

# UNLOCKING ARCHITECTURE AND HERITAGE POTENTIAL FOR VILLAGE TOURISM IN LAHAT REGENCY

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## ABSTRACT

*Cultural heritage plays a vital role in supporting sustainable development, particularly within the growing field of heritage-based tourism. Tinggi Hari Village in Lahat Regency, South Sumatra Province, offers a distinctive combination of cultural and natural attractions, which positions it as a valuable site for integrated tourism development. The village's key heritage assets include the megalithic sites, which are considered among the oldest in Southeast Asia, and the traditional Rumah Baghi architecture, which embodies vernacular knowledge, social values, craftsmanship, and historical continuity. Despite the richness of these resources, existing development programs tend to manage them in isolation or to overlook their interconnected significance, resulting in underutilised potential, fragmented planning, and limited benefits for local communities. This research addresses the lack of a comprehensive framework that connects cultural heritage with the surrounding natural environment. Adopting a case study methodology, this study combines field surveys, in-depth interviews with experts and community leaders, and spatial mapping analysis to explore viable pathways for integrating megalithic heritage, Rumah Baghi architecture, and natural landscapes into a cohesive cultural heritage tourism strategy. The findings reveal that aligning tangible heritage assets with environmental features not only enriches the visitor experience but also reinforces local identity, enhances conservation awareness, and contributes to economic resilience. The proposed integrative model provides practical insights and strategic guidance for heritage-rich rural areas that seek to advance sustainable development through culturally grounded and community-centred tourism initiatives.*

**Keywords:** *cultural heritage tourism, megaliths and architecture, rumah baghi, villages*

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development, particularly in heritage-based tourism. Integrating heritage preservation with community development not only strengthens cultural identity but also generates economic and social benefits for local populations (Bonet, 2018). In Indonesia, this approach is increasingly recognised as a key strategy for promoting inclusive rural development and preserving local wisdom amid modernisation pressures (Prima, 2020).

One of the regions rich in cultural and natural heritage is Lahat Regency, which is located in South Sumatra Province. The area is widely known

for its remarkable collection of Megalithic sites, which represent some of the earliest human cultural expressions in Southeast Asia. With more than 1,000 megalithic relics (Pemerintah Kabupaten Lahat, 2023), including statues, dolmens, stone chairs, and burial stones, and dating from the Neolithic to the early Bronze Age, Lahat is regarded as one of the most significant megalithic landscapes in the region (Alauwiyah et al., 2024; Wargadalem et al., 2020). These sites are not only archaeological treasures but also serve as living symbols of local history, spirituality, and artistic expression. In addition, the traditional Rumah Baghi architecture reflects the community's vernacular knowledge, social structure, and adaptation to the environment, thereby forming a vital part of the

region's tangible and intangible heritage.

Several studies examine various aspects of Lahat's heritage. Kusuma et al. (2024) explore community behaviour in managing the Tinggi Hari site, highlighting strong local motivation but limited infrastructural and institutional support. Alauwiyah et al. (2024) analyse the symbolic and artistic motifs at Tinggi Hari I–III, demonstrating how carvings convey Pasemah cosmology and social beliefs. Prima et al. (2023) propose an integrated foodscape–landscape model to enhance cultural tourism experiences, while Hudaidah (2021) emphasises the importance of local wisdom in sustaining cultural identity. Collectively, these studies confirm the profound connection between heritage, community values, and local development potential.

However, existing research tends to focus on individual aspects, either the archaeological significance of the megaliths or the architectural and social values of Rumah Baghi, without exploring how these elements interact within the broader landscape and tourism framework. This fragmentation limits the effective use of cultural and natural heritage as a unified foundation for sustainable rural development. To address this gap, the present research proposes an integrative model that links the megalithic heritage, Rumah Baghi architecture, and the natural environment of Tinggi Hari Village into a cohesive framework for cultural heritage tourism. Wargadalem et al. (2020) argue that preserving megalithic sites as integrated components of tourism supports both cultural heritage protection and local economic growth. This approach seeks to harmonise tangible and intangible heritage with ecological assets, thereby strengthening local identity, promoting sustainable tourism, and enhancing community-based economic resilience.

This research aims to analyse the capacity of the megalith sites for local development in Lahat Regency, especially in Tinggi Hari Village. Tinggi Hari Village is distinctive and is known for its megaliths at specific sites. Moreover, beyond its archaeological importance, the village possesses rich heritage values, both material and immaterial. Tinggi Hari Village exhibits distinctive heritage characteristics, particularly the traditional house known as Rumah Baghi, along with strong local values and enduring traditions that shape everyday community life.

The complex components of Megalithic sites and heritage architecture make Tinggi Hari Village an attractive resource for heritage tourism, particularly within the cultural sector. The activation of these assets strengthens cultural heritage tourism as a potential development pathway beyond agriculture. Another sector of cultural heritage tourism can therefore be proposed as a complementary strength, serving as an inheritance-dominant living sector for local people. Consequently, cultural heritage tourism and the dominant characteristics of heritage architecture are positioned as the region's identity and a potential local development sector, especially for Tinggi Hari Village.

The combination of megalithic sites and

heritage architecture offers a refreshing approach to promoting local development in the village. The megalithic site is commonly positioned as a complementary attraction within tourism branding strategies. In this research, its integration with heritage architecture functions as a leading resource for local development, particularly in relation to the influence of cultural heritage tourism on local development from multiple perspectives, including social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

Therefore, this research formulates four main research questions. The first question asks how megalithic sites and traditional architecture can be developed as tourism assets in Lahat Regency. The second question examines the main challenges and opportunities for cultural heritage tourism in Lahat's villages. The third question investigates how local communities perceive and participate in the preservation and promotion of their heritage. The fourth question explores which strategies are effective in integrating heritage conservation with tourism growth.

## METHODS

This research employs a case study approach as the primary method to investigate the potential of cultural heritage-based sustainable development in Lahat Regency, with a particular emphasis on Tinggi Hari Village. The case study approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth, contextual examination of the complex relationships among heritage resources, local community values, and spatial dynamics. It also enables the integration of diverse data types, both qualitative and quantitative, within a single analytical framework.

Data are collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and reliability. Primary data are obtained through field surveys, expert and community interviews, and direct observation of cultural and environmental features; field surveys focus on documenting the physical condition of Megalithic sites, Rumah Baghi architecture, and surrounding landscapes; expert interviews are conducted with heritage specialists, local government officers, and community leaders to explore perceptions, management practices, and aspirations related to heritage development; community interviews capture the social meanings, values, and narratives attached to the heritage assets. Secondary data include village-level development statistics, spatial land-use maps, and documents from regional development agencies that cover the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of village progress.

The research employs an Integrative Thematic–Spatial Analysis framework, which combines qualitative thematic coding with spatial analytical tools. Thematic analysis is conducted on qualitative data (interviews, observations, and field notes) using inductive coding to identify key themes,

including heritage values, community participation, infrastructure limitations, and tourism potential. These qualitative themes are then linked with quantitative indicators derived from village development data, including economic activity, infrastructure index, and environmental quality scores. Spatial mapping analysis utilises Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques to visualise and overlay cultural, environmental, and developmental data layers. This process enables the identification of high-potential zones for heritage tourism development and the establishment of spatial linkages among villages within the Lahat cultural landscape. The integration of thematic and spatial findings facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how tangible and intangible heritage elements interact within the broader environmental and socio-economic context. This mixed-methods design strengthens both the explanatory depth and practical relevance of the research, allowing for evidence-based recommendations for sustainable heritage tourism development in Tinggi Hari Village and its surrounding areas.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tinggi Hari Village is an extraordinary settlement situated in a breathtakingly beautiful hilly region in the Gumay Ulu District, South Sumatra, Indonesia. This village is located approximately 22 km from the capital city of Lahat Regency, making it relatively accessible while still maintaining a rural character. It is divided into two areas by the Lematang River, which serves as a crucial water source for the villagers and supports both daily activities and agricultural production. The total area of Tinggi Hari Village covers 9.54 km<sup>2</sup>, and most of the land is used for agricultural purposes, including rice fields, fruit orchards, and vegetable crops, which form the backbone of the local economy. The village has a population of 292 people, comprising 159 men and 133 women, reflecting a small and closely connected community structure. The residents of Tinggi Hari Village are known for their rich cultural heritage, which is characterised by warm hospitality and a traditional way of life that continues to adhere to ancestral customs and beliefs, including farming, fishing, and handicraft practices that remain integral to everyday life.

Spatial analysis is conducted by integrating GIS mapping, field observations, and topographic data interpretation to examine settlement distribution, accessibility, and land-use dynamics in Tinggi Hari Village, as illustrated in Figure 1. The analysis combines drone imagery, DEM-based slope classification, and manual digitisation of land parcels to identify correlations between environmental constraints and spatial organisation. The results reveal that approximately 62% of the total land area (9.54 km<sup>2</sup>) is classified as moderately to steeply sloped terrain (15–45%), which is concentrated in the northern and eastern zones. Settlements cluster along

the Lematang River corridor, primarily occupying gentler slopes (with slopes under 15%) where road access and water availability are optimal. Agricultural land dominates the flatter sections near the riverbanks, while forest patches and mixed gardens occupy the upper slopes, reflecting adaptive land-use patterns shaped by topography.



Figure 1 Tinggi Hari village

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The river functions as the central spatial axis, structuring mobility, irrigation, and social activity within the village. As demonstrated by Kraemer et al. (2020), human mobility is not uniform worldwide but fluctuates according to contextual and demographic

conditions. However, slope instability during the rainy season restricts connectivity between the upper and lower settlement clusters. Accessibility analysis using a network cost-distance model indicates that the average travel time from peripheral households to the main road ranges from 18 to 25 minutes on foot, with notable increases during monsoon periods due to erosion and surface runoff. The spatial integration of infrastructure and natural elements reveals a polycentric rural morphology, characterised by clusters of stilt houses (Rumah Baghi) that are interconnected by narrow paths, community gardens, and rural roads. Moreover, effective rural road design in hilly terrain must incorporate erosion-control measures to mitigate the heightened landslide risk associated with heavy rainfall (Paudyal et al., 2023). This pattern demonstrates both environmental adaptation and collective spatial planning, aligning with previous findings on hill settlements in South Sumatra (Nuraini et al., 2023; Prima & Yanto, 2025).

and contributes to both the village's ecological system and visual identity.

The megalithic tradition of the area is believed to originate from materials sourced from the Lematang River, reflecting the close relationship between natural resources and cultural practices. Tinggi Hari Village is located at a geographical position of 3°50'–4°25' South Latitude and 103.70' East Longitude and lies along the edge of the road connecting Pulau Pinang Village and Tinggi Hari Village, approximately 4 km from the main road linking Lahat and Bengkulu. As a result, the village is widely known for its ancient Megaliths, as presented in Figure 2, which are scattered throughout the village in two designated locations, making them easily accessible to visitors. These Megaliths are believed to represent an ancient civilisation that once thrives in the area and continues to shape local historical narratives and cultural identity.

Apart from the Megaliths, the village is also home to unique traditional houses called Rumah Baghi. The houses are two-story buildings with elevated structures that are designed to protect villagers from wild animals that frequently threaten the settlement during its early establishment. A series of semi-structured interviews (n = 12) with residents, traditional leaders, and local government officials, along with questionnaire surveys (n = 38), provides qualitative insights into residents' perceptions, livelihood strategies, and adaptive responses to environmental challenges. The data are coded through thematic content analysis, supported by NVivo-assisted categorisation, yielding four major themes: (1) Environmental Adaptation, (2) Cultural Continuity, (3) Infrastructure Challenges, and (4) Community-Based Innovation.

Respondents consistently describe the village's settlement form as a direct response to its hilly topography and flood-prone conditions. The use of elevated Rumah Baghi structures represents a functional adaptation to both ecological and climatic constraints. Indigenous architectural practices in Mentawai demonstrate effective adaptation to recurring floods, particularly through the design of the Uma house (Siregar et al., 2023; Markolinda et al., 2025), providing a relevant comparative context. Residents emphasise that the stilt houses protect against soil moisture, wildlife intrusion, and seasonal flooding. These traditional architectural solutions closely align with contemporary climate adaptation models, which recommend elevated dwellings in high-rainfall areas (Mulyadi et al., 2025; Arni et al., 2026).

Interviews with village elders reveal a strong attachment to ancestral heritage, particularly the megalithic relics that symbolise continuity with the ancient Pasemah civilisation. These artefacts serve as markers of identity and function as focal points for cultural tourism activities. Ritual practices and storytelling traditions associated with the megaliths are still performed annually, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and collective memory. Respondents highlight that maintaining these practices strengthens intergenerational ties and enhances pride in place



Figure 2 Megalith sites at Tinggi Hari village

Tinggi Hari Village is situated in a picturesque location, characterised by lush greenery, fruit farms, and paddy fields. It lies amid hills and is surrounded by dense forests at the foot of the Barisan hill range, which shapes its scenic and ecological character. The Pasemah region has an average altitude ranging from 750 m to 1,000 m above sea level and receives annual rainfall of 1,000–3,000 mm, creating a humid highland climate. The landscape is characterised by varying contours and is cut by the meandering Lematang River, which is adorned with numerous large rocks

identity, supporting the sustainability of local cultural heritage.

Survey responses show that 76% of households experience restricted mobility during the rainy season, primarily due to the steep terrain and erosion-prone pathways. Interview data corroborate these findings, as respondents express concern about insufficient maintenance of connecting roads and bridges. Experts from the Lahat Public Works Department note that logistical costs for infrastructure repair remain high due to difficult terrain and limited access to equipment. This spatial constraint exacerbates economic vulnerability and limits market integration for agricultural goods (Sepriyanti et al., 2024; Untari, 2024; Sebayang et al., 2025).

Despite infrastructural constraints, Tinggi Hari residents adopt collective maintenance systems known locally as *gotong royong*. This participatory model involves periodic road clearing, bridge repairs, and communal decision-making for irrigation control, thereby reinforcing shared responsibility. Expert informants describe these activities as a successful example of community-driven rural governance, which aligns with sustainable development frameworks that prioritise local agency (Dewi & Atmojo, 2023; Sari & Parawu, 2023; Hadi et al., 2024). Additionally, initiatives such as rainwater harvesting and runoff channelling, which are inspired by neighbouring villages, are increasingly implemented to mitigate slope erosion (N. Zhang et al., 2025).

The combined spatial and thematic analyses indicate that Tinggi Hari's resilience arises from the synergy between physical adaptation and social organisation. The stilt-house typology corresponds spatially to flood-prone and steep zones identified in the GIS model, demonstrating how vernacular architecture reflects lived environmental knowledge. Similarly, community-based practices align with areas that experience limited road connectivity, highlighting how local collaboration compensates for infrastructural deficiencies. The integration of quantitative spatial data and qualitative thematic coding thus illustrates a multi-scalar adaptive system, encompassing spatial resilience (through topographic adaptation and settlement clustering), cultural resilience (through heritage conservation and collective rituals), and institutional resilience (through community-led governance). This holistic understanding positions Tinggi Hari Village not merely as a passive rural settlement but as a dynamic socio-ecological system in which geography, culture, and collective knowledge converge to sustain life in a challenging landscape.

The Tinggi Hari megaliths, as seen in Figure 3, represent one of the most remarkable concentrations of megalithic relics in South Sumatra (Kusuma et al., 2024). Spatial mapping shows that the artefacts are distributed across two main clusters, located north and south of the Lematang River, each lying within easy reach of the main settlement area. Their locations align with gentle topographic zones (slopes under 10%) and areas of high visibility, which suggests deliberate

placement to ensure both symbolic prominence and territorial demarcation.



Figure 3 Megaliths at Tinggi Hari village

Historical documentation indicates that the earliest academic attention to these sites dates to the nineteenth century, as summarised in Table 1. From Tombrink (1827) to Van der Hoop (1932), scholars repeatedly hypothesise Hindu influence on the Pasemah megaliths, reflecting the dominant intellectual lens of colonial archaeology. More recent interpretations, however, view these relics not as derivatives of Indian culture but as manifestations of a distinct local cosmology that precedes or evolves independently of Indic contact (Triwurjani, 2023).

The early studies of Megalith sites, as presented in Table 1, in Tinggi Hari Village (Sukendar, H., 1984), are summarised as follows: these studies focus primarily on typological classification, stylistic comparison, and assumed external influences, while giving limited attention to local socio-cultural contexts. This overview highlights the shift from externally driven interpretations toward more recent, context-sensitive approaches that recognise indigenous knowledge systems and local cosmological frameworks.

The GIS-based spatial analysis reveals that the megaliths of Tinggi Hari Village (Figure 3) are concentrated in two principal clusters on both sides of the Lematang River. These clusters are situated at altitudes between 780 and 890 m above sea level, within areas of moderate slope (below 10%). The sites' proximity to the river and agricultural land indicates a strong relationship between settlement patterns,

water resources, and ritual zones. Field surveys confirm that most megaliths are placed near major access routes and communal spaces, suggesting that they function as social markers rather than isolated monuments. Visibility analysis (viewshed) indicates that several key megaliths occupy elevated positions with panoramic views of the surrounding valley, thereby reinforcing their symbolic role in territorial demarcation and spiritual protection.

Table 1 The early studies of megaliths at Tinggi Hari village

Research	Hypothesis
Tombrink (1827)	Hinduism influences the remaining stones
Ulmann (1850)	The existence of Hindu influence on the heritage Pasemah megalith, same as Tombrink (1987)
Westenenk (1921)	The details of Hindu influence on the heritage Pasemah megalith
Van der Hoop (1932)	Dissertation on the Pasemah megaliths justifies and emphasise Hindu influence in interpreting Pasemah heritage.

Spatial overlays integrating natural and cultural layers further identify three potential tourism corridors: Northern Cultural Loop, which connects the upper cluster of megaliths with agricultural landscapes; Central Riverine Route, which follows the Lematang River and links stilt-house clusters (Rumah Baghi); and the Southern Forest Trail, which combines megalith sites with ecotourism destinations, including waterfalls and forest viewpoints. These spatial connections demonstrate that Tinggi Hari's heritage landscape is not a static archaeological zone, but represents a living spatial system that integrates ecology, culture, and accessibility.

Data from seven expert interviews and two focus group discussions with village leaders and youth are analysed using thematic content analysis, following the six-phase model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The coding process produces three major themes, each reflecting a distinct dimension of the megaliths' contemporary significance. Experts and community members consistently describe the megaliths as embodied memory, serving as a visible narrative of ancestral wisdom. Participants note that the megaliths function as "silent witnesses" of lineage continuity and confer moral legitimacy on local customs (*adat*).

"We are part of these stones; they remind us of who we are and how our ancestors live," states one village elder (Interview 3).

This theme underscores how the megaliths sustain intergenerational identity, connecting tangible artefacts with intangible values such as respect for

ancestors, land stewardship, and collective harmony. Respondents identify heritage tourism as a strategic opportunity for diversifying village livelihoods. Experts highlight the potential to combine megalithic sites with Rumah Baghi architecture, traditional crafts, and agricultural activities to create a holistic visitor experience.

"If it is managed together, with the river, the forests, and the houses, it becomes a full cultural landscape," notes one tourism planner (Interview 5).

However, most agree that promotion remains limited and infrastructure is inadequate. The mapping results suggest that tourism development can follow the identified spatial corridors, thereby aligning conservation with community entrepreneurship. This approach enables tourism growth to build upon existing spatial patterns, reduces pressure on sensitive heritage areas, and supports locally driven economic initiatives rather than externally imposed development models.

A recurring concern was the deteriorating physical condition of the megaliths. Biological growth, erosion, and unregulated visitor activity were frequently mentioned. Experts argued that preservation should move beyond technical restoration toward community-based monitoring and interpretive engagement.

"Local people are already caretakers; they only need structured support," emphasised a cultural heritage officer (Interview 7).

The integration of traditional beliefs with contemporary management is considered essential for the long-term sustainability of heritage tourism. Participants propose establishing heritage committees and interpretive trails to encourage local ownership and sustainable visitation. Such mechanisms are expected to formalise community participation, improve coordination with local authorities, and strengthen interpretive narratives that reflect indigenous values and historical knowledge.

The synthesis of spatial and thematic findings reveals that Tinggi Hari's megalithic landscape operates as a cultural-ecological network in which physical placement, symbolic meaning, and social practice interact dynamically. GIS mapping provides a spatial framework that shows how megalith distribution aligns with topography, settlement, and access routes. At the same time, thematic analysis adds interpretive depth, clarifying how residents and experts perceive, value, and manage these sites. This integrated analysis yields three overarching insights: Cultural Centrality – Megaliths function as spatial anchors of identity, linking the community's past and present; Tourism Connectivity – Spatial corridors and heritage clusters offer clear opportunities for experiential tourism routes; Community Resilience – The combination of

vernacular knowledge, adaptive architecture (Rumah Baghi), and participatory stewardship provides a model for sustainable rural heritage management. Overall, the megaliths of Tinggi Hari should be understood not only as ancient monuments but as active nodes within a living cultural landscape, capable of generating educational, cultural, and economic value when managed through an integrative, community-based approach.

Architectural heritage includes historic buildings, traditional houses, monuments, and urban landscapes. It expresses a society's identity, artistry, and local history, while also reflecting social values and collective memory. These structures often embody unique building technologies, spatial concepts, and cultural meanings, thereby connecting present communities with their ancestral past (Bręczewska-Kulesza & Kaus, 2025; Haryotedjo, 2024).

Tinggi Hari Village is home to several cultural heritage sites and traditional buildings known as Rumah Baghi, as represented in Figure 4. The architectural style of these houses is particularly unique, offering a significant and visually compelling example of local, national, and even global architectural expressions. This condition supports the view that rural contextual development holds a level of significance comparable to national-level programs, particularly in heritage-based planning and sustainable development strategies (Y. Zhang et al., 2022).

Tinggi Hari Village features traditional stilt houses that function as more than architectural forms. They are cultural artefacts that embody the region's

history and the ingenuity of its people. Elevated on wooden stilts, these houses serve both practical and symbolic purposes. The lower level is used for storage or agricultural activities, while the upper floor functions as the primary living space. This level is typically either open or enclosed, depending on household needs and social functions. The vertical arrangement maximises spatial efficiency and provides protection against floods and wild animals, a strategy that is well documented in vernacular Indonesian architecture (Aulia & Veronica, 2024; Arni et al., 2026).

The architectural house style resembles the rumah limas or rumah bari typology in South Sumatra, especially in areas around Palembang. These houses are characterised by red roofs, large front porches, and stepped interior floor levels, which reflect local environmental adaptation and social stratification (Al-Faris & Herwandi, 2024; Cahyani et al., 2024). Over time, the evolution of these structures illustrates a strong relationship between heritage and innovation in shaping the village's identity, as seen in the integration of modern materials while still preserving the traditional spatial layout and symbolic elements (Idrus et al., 2023).

Another significant element is the choice of wood as the primary building material. Tembesu and Ulin, as locally available resources, are dominantly used in house construction and are highly valued for their durability and resistance to humidity and termites, which are essential qualities in flood-prone lowland environments (Adam & Munanjar, 2025). Moreover, the use of wood facilitates the creation of distinctive

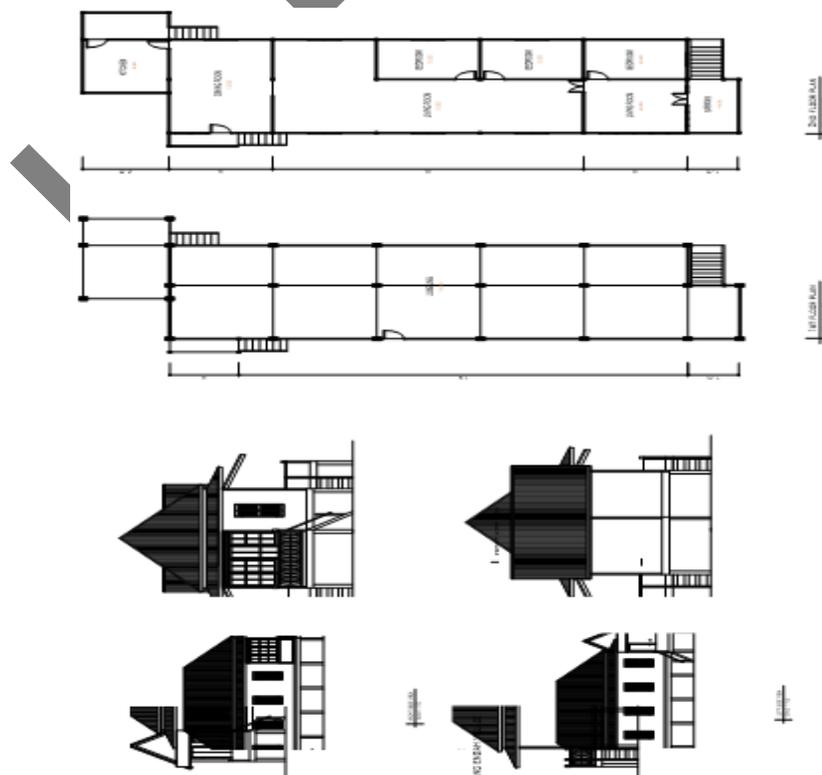


Figure 4 Rumah Baghi building plans at Tinggi Hari village

ornamental elements, incorporating intricate carvings and traditional joinery techniques. These ornaments are not only structurally effective but also artistically expressive, reinforcing the cultural identity of the houses. The decorative elements often take the form of floral and geometric motifs, reflecting deep-rooted aesthetic traditions and shared community values (Iskandar et al., 2024; Hamzah et al., 2024; Fauziah, 2025).

Recent studies emphasise that attention to these traditional houses also contributes to environmental sustainability and resilience. Structural features such as pile foundations, diagonal bracing, and flexible joints enhance earthquake resistance, which is especially important in Indonesia's seismically active regions (Hariyanto et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2025). Additionally, the houses are designed to support thermal comfort in hot and humid climates and incorporate passive cooling strategies, including elevated floors, wide eaves, and cross-ventilation, thereby reducing reliance on mechanical cooling systems (Mulfakli et al., 2025; Saptaningtyas, 2025).

Spatially, these homes reflect socio-cultural hierarchies, with room arrangements indicating varying levels of privacy and function (Asriana & Khidmat, 2024; Asriana et al., 2024). This spatial logic demonstrates how settlement patterns and cultural identity are closely intertwined (Liu et al., 2025; Putra & Mahendra, 2025; X. Zhang et al., 2025). It is further combined with the orientation of buildings toward rivers and communal spaces, reinforcing social interaction and environmental awareness. As the village continues to evolve, so do its houses, adapting to shifting social, environmental, and technological conditions while preserving a distinct cultural character.

Therefore, Tinggi Hari Village possesses a unique architectural heritage that adds to the area's cultural richness and strengthens its local identity. This heritage also contributes to the local economy through community engagement and serves as an integral component of cultural heritage tourism. Recent research consistently emphasises that community involvement significantly enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of preservation efforts by fostering a sense of ownership and promoting cultural continuity (Suprapti et al., 2020). Marketing unique local architecture helps promote and preserve this distinctive feature, while activating local communities and involving relevant tourism stakeholders supports long-term conservation. Sommariva (2018) argues that green communities strengthen cultural biodiversity through practices that integrate environmental stewardship and cultural heritage. However, it remains essential to manage local tourism carefully to minimise potential impacts on heritage sites and vulnerable buildings. As warned by UNESCO (2015, p. 2) in its policy document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention, "if the heritage sector does not fully embrace sustainable development and

harness the reciprocal benefits for heritage and society, it risks becoming a victim of, rather than a catalyst for, wider change."

Preservation is a mandatory agenda item, alongside the development of cultural heritage tourism programs. It serves as a strategic effort to safeguard and protect existing cultural values while allowing them to be utilised to enhance both spatial character and functional relevance. This concern relates directly to the condition of heritage sites and traditional buildings in villages across Lahat Regency, including Tinggi Hari Village. Several megalithic artefacts are currently under threat, as some have been lost in certain areas due to human activities, natural deterioration, and insufficient maintenance practices. Therefore, preservation is urgently required through practical and creative initiatives that actively involve the local community to ensure long-term sustainability. Community participation also strengthens social interaction, fostering greater happiness and improving overall quality of life (Abdullah & Zulkifli, 2018). Consequently, development principles must remain closely connected to local contexts and cultural realities to avoid undermining heritage values (Gorlach et al., 2014).

Recent studies indicate that the preservation of architectural heritage faces multiple challenges, including urbanisation, environmental degradation, and changing lifestyles, all of which threaten both the physical condition and intangible meanings of heritage sites (Thuc et al., 2024; Harun et al., 2025; Karataş et al., 2025; Kuang et al., 2025). Preservation is particularly crucial in villages such as Tinggi Hari in Lahat Regency, where several megaliths remain vulnerable due to ongoing human activity, gradual deterioration, and a lack of systematic maintenance. As such, practical and creative preservation efforts must actively involve the local community to ensure continuity and long-term sustainability. The processes of documentation and conservation continue to expand as the significance of these sites for cultural identity and heritage tourism becomes increasingly recognised (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Judijanto & Malik, 2025). Accordingly, cultural heritage tourism programs function as an important framework for preservation strategies and implementation. These programs can be designed to integrate government support, community participation, and sustainable practices to ensure effective conservation outcomes. Their success depends largely on meaningful community engagement and the consistent application of sustainability principles to protect unique architectural assets. Heritage preservation also contributes to social cohesion by reinforcing collective memory and connecting communities to their shared historical roots (Ramadhan & Zikri, 2025).

The spatial, cultural, and architectural characteristics observed in Tinggi Hari Village reveal a heritage landscape that resonates with several global heritage tourism models. These comparative perspectives enhance understanding of how Tinggi

Hari's megaliths, vernacular houses, and socio-ecological systems operate within a broader framework of sustainable cultural tourism. Internationally, Community-Based Heritage Tourism (CBHT) initiatives in Nepal, northern Thailand, and Malaysia emphasise local ownership, participatory maintenance, and community control over tourism benefits. Tinggi Hari demonstrates similar characteristics through *gotong royong* practices, communal road maintenance, and participatory decision-making related to irrigation management, megalith preservation, and the upkeep of Rumah Baghi. However, unlike the more institutionalised CBHT models in Thailand or Nepal, which are supported by village tourism councils, interpretive centres, and formal revenue-sharing mechanisms, Tinggi Hari's governance structure remains largely informal. This condition presents opportunities to strengthen community-led tourism institutions in order to secure equitable benefit distribution and long-term sustainability.

On a broader territorial scale, the integration of settlement patterns, ritual zones, agricultural land, and riverine morphology aligns Tinggi Hari with Cultural Landscape Tourism Models. Comparable examples include the Ifugao Rice Terraces in the Philippines, the Jeju Volcanic Landscape in South Korea, and Bali's subak irrigation ecology, all of which integrate environmental systems, vernacular architecture, and ritual practice into cohesive spatial configurations. Tinggi Hari reflects this model through the interrelationship between the Lematang River, megalith clusters, slope-adapted stilt houses, and ancestral cultural practices. However, unlike UNESCO-recognised cultural landscapes that operate under strict zoning regulations, buffer zones, and formal conservation policies, Tinggi Hari currently lacks an official heritage management framework. The development of such regulatory mechanisms may help manage visitor movement, protect megalith sites, and maintain ecological balance.

The potential tourism corridors identified through GIS analysis—namely the Northern Cultural Loop, Central Riverine Route, and Southern Forest Trail—also correspond with Mixed Cultural–Ecotourism Models found in Sabah, Tana Toraja, and parts of Chiang Mai. These models integrate nature-based tourism with cultural attractions through thematic routes that enhance visitor engagement and spatial coherence. Tinggi Hari demonstrates comparable potential through its combination of waterfalls, megalith sites, forest viewpoints, and stilt-house settlements. Nevertheless, the village requires strengthened interpretive infrastructure, including guided trails, informational signage, and thematic cultural packages, to achieve a level of implementation comparable to more established destinations.

Tinggi Hari's living stilt-house tradition positions the village within the typology of Living Heritage Settlements. Comparable examples include Hahoe Folk Village in South Korea, Shirakawa-go in Japan, and Kyoto's historic districts, where heritage

structures remain inhabited and cultural practices continue uninterrupted. Tinggi Hari shares this continuity through the ongoing use of Rumah Baghi, the performance of ancestral rituals, and annual ceremonies linked to megalithic heritage. However, the absence of formal conservation guidelines and architectural regulations increases the risk of structural deterioration and unplanned modernisation. Adapting principles from established living heritage settlements, such as community-led building guidelines, could help preserve architectural authenticity while accommodating contemporary needs.

Therefore, it is essential to emphasise the benefits of preserving cultural heritage sites and buildings. Preservation strengthens tourism development while fostering a sense of identity, pride, and historical continuity within the community. It ensures that preservation priorities remain clear and that cultural resources are protected for future generations. Additionally, encouraging community support and active involvement remains fundamental to successful conservation efforts. Heritage tourism can serve as an effective framework for preservation strategies by integrating government policy, community participation, and sustainable practices aimed at conserving unique architectural and cultural assets.

## CONCLUSIONS

Tinggi Hari Village is characterised by rich local heritage, particularly its megaliths and architectural buildings, which narrate the story of ancient civilisation and the unique vernacular design traditions of the area. The village's natural landscape, including its hills, forests, and the Lematang River, contributes to its attractiveness as a cultural heritage tourism destination. The Lahat Regency government introduces several tourism programs to enhance the local economy; however, these initiatives remain fragmented and lack coordination. At present, there is no integrated cultural heritage tourism framework that systematically connects megaliths, architecture, and community participation through a bottom-up development approach.

This integration extends beyond economic purposes and is essential for preserving local potential and reinforcing community identity. Urgent attention is required to safeguard the existing megaliths and Rumah Baghi houses, as both constitute integral components of the historical and cultural identity of Lahat Regency. Consequently, developing local potential through heritage preservation becomes a critical foundation for sustainable rural development and long-term community resilience.

Through the case study of Tinggi Hari Village, which combines spatial analysis, field observation, and thematic interviews, the research identifies that integrating tangible heritage (megaliths and architecture) with natural resources and community

participation significantly strengthens tourism development, social identity, and local economic resilience. The spatial analysis maps three heritage corridors connecting megalithic clusters, Rumah Baghi settlements, and natural landscapes, thereby offering a spatial framework for sustainable tourism zoning. Meanwhile, the thematic findings reveal strong community motivation for participation, the enduring symbolic power of the megaliths as cultural anchors, and the need for greater institutional and infrastructural support. These findings directly address the research aim, namely to explore how tangible heritage can be harmonised with the local environment and social systems to support sustainable cultural tourism. Overall, the research demonstrates that integrating cultural and natural assets represents an effective strategy for both heritage preservation and community empowerment.

In terms of contribution, the research offers theoretical significance by advancing the understanding of cultural landscape integration as a dynamic relationship between heritage, space, and community. It also provides practical value by proposing an integrative model of cultural heritage tourism that merges megaliths, architecture, and natural assets through community-based management. In addition, the research holds policy relevance by offering a framework for heritage-driven rural development that can guide planning and conservation initiatives in Lahat Regency. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that Tinggi Hari Village functions not only as a repository of the past but also as a living landscape of innovation and resilience, serving as a model for other rural regions seeking sustainable development rooted in cultural identity and local participation.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its focus on a single village context and by its reliance on spatial analysis and qualitative thematic interpretation, which may restrict broader generalisation. The absence of longitudinal data also limits the ability to assess long-term tourism, socio-economic, and conservation impacts. Future research should therefore expand comparative studies across multiple heritage villages, incorporate quantitative socio-economic indicators, and employ longitudinal approaches to evaluate the sustainability and scalability of community-based cultural heritage tourism models.

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**Data Availability Statement:** Embargo on data due to commercial restrictions. The data that support the findings will be available in [repository name] at [URL / DOI link] following a [6 month] embargo from the date of publication to allow for commercialization of research findings.

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