increase community income but also strengthens the preservation of Minangkabau cultural values.

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INTRODUCTION

Fort de Kock is a Dutch colonial relic built around 1825 and is now one of the historical icons of Bukittinggi City, West Sumatra. This structure is not only valuable as a historical monument; according to Ashworth (1994), heritage should not be understood merely as remnants of the past, but also as a cultural resource that can be utilized for social, educational, and economic purposes in the present. This aligns with the view of Timothy and Boyd (2003), who state that heritage tourism connects visitors with historical narratives through direct engagement with buildings, artifacts, and inherited traditions. Fort de Kock has therefore become part of a heritage tourism attraction that also enhances the economic activity of surrounding communities (Kompas.com).

Developing heritage tourism integrated with the local creative economy has become an essential strategy for creating sustainable tourism. Therefore, an appropriate research method is required to analyze the role of Fort de Kock within these two dimensions comprehensively and objectively. This article focuses on describing the research method used in studying the relationship between heritage tourism and the creative economy in the Fort de Kock area.

Cahyadi and Gunawijaya (2009) define heritage tourism as a journey to enjoy places, artifacts, and activities that authentically narrate the history of previous or current generations. Heritage tourism is a form of travel that emphasizes the preservation and utilization of historical assets, cultural expressions, and traditional values. In Indonesia, heritage tourism holds significant potential due to the abundance of historical sites both colonial and indigenous across the archipelago. One of the historical destinations with high heritage value is Fort de Kock in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra (bukittinggikota.go.id).

Fort de Kock was built by the Dutch colonial government as a defensive fortification against Minangkabau resistance during the Padri War. Today, the fort not only symbolizes the struggles of the local community but has also transformed into a popular tourist attraction visited by domestic and international travelers (rri.go.id).

In the context of modern tourism development, Fort de Kock plays an important role in driving the creative economy of the local community. Through economic activities such as souvenir production, traditional culinary businesses, tour guiding services, and cultural performances, the surrounding community benefits both directly and indirectly. Furthermore, the development of heritage tourism in this area also strengthens cultural preservation and raises public awareness about the importance of protecting historical heritage (Padek Jawapos.com).

Thus, this study aims to analyze the role of Fort de Kock in supporting heritage tourism and its contribution to the development of the local creative economy. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for local governments and tourism stakeholders in designing sustainable heritage tourism strategies based on cultural preservation and community empowerment.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to analyze the role of Fort de Kock as a heritage tourism attraction, identify forms of heritage-based activities such as historical education, cultural attractions, and building conservation, and assess the fort's ability to attract domestic and international tourists as part of Bukittinggi's tourism image.

REVIEW LIBRARY

Fort de Kock is a Dutch fort located in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, built under the command of Captain Bouer. It is a significant structure in the history of the local community's struggle against colonialism. The fort witnessed the perseverance of the Padri forces led by Imam Bonjol in resisting Dutch troops (Marihandono, 2008). While initially functioning as a security post, the fort later evolved into an administrative, governmental, and commercial center.

Heritage tourism is a type of travel that focuses on visiting historical sites, cultural locations, and community traditions. Timothy and Boyd (2003) explain that heritage tourism provides direct experiences that allow visitors to understand history through physical structures, artifacts, and cultural narratives.

Cahyadi and Gunawijaya (2009) also describe heritage tourism as travel aimed at enjoying places, artifacts, and activities that authentically recount the stories of past and present generations.

The concept of the creative economy refers to economic activities rooted in creativity, ideas, and innovation. Howkins (2001) describes the creative economy as transactions involving creative products generated from human creativity and possessing economic value. The creative economy is closely linked to tourism, especially through the production of souvenirs, culinary items, traditional performances, and local handicrafts.

In the context of Fort de Kock, the heritage area encourages growth in MSMEs and local creative economy actors, such as souvenir sellers, craftsmen, culinary vendors, and cultural performers. Rahmawati (2020) highlights the important role of MSMEs as key supporters of heritage tourism because they provide products that reflect regional cultural identities.

METHOD STUDY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach and was conducted in the Fort de Kock tourism area, Bukittinggi. The aim is to comprehensively understand the role of Fort de Kock as a heritage tourism destination and its contribution to the development of the local creative economy. This approach was chosen because it can depict social, cultural, and economic phenomena occurring in the field in a contextual and holistic manner.

Data collection techniques included observation to examine tourism activities, heritage facilities, and economic activities surrounding Fort de Kock.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fort de Kock, as a heritage tourism destination, represents an important trace of Dutch colonial presence in Minangkabau. Its existence reflects not only military strategy but also the dynamics of relations between the colonial government and local communities, particularly during the Padri conflict. Physical elements such as the fort walls, cannons, and its elevated location provide historical and aesthetic value that attracts visitors.

1. THE ROLE OF FORT DE KOCK AS A HERITAGE TOURISM SITE

Fort de Kock holds high historical value as a 19th-century Dutch colonial relic. It has become a symbol of struggle and the identity of Bukittinggi City. In the context of heritage tourism, the role of Fort de Kock includes:

- a. Preservation of history and culture, as the building and its historical narratives attract visitors to learn about the colonial era. Colonial-era structures have architectural characteristics that distinguish them from modern buildings, featuring unique materials and structural forms. These buildings are not only visually appealing but also carry strong historical significance.
- b. Tourist attraction, which reinforces Bukittinggi's image as a historical city. Fort de Kock was built by the Dutch in 1825 as a defensive fort during the Padri War. This historical value is a major attraction because the fort stands as a witness to a major conflict between the Dutch and the Minangkabau people. Its architecture provides both visual appeal and educational insight into colonial military styles at the time. This strengthens Bukittinggi's identity as a city with tangible colonial heritage.
- c. Educational tourism for students and researchers. The Fort de Kock area functions as a learning space where students and researchers study colonialism and local resistance. Visitors gain historical interpretation through information boards and guides. Lessons about colonial history, military strategies, architecture, local culture, and heritage preservation can all be learned directly from the site. The fort is not merely a tourist object but an educational medium that helps society understand history and cultural values that must be preserved.

The fort symbolizes the period in which Minangkabau communities both the Padri faction and traditionalists experienced colonial pressure. Built by Captain Johan Heinrich during Dutch rule, Fort de Kock stands as evidence of strategic interactions, conflict, and socio-cultural change. It serves as an important learning source for both local and colonial history.

a. A reinforcement of Bukittinggi's identity as a heritage city.

Bukittinggi is known as one of the most important cultural and historical cities in West Sumatra. Its historical heritage makes the city closely associated with national struggle and colonial narratives. Fort de Kock symbolizes resistance and local dynamics, illustrating Padri resistance strategies, social changes caused by colonialism, and regional political developments of the 19th century. This strengthens Bukittinggi's identity as a city of struggle. The fort is not only a historical attraction but also a symbol of collective memory and cultural identity. Its existence differentiates Bukittinggi from other cities because it has a concrete colonial site one of the oldest and most strategic forts in West Sumatra.

For Bukittinggi residents, Fort de Kock is part of collective memory and social space, used for recreation, education, and cultural activities. The fort represents the strength of the Minangkabau people in facing colonial pressure. With proper heritage interpretation, the fort becomes a medium for introducing Minangkabau cultural identity to both domestic and international tourists.

The fort's location in the city center, supported by adequate infrastructure and easy accessibility, makes it a preferred destination. Facilities such as parking areas, organized pedestrian paths, historical information boards, and other amenities support the tourism experience.

a. Integration with other tourism sites.

Fort de Kock is connected to a zoo, the Baanjuang Traditional House Museum, and the Limpapeh Bridge iconic elements of the city. This uniqueness is strengthened because the fort does not stand alone but is integrated with the Kinantan Wildlife and Cultural Park, the Baanjuang Traditional House Museum, and the Limpapeh Bridge. This creates a cohesive tourism cluster combining history, culture, education, and recreation.

Integration with Kinantan Wildlife Park allows visitors to move directly from the fort via the Limpapeh Bridge, creating a combined tourism package. The arrangement produces a sequential route: historical tourism at the fort, educational tourism at the wildlife park, and cultural tourism at the museum. Integration with the Baanjuang Museum provides continuity of narratives between colonial history (Fort de Kock) and Minangkabau cultural heritage (the museum). Visitors can understand societal dynamics during the colonial era through this combination.

The Role of Limpapeh Bridge as the Main Connector and City Icon: Limpapeh Bridge is an iconic landmark in Bukit-tinggi. It connects Fort de Kock with the Wildlife Park and Baanjuang Museum. Its strategic location allows visitors to explore both hills without descending to the main road. Its Minangkabau-inspired design makes it a favorite photo spot and a unifying element of the heritage and recreational area. The bridge enhances tourism integration, accessibility, and visitor flow, offering panoramic views of Bukittinggi from above.

Factors Influencing the Heritage Appeal of Fort de Kock as a Cultural Tourism Site:

a. Authenticity of the fort's structure.

The authenticity is evident from its original physical form and Dutch colonial architectural character maintained for more than two centuries. The walls, foundation, and placement atop a hill remain consistent with the original structure.

b. Minimal changes that preserve historical value.

Although the fort has undergone maintenance, modifications are minimal and do not alter its historical character. Repairs are mostly structural reinforcement rather than redesign. Its hilltop position crucial for its military function remains unchanged, preserving the fort's strategic historical value.

c. Connection with Limpapeh Bridge and Kinantan Wildlife Park.

The three sites form an interconnected tourism area that reinforces each other's functions. The fort as a historical center, the bridge as an iconic connector, and the wildlife park as recreational support collectively form an integrated, accessible, and educational tourism cluster.

d. Availability of photo spots

Fort de Kock is not only historically important but also popular as a photography location due to its heritage aesthetics. These spots increase visitor engagement and enhance the fort's recognition among various groups.



Figure 1. Stone Inscription of Fort de Kock Fortress
(Documentation: Rezy Eka Putri Riansyah, 2025)

The inauguration inscription and historical information of Fort de Kock. This stone serves as a heritage marker that provides official information regarding the origins and construction of the fort.

2. CONTRIBUTION OF FORT DE KOCK TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY'S ECONOMY

Encouraging the growth of MSMEs and the creative economy

Fort de Kock, as one of the main heritage icons in Bukittinggi, not only functions as a historical tourist attraction but also acts as a driver of economic activities for the surrounding community. Its presence attracts a stable flow of visitors, which opens opportunities for the growth of various micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including those in the creative economy sector. The high number of visitors in the Fort de Kock area provides space for the community to develop small businesses. MSME actors can utilize the areas around the entrance, pedestrian paths, and resting points to offer products and services with economic value.

The Fort de Kock tourist area has become a center for businesses based on local creativity such as Minangkabau souvenirs, embroidered handicrafts, and miniature replicas of Bukittinggi icons such as Fort de Kock, the Jam Gadang tower, and other traditional Minang architectural structures. Through the sale of these Minangkabau-themed creative products, local MSMEs indirectly preserve and promote regional culture. Souvenirs purchased by tourists serve as cultural messengers that spread information about Minangkabau heritage to wider regions. The growth of MSMEs contributes to job creation and increases the income of local residents.

Local products such as traditional chips, ethnic Minangkabau clothing, and creative works produced by local youth also contribute to income generation. Fort de Kock has become a significant marketing space for local MSME actors, helping sustain their businesses. It also opens job opportunities for nearby residents, including workers in souvenir shops and food stalls.

The presence of Fort de Kock contributes to the local economy by expanding opportunities for MSMEs and the creative economy. Tourism development policies that incorporate creative economic principles and community empowerment are essential to building an inclusive and sustainable economic ecosystem around this historical heritage site.

Coordination Between Tourism Stakeholders, the Community, and the Government in Supporting Creative Economic Development in the Fort de Kock Area

The development of the creative economy around Fort de Kock did not occur spontaneously. The progress seen in recent years is the result of collaboration between the local government, tourism actors, and the surrounding community. Coordination among these three parties forms a crucial foundation so that creative economic activities can grow without compromising the historical value and preservation of the fort as a cultural heritage site.

Government's Role in Directing Policy and Providing Facilities

The Bukittinggi City Government plays the most strategic role as a policy regulator and guardian of the quality of the heritage area. The government acts as a regulator, facilitator, and primary investor in ensuring the preservation of the fort as a cultural heritage site so that its historical function remains intact while still being accessible for tourism. Without government oversight, economic activities around Fort de Kock risk becoming disorderly and potentially damaging the long-term preservation of the site. Therefore, real coordination is carried out through spatial planning and zoning regulations designating specific areas for MSMEs, street vendors, cultural performance spaces, and visitor pathways so they do not disturb the structure of the fort. The government also provides infrastructure and public facilities, such as improved pedestrian paths, better-organized MSME areas, waste disposal points, information boards, and spaces for cultural activities. These facilities support the operations of creative economy actors and make their businesses more accessible.

Role of Tourism Actors as Direct Connectors to Visitors

Tourism actors include destination managers, souvenir vendors, local food sellers, artisans, tour guides, and creative communities. Their contributions include:

- a. Supporting government regulations regarding area management, such as adhering to operational hours and maintaining waste responsibly.
- b. Maintaining product and service quality to ensure that visitors have a positive experience.
- c. Collaborating in cultural events and traditional performances that enhance the attraction of the area while providing additional income opportunities.

Role of the Community as Economic Drivers and Cultural Guardians

Community involvement is essential for the sustainability of the area as a heritage-based tourist destination. Local residents are not merely beneficiaries but also central actors who enliven the area through economic activities and cultural preservation.

Forms of community participation include producing creative Minangkabau products such as traditional foods (ampiang dadiah, karupuak sanjai), embroidered crafts, wood carvings, ethnic bags, and traditional clothing. These products become unique attractions for tourists. Good coordination has resulted in significant impacts, such as:

- a. A more organized tourism area, improving visitor comfort
- b. Growth of MSMEs, especially in food and souvenir sector.
- c. Increased local income supported by continuous tourist visit
- d. Strengthening Minangkabau cultural identity through arts and creative products

In addition to economic contributions, the community also protects cultural values by maintaining environmental cleanliness, avoiding construction that may damage heritage value, and adhering to zoning rules.

CONCLUSION

Fort de Kock is one of the main historical sites in Bukittinggi, built in 1825 and serving as a witness to the Padri War. Its authentic structure and strategic location make it a continuous attraction for tourists and an important part of Minangkabau's cultural identity. As part of tourism development, the fort is connected to the Kinantan Wildlife Park, the Baanjuang Traditional House Museum, and the Limpapeh Bridge. This integration creates a tourism area offering education, culture, history, and recreation strengthening Bukittinggi's image as a heritage city. The fort also functions as a center for historical learning. Through various colonial narratives and information displayed, the site becomes relevant for students, researchers, and the public to understand Minangkabau's resistance and colonial history.

Economically, the fort has a significant impact on the local community. The steady flow of visitors opens business opportunities for MSMEs such as souvenir vendors, traditional food sellers, artisans, and tourism service providers. These cultural products not only generate income but also preserve local traditions. All activities run through collaboration between the government, tourism actors, and the community. The government provides policies and infrastructure, tourism actors maintain product and service quality, and the community supplies creative cultural products. This collaboration creates a well-organized tourism area while preserving its historical value.

Overall, Fort de Kock plays a vital role as a heritage destination and a driver of the creative economy. To ensure its sustainability, heritage-centered tourism management that emphasizes cultural preservation and community empowerment is essential.

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