

## IDENTIFICATION OF TOURISM COMPONENTS IN KAWALO FORT AS A HISTORICAL TOURISM ATTRACTION IN TALIABU ISLAND REGENCY

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify tourism components in the Kawalo Fort area as a potential historical tourism attraction in Taliabu Island Regency. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using literature review, field observations, and focus group discussions (FGD) involving 24 participants from local communities, government representatives, and tourism stakeholders. The findings indicate that Kawalo Fort has significant historical value, evidenced by the presence of two remaining European-style colonial cannons and traces of stone structures bonded with traditional lime adhesive (kalero), although its physical structure is largely damaged. Accessibility to the location remains challenging due to poor road infrastructure, the absence of public transportation, and reliance on rented water transport across Likitobi Lake, which increases travel cost and time. In terms of amenities, tourism-supporting facilities are minimal, with no formal visitor infrastructure at the site; however, one locally managed homestay is available in Kawalo Village. Based on Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, Kawalo Fort is categorized in the exploration phase, characterized by low visitation, limited facilities, and emerging local awareness of tourism potential. The combination of historical remains, local legends, and the natural landscape of Kawalo Lake presents opportunities for developing a sustainable, culture-based tourism destination. Nevertheless, further historical and archaeological research, infrastructure improvement, and active community involvement are essential to support conservation efforts and future tourism development.

**Keywords:** Kawalo Fort; historical tourism; Taliabu Island Regency

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Taliabu Island, located in the North Maluku Province, holds significant historical and cultural wealth that deserves to be explored. One of the historical relics that needs revitalization is Kawalo Fort, a historical site located on the shores of Likitobi Lake (also called Telaga Kawalo) in Kawalo Village, West Taliabu District. Although the site is locally recognized as a historical relic, its origin, function, and construction period remain uncertain (Benteng Indonesia, 2022), and its physical condition has deteriorated considerably.

Previous studies indicate that many forts in Maluku and North Maluku were constructed by European colonial powers, particularly the Portuguese and the Dutch, as part of their trade and military networks during the spice trade era (Aksa, 2014). Local narratives and limited historical references suggest that Kawalo Fort may have been built by Dutch, given their dominant presence in Maluku, while other accounts attribute it to Portuguese influence or even to local construction (Rahmat, 2023). However, unlike major forts in North Maluku, Kawalo Fort has received very limited academic attention, and existing information is fragmented and largely speculative.

The current condition of Kawalo Fort further reflects this research gap. Only scattered stone foundations and two colonial cannons remain, making it difficult to determine the original structure and scale of the fort. Documentation is minimal, and the site has not yet been formally listed in the national cultural heritage inventory. As a result, Kawalo Fort risks being overlooked in regional heritage preservation and tourism planning, despite its potential historical significance.

From a tourism perspective, historical and cultural heritage sites play an important role in diversifying destinations and supporting sustainable tourism development, particularly in peripheral regions. However, effective development requires a clear understanding of a site's tourism components, including attractions, accessibility, and amenities, as well as its position within the tourism development cycle. To date, no systematic study has examined these aspects for Kawalo Fort.

Therefore, this study aims to provide preliminary documentation and analysis of Kawalo Fort by identifying its tourism components—specifically its historical attractions, accessibility conditions, and available amenities—using Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework. The findings are expected to serve as baseline data to support future research, conservation initiatives, and the development of Kawalo Fort as a sustainable historical and cultural tourism destination.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This report was compiled using a combination of data collection methods designed to produce a comprehensive and in-depth analysis, including:

1. Literature study: this was conducted by reviewing relevant documents, including historical records of forts in Indonesia and Moluccas islands, as well as previous related research. The purpose of this method was to obtain theoretical understanding and historical context to serve as the foundation for developing the fort as a tourism attraction;
2. Observation: this involved directly identifying the physical condition of the fort, the remaining historical elements, and the unique tourism potential that could be developed. The observation, which was conducted for a week, also covered an analysis of accessibility, including transportation routes, signage, and supporting infrastructure, as well as an evaluation of available amenities around the fort area;
3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD): this focused group discussion involved 24 participants from various parties. The participants were selected based on their direct involvement, knowledge, and interest in Kawalo Fort including representatives from local community, government, and stakeholders who are familiar with the site and its development potential. The FGD aimed to gather perspectives, input, and aspirations from different interested parties to formulate participatory, inclusive development strategies tailored to local needs.

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach by systematically organizing data from literature reviews, field observations, and focus group discussions. The collected data were categorized according to key tourism components—attraction, accessibility, and amenities—and then interpreted by comparing empirical findings with relevant theories, particularly Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle model, to identify the current condition, development stage, and tourism potential of Kawalo Fort.

## C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A Brief Overview of Forts in the Moluccas Islands

Spices and other Indonesian natural commodities were once highly sought after in global trade, prompting the arrival of the Dutch and other foreign powers to the archipelago. Their arrival in various parts of Indonesia led to a series of trade agreements between them and the ruling kingdoms or local authorities at the time (Vlekke, 2013). Typically, these agreements allowed foreign powers to establish trading posts. Initially, these trading posts served as offices and storage for goods they purchased before shipping them back to their countries. Over time, citing the need to protect and secure their goods, these trading posts were fortified with weapons, soldiers, and perimeter walls, eventually evolving into defensive forts (Abbas, 2018). This process was common in the early period, whereas later forts were constructed with more planning and military strategy in mind.

History notes that Indonesia experienced periods of colonization by foreign powers, with the Dutch dominating the region the longest—from the late 16th century to the mid-20th century. During this period, the Dutch built numerous forts across the archipelago to consolidate their control, particularly in the Maluku Islands (Loupatty dkk., 2020). In the 19th century, General De Kock of the Netherlands implemented the *Benteng Stelsel* (fortification system), in which newly conquered areas were fortified with smaller forts to maintain Dutch dominance (Abbas, 2018).

Historical records state that in 1602, the Dutch sent trade fleets to the archipelago and established trade relations with Banten and Maluku (Sukoharsono & Gaffikin, 2019). They later founded the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) with its initial headquarters at Fort Malayo (now Fort Oranje, Ternate), which was later moved to Batavia (Jakarta). However, for the Dutch, Java was not their main trade focus—their interest lay in Maluku due to its rich supply of spices. Between 1610 and 1619, the Governor-General of the VOC was based in Maluku. During that decade, the Dutch built and took over several forts previously constructed by the Spanish and Portuguese (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012). Moreover, according to *Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Ternate* (2020), in 1612, during the leadership of Pieter Both, the Dutch constructed Fort Mauritius on Makian Island and renovated Fort Barneveld on Bacan Island. Even after the VOC moved its headquarters, in 1736, the Dutch built Fort De Verwachting in Sanana.

Based on this historical overview, it is possible that the Dutch also constructed a fort on Taliabu Island. The discovery of European cannons and a stone wall structure in Kawalo Village supports this hypothesis. The fort's location, surrounded by a lake—an architectural trait common to colonial forts—further suggests its colonial origins. However, the lack of literature and research on cultural heritage in Taliabu Island prevents definitive identification. Thus, further studies are critically needed.

### A Brief Overview of Kawalo Fort

In 2023, several news articles reported on the visit of the Regent of Taliabu Island to the site where two cannons were discovered, located to the north of Lake Likitobi, also known as Telaga Kawalo (Ramli, 2024; Rahmat, 2023; Kasim, 2023). The discovery of the cannons and a pile of stones believed to be part of a fort structure led to the site being locally referred to as “Kawalo Fort.” The name was given by local residents because the site is located in the old settlement area of Kawalo Village, where the community lived before relocating to the southern coastal area of the island.

The fort's name has not yet been included in the cultural heritage inventory list maintained by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Center (BPK) Region XXI. Nevertheless, the existence of

Kawalo Fort has been known for some time. According to a report on cultural heritage inventory in Taliabu Island Regency, prior to the 2023 inventory, cultural heritage experts had already recorded the site in 2006 (*BPK Wilayah XXI, 2023*). Unfortunately, no early literature was available to confirm what Kawalo Fort truly is, who built it, or when it was established. More concerningly, research conducted on Taliabu Island in general is very limited, particularly regarding Kawalo Fort, which is difficult to access.

Who built this fort? When was it constructed? What was its function? The data collected so far has not yet been able to provide definitive answers to these questions. However, when tracing the region's historical context, it is important to note that Taliabu Island was once considered part of the Sula Islands during the colonial period, a classification that remained until about a decade ago when Taliabu became an independent regency, separate from the Sula Islands. Therefore, Taliabu's historical records are closely linked with those of the Sula Islands.

In the writing of Ruray (2021), it is stated that the Sula Islands were once part of the Sultanate of Ternate. During the VOC period (1602–1799), the Sula Islands served as a food supply region for the VOC and a transit hub for the spice and slave trade (Raman, t.t.). Considering the strong influence of the VOC and the Sula Islands' status as a strategic area in both local and international maritime routes, it is highly plausible that the fort and cannons discovered in the northern part of Lake Likitobi were built by the Dutch. The fort may have served as a small post catering to transit needs or as a residence for envoys who, according to literature, were based in Likitobi. However, to confirm this hypothesis, further studies are needed—including archaeological analysis and in-depth historical research—to determine the true origin and function of the structure within its colonial context.

### Conditions of the Cannons

Field observations revealed that two cannons are located in the Kawalo Fort area, lying in a grassy area surrounded by wild vegetation. According to the results of the Focus Group Discussion, the acting village head of Kawalo stated that there were originally six cannons; four of them were relocated to Bobong, leaving only two at the fort site. Both cannons appear to be made of metal, with moss-covered surfaces and signs of aging that reflect their considerable age. One of the cannons has a small hole that might be part of its original design or the result of long-term damage. These two European-style cannons are of the “cannon” type and were found by local residents on the edge of the lake. They are placed directly on the ground, with their muzzles supported by natural stones, and appear to be two different types of cannons.



Figure 1. Conditions of the Two Cannons

Source: Researchers, 2024

According to the Cultural Heritage Preservation Center/*Balai Pelestarian Kebudayaan* (BPK) Region XXI in their 2023 report on cultural heritage inventory in Taliabu Island Regency, Cannon

A has a longer and slimmer shape compared to Cannon B, which is shorter. The diameter of the muzzles also differs—Cannon A has a narrower muzzle, while Cannon B has a wider one and visible internal damage. No symbols or inscriptions indicating the origin or manufacturing date were found on either cannon. However, considering the historical context and maritime activity in southern Taliabu—dominated by Dutch movement—it is likely that the cannons were made, brought, and used by the Dutch.

A detailed analysis by BPK Region XXI provides the following descriptions of each cannon:

#### **Cannon A**

This cannon is made of iron and remains intact from base to muzzle, although the entire inner surface is corroded. The touch hole is still in good condition. When discovered, the cannon was found in an upside-down position. It was later turned over to search for any marks or inscriptions, but none were found. The characteristics of Cannon A are as follows:

- Length: 150 cm
- Muzzle width: 15 cm
- Bore diameter (caliber): 9 cm
- Wall thickness: 3 cm
- Distance from trunnion to base: 60 cm
- Rear width: 27 cm



Figure 2. (left) muzzle of Cannon A; (right) muzzle Cannon B

Source: BPK Region XXI, 2023

#### **Cannon B**

This cannon is also made of iron, Cannon B is in poor condition, especially at the *cascabel* (rear knob), which is broken. Unlike Cannon A, Cannon B has a wider muzzle and interior breakage. Its surface is entirely rusted and corroded, with four small holes on its upper body (chase and second reinforce). Its features are as follows:

- Length: 136 cm
- Muzzle width: 20 cm
- Bore diameter (caliber): 10 cm
- Wall thickness: 10 cm
- Distance from trunnion to base: 54 cm
- Rear width: 22 cm

#### **Condition of the Fort Structure**

The fort structure is located across from Kawalo Village, situated on a small hill less than one kilometer from the location where the two European cannons were found. It now lies behind a garden house owned by a local resident. The cannons are no longer in the fort's original location

due to a past theft attempt. According to the acting village head of Kawalo during the Focus Group Discussion, the cannons were dragged to the lake's edge to be loaded onto a boat but could not be lifted because of their weight.

Observations indicate that the fort structure is in a ruined condition. This can be seen from the scattered stones at the base of the hill, which do not show any signs of lime mortar (a traditional adhesive made by burning limestone), known locally as *kalero*. This condition remains consistent with observations made by the BPK Region XII team in 2006.



Figure 4. (left) natural structure in the upper area; (right) stone structure of the fort without *kalero*

Source: BPK Region XXI, 2023

However, during BPK's 2023 observation, evidence of *kalero* bonding was found at two points, which had not been detected in the 2006 survey—possibly because the adhesive was covered by soil at that time. The fort, which faces Kawalo Bay to the south, is located in what used to be the old settlement of Kawalo Village, historically known as Lipulomo. The stone structures in this area are mostly collapsed and show no signs of adhesive bonding between the stones. At the hilltop, there are natural stones without adhesive, forming corners and showing sharp, symmetrical lines etched on the surface.

In addition, literature review revealed the presence of a broken European ceramic plate, with a missing rim. This ceramic shard was not found by the BPK team during their 2023 inventory. The fragment was located between the cannons and the structure presumed to be a local fort, right beneath a local resident's garden house. However, during the researcher's visit in 2024, the ceramic fragment could no longer be found. It is suspected that the shard had been secured by a government agency or related institution.



Figure 5. Ceramic fragments found between the cannon and the structure presumed to be the fort

Source: BPK Region XXI, 2023

## Accessibility to Kawalo Fort

Access to Kawalo Fort currently faces significant challenges, particularly due to the lack of road infrastructure and inadequate transportation options. The remote location of the fort makes it difficult for visitors to reach without using private vehicles such as cars, motorcycles, or *bentor* (a local motorized rickshaw), which usually have to be rented from the capital of Taliabu Island Regency, Bobong. However, the journey is hampered by poor road conditions, consisting of a mix of worn asphalt and gravel. Road damage is exacerbated by potholes, which often become filled with water during the rainy season. This condition not only slows down the mobility of tourists and local residents but also poses risks to safety and comfort during travel. These findings are consistent with destination accessibility studies, which highlight infrastructure as a key determinant of tourism competitiveness, particularly in rural and island destinations (Jehamur dkk., 2025).



Figure 6. (left) main road condition; (middle) private bridge; (right) wooden boat owned by locals  
Source: Researchers, 2024

After arriving in Holbota Village, travelers must cross a privately owned bridge, which serves as one of the main access points to the fort. However, a toll fee of IDR 15,000 is required per vehicle for a one-way crossing. The presence of this bridge is a key element in the accessibility of the fort, although the fee may become an additional burden for both tourists and local communities. This policy highlights private sector involvement in access infrastructure management, but also indicates a potential barrier for budget-conscious visitors.

Furthermore, the journey continues to Kawalo Lake, located in Kawalo Village. From this point, access to the fort requires water transportation using a wooden boat (*longboat*) to cross Likitobi Lake. These wooden boats are owned by local residents and are rented for around IDR 500,000 for a round-trip. This fee covers boat rental and operational costs; however, for some tourists, the price may be considered expensive, especially compared to the distance and travel time. Nonetheless, using local boats as the primary mode of transport reflects the potential for leveraging local resources to support tourism while also providing additional income for the community.

Comparatively, similar accessibility challenges were found in heritage sites such as Fort Belgica in Banda Neria prior to infrastructure improvements (Nurlette dkk., 2024), which later contributed to increased visitation and tourism growth. This finding directly relates to the second research objective by demonstrating that accessibility remains a critical barrier that must be

addressed before tourism development can progress beyond the exploration stage in Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (1980).

### **Amenities (Supporting Facilities)**

In the Kawalo Fort area, the unclear physical remains of the fort result in its surroundings being dominated by farmland and gardens owned by local residents. These lands are utilized for agricultural activities, reflecting the community's dependence on the natural resources around the fort. This condition also indicates the lack of visitor-support facilities, such as parking areas, direction signs, and sanitation facilities. The absence of such amenities may negatively affect the comfort of tourists who wish to visit and explore the site.

However, in Kawalo Village, there is a homestay owned by a local resident that can serve as accommodation for visitors. This homestay not only provides a place to stay but also has the potential to foster interaction between tourists and the local community, thus supporting a community-based tourism experience. Enhancing infrastructure around the fort—including basic amenities and tourism services—is essential for the development of the site into a more integrated historical and cultural tourism destination.

In general, in West Taliabu District, data published by Badan Pusat Statistik Kepulauan Sula, (2024) indicates a significant decline in the number of food stalls and restaurants over the past two years. In 2021, there were 15 food establishments in operation, but this number dropped to only 12 in both 2022 and 2023. This decline suggests dynamic changes in the culinary sector that need further analysis, whether in terms of consumer demand, the local economy, or other influencing factors.

On the other hand, based on data from the Badan Pusat Statistik Kepulauan Sula (2024b), the tourism sector in West Taliabu District shows a more diverse accommodation infrastructure, with one hotel and 16 lodgings recorded across the district. This reflects that although the food sector has declined, accommodation facilities remain relatively stable and can be a supporting factor in the development of tourism at the district level—particularly at specific attractions like Kawalo Fort.

### **Tourism Attraction Potential**

The current condition of Kawalo Fort, when analyzed using Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, is categorized in the initial stage—the exploration phase. This phase represents the early development of a tourism destination, where attention begins to focus on identifying the tourism potential of a site. At this stage, local government and the surrounding community start to recognize or discover the potential of the area as a tourism destination. However, development efforts remain limited, unstructured, or even nonexistent (Nalendra, 2021).

Several indicators show that Kawalo Fort is still in the exploration phase: the original fort structure is barely visible, the number of tourists is relatively small and undocumented, and infrastructure and basic facilities in the area are minimal—still used primarily by locals for daily activities rather than designed for tourism support. For example, road access and other facilities have not been prepared to meet the needs of visitors.

To progress to the next stage in Butler's model—the involvement phase—strategic steps are required, such as infrastructure planning, fort restoration, local community capacity-building, and targeted tourism promotion. Sustainable and community-based development is essential to

ensure that tourism growth at Kawalo Fort does not compromise the site's historical, cultural, and environmental values, which form the foundation of its appeal.

### **The Fort and Cannons**

The presence of the fort and cannons in Kawalo Village serves as concrete evidence of the region's historical legacy. Although only the stone foundations of the fort remain, Kawalo Fort retains significant historical value as a relic of the past, reflecting the political and military dynamics once present on Taliabu Island. The two remaining cannons enrich the historical narrative, serving as artifacts that highlight the strategic importance of Kawalo Village in earlier times. By leveraging this historical heritage, the village has great potential to be developed into a historical tourism destination that not only educates visitors but also empowers the local community through the preservation of cultural heritage.

### **Legends and Local Folklore**

Another potential asset for developing the Kawalo Fort area is the existence of local legends that form part of the community's cultural beliefs. One such legend relates to the two remaining cannons. According to the local story, there was an attempt to steal one of the cannons, but the thieves were unable to lift it onto a boat due to its extraordinary weight. This incident is believed to be a sign of a mystical force or a blessing that protects the fort. Such beliefs add a cultural and spiritual dimension that can attract tourists interested in myths and folklore. With proper management, this legend could be incorporated into historical interpretation narratives at the site, enhancing the visitor experience while strengthening local cultural identity. This also opens opportunities for the community to engage in tourism activities based on folklore, such as becoming tour guides or organizing traditional storytelling performances.

### **Intangible Cultural Heritage**

The BPK XXI's report on cultural heritage inventory in Taliabu Island Regency also includes examples of intangible cultural heritage found in Kawalo Village, such as the Cakalele dance and traditional medicine practices—all of which have the potential to become complementary tourism attractions. The Cakalele dance in Kawalo Village differs from those performed in the island's interior or northern regions. This version has not been formally documented because it involves specific rituals that must be performed beforehand. Besides that, there is traditional knowledge related to treating illnesses. According to sources, traditional medicines are made from tree bark and certain leaves used to treat various conditions. For example, papaya leaf decoction is used to treat malaria. The healing ritual, locally referred to as *wonge* or *salai*, has not yet been fully described in detail.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

Based on field observations, focus group discussions, and literature analysis, this study confirms that Kawalo Fort represents an important cultural heritage site with significant potential for historical and cultural tourism development in Taliabu Island Regency. Although the physical structure of the fort is largely deteriorated, the remaining colonial cannons and stone foundations indicate a strong historical value, which is most likely associated with Dutch colonial presence. These findings position Kawalo Fort as a meaningful heritage asset that can contribute to the diversification of cultural tourism in eastern Indonesia.

To ensure sustainable utilization of this site, several strategic recommendations are proposed. Local and regional governments are encouraged to prioritize Kawalo Fort within cultural heritage preservation and tourism development policies, particularly through improving accessibility infrastructure, conducting formal heritage designation, and supporting basic visitor facilities. Local communities should be actively involved as key stakeholders in conservation efforts and tourism activities, including community-based guiding services, homestay management, and the preservation of local legends and intangible cultural heritage. For researchers and academic institutions, this study highlights the urgent need for follow-up research, especially archaeological investigations, historical archival studies, and interdisciplinary research to accurately determine the origin, function, and chronology of the fort.

Furthermore, Kawalo Fort holds strategic value not only for tourism but also for the development of scientific knowledge in the fields of history, archaeology, and cultural studies. With proper management and collaborative governance, the site can function as an educational resource, a research laboratory, and a sustainable cultural tourism destination. Therefore, Kawalo Fort should be recognized as an integral part of regional cultural tourism development, contributing to heritage preservation, local economic empowerment, and the advancement of knowledge for future generations.

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