

# Sustainable tour operator practices: A case study of PT Destination Asia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the implementation of sustainable tour operator principles based on Travelife criteria in enhancing the competitive advantage of PT Destination Asia, a tour operator company based in Bali. Although existing literature highlights the benefits of sustainability practices, there remains a research gap in understanding their practical application and impact at the tour operator level in Indonesia. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method, with data collected through in-depth interviews and documentation. Key informants, including managers and relevant staff, were selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that PT Destination Asia has successfully integrated the four main dimensions of sustainability—management, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental—into its operations. The company demonstrates a strong commitment to transparency through its annual reports, offers authentic tourism products that promote local culture, establishes partnerships with local communities and sustainable business partners, and applies environmentally friendly transportation and accommodation practices. Theoretically, this study strengthens the existing literature on the importance of applying sustainability principles to build competitive advantage in the tourism industry. Practically, it provides a valuable reference for other tour operators and policymakers to encourage the adoption of sustainability in the travel sector. Furthermore, this research opens up opportunities for future studies to explore consumer perspectives in evaluating the effectiveness of sustainability implementation.

**Keywords:** Competitive Advantage, Travel Industry, Travelife Criteria, Sustainable Tour Operator, Sustainable Tourism

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## Introduction

In the current era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), adherence to health protocols, discipline, and enhanced collaboration are crucial. The Ministry of Tourism is promoting sustainable tourism to foster robust and resilient growth in Indonesia's tourism sector, while simultaneously generating value through the creative economy. This initiative aligns with the Ministry's 2020–2024 Strategic Plan. The Ministry has identified sustainability, competitiveness, value creation, digitalization, and productivity as the five key strategic issues for sustainable tourism development in Indonesia, which are reflected in its policy directions. In line with the Ministry of Tourism Regulation No. 14 of 2016, which is based on the UNWTO's sustainable tourism concept, tour companies must adopt sustainability principles. Travelife, a global organization accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), provides Travelife Partner Criteria to help tour operators implement these principles and align with the ministerial regulation's sustainability standards. Tour operators committed to these guidelines must also be ready for regular audits as part of their ongoing evaluation and improvement.

Tour operators play a pivotal role in the tourism industry, particularly in shaping tourist behavior, thereby necessitating the implementation of sustainability principles (Penz et al., 2017). One viable approach is the adoption of the Travelife Partner Criteria as a framework for assessing

sustainability within tour operator operations, in support of sustainable tourism implementation. The adoption of sustainable tourism practices not only enhances business opportunities and fosters market innovation and design, but also improves operational efficiency, strengthens business resilience amidst growing sustainability trends, enhances competitive advantage, fulfills customer satisfaction, and elevates corporate sustainability reputation (Alsheref et al., 2024; Azmi et al., 2023; Bressan & Pedrini, 2020; Damiasih, 2025; Kholijah, 2024; Mykola et al., 2020; Streimikiene et al., 2021). However, despite the growing body of literature highlighting the benefits of sustainability implementation, challenges persist in the adoption of these principles among various tour operators operating in Indonesia. Accordingly, further research is warranted to explore the critical factors influencing the successful implementation of sustainability principles within the tour operator industry, particularly in the context of Indonesia's national travel sector.

PT Destination Asia Bali is the Indonesian branch of Destination Asia Group, a premier destination management company (DMC) established in 1996 (Destination Asia, 2025). Situated in Sanur, Denpasar Bali, the office serves as a central hub for delivering bespoke travel experiences across the diverse archipelago. Specializing in leisure travel, meeting and incentives, and cruise services, PT Destination Asia Bali offers tailor-made programs that highlight Indonesia's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. Their dedicated team of guides, drivers, and reservation staff ensures high-quality service and authentic experiences for travelers. The company is committed to sustainable tourism. The company integrates responsible travel practices into its operations, aiming to minimize environmental impact and support local communities. The company creates products which can give authentic experience about culture and local heritage to the tourists. This company has adopted the Travelife Partner Criteria as a comprehensive framework for integrating sustainability principles into its operational practices across all branches, both locally and globally. This strategic move reflects the company's deep-rooted commitment to sustainability and its ongoing efforts to mitigate negative environmental impacts while enhancing social and economic well-being. Through this policy, the company transcends a profit-centered approach by actively engaging in ecological impact reduction and contributing to the development of surrounding communities. The successful implementation of sustainability principles at PT Destination Asia serves as an exemplary model for other tourism enterprises seeking to transition toward more sustainable business practices within the industry.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that, despite the substantial initiatives undertaken by the company, the challenges confronting the tourism industry are continually evolving. Therefore, systematic and periodic evaluations of the implementation of sustainability principles are essential. In this regard, the company should serve as a subject of further evaluative inquiry to ensure that its sustainability policies remain adaptive to industry dynamics and capable of generating long-term positive impacts. Moreover, further scholarly investigation into the implementation and outcomes of these policies may yield critical insights that can inform the formulation and refinement of sustainability strategies across the broader tourism sector.

## Literature Review

### *Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC)*

A pivotal milestone in the formal adoption of sustainable tourism as a conceptual framework emerged in the early 1980s, marked by the publication of the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This initiative laid the foundational principles for integrating conservation and development. The subsequent release of the seminal report *Our Common Future* in 1987 significantly influenced the advancement of sustainable approaches across multiple sectors, including tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has since played a critical role in formulating standards and guidelines aimed at fostering sustainable tourism practices, including those directed at sustainable tour operators. Over time, the concept of sustainable tourism has continued to evolve, enriched by the contributions of diverse stakeholders from various disciplines and sectors.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is a multi-stakeholder organization dedicated to establishing global criteria for sustainable tourism. Formed in 2007 as a coalition of

32 partners, its founding was spearheaded by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). During the 2014–2019 ministerial term, the Minister of Tourism cited the UNWTO and the GSTC as international benchmarks for the development of sustainable tourism. The GSTC was conceived to define a set of minimum standards that all tourism enterprises must meet in order to protect and preserve the world's natural and cultural resources (Bricker & Schultz, 2011). These criteria were developed with the overarching aim of ensuring that tourism not only generates economic benefits but also serves as a vehicle for environmental conservation and poverty alleviation. The Council identifies four core pillars as the foundation of its criteria: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits for local communities; minimizing negative impacts on cultural heritage; and reducing adverse effects on environmental heritage.

The implementation of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria within the tourism industry is of paramount importance in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the natural and cultural resources upon which the sector depends (Hamid & Isa, 2017). These criteria provide a foundational framework for tourism enterprises to adopt environmentally and socially responsible practices, thereby enhancing corporate reputation and fostering consumer trust. Such implementation extends beyond environmental management—such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving water resource management—to encompass critical social dimensions, including the empowerment of local communities and the safeguarding of cultural heritage. For industry stakeholders, adherence to GSTC standards presents strategic opportunities to tap into an increasingly sustainability-conscious tourism market. However, it simultaneously demands substantial investment in education, capacity-building, and resource allocation to effectively meet the rigorous benchmarks established by the GSTC.

Tourism sustainability within the travel industry centers on achieving a harmonious balance between economic growth, environmental preservation, and social well-being (Shekhar, 2024). At its core, the principle of sustainable tourism entails minimizing adverse environmental impacts—such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and air pollution—while maximizing the economic and social benefits for local communities. The development of sustainable tourism necessitates prudent management across key sectors including transportation, accommodation, and food and beverage services, all of which must be regulated to mitigate their ecological footprint (Khan et al., 2023). These sectors constitute integral components of the travel industry and play a pivotal role in shaping tourist experiences. As such, embedding sustainability principles into every facet of the industry is essential to fostering responsible tourism products that can be preserved and enjoyed by future generations.

Nagendrakumar et al. (2022) articulate that the concept of sustainability in the travel industry encompasses three fundamental dimensions: environmental, economic, and social sustainability. These dimensions are vital for ensuring the long-term viability of tourism enterprises. Their findings suggest that the adoption of sustainable practices significantly influences the going concern of tourism businesses in both developed and developing countries. In particular, environmental sustainability indicators exhibit a strong positive correlation with financial stability, whereas the economic and social dimensions demonstrate variable impacts depending on the specific indicators employed. Consequently, sustainability within the travel and tourism sector has emerged as a critical discourse that interlinks economic expansion, carbon emissions, and sustainable development objectives.

According to Lee & Kwag (2013) the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in the context of travel, makes a significant contribution to economic growth, but at the same time, it also leads to increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Their study demonstrates that although this industry can stimulate economic development, it is also a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions due to its high energy consumption, especially within the transportation and accommodation sectors. Nevertheless, effective management of this sector can result in sustainable economic growth and a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Lee & Kwag (2013) further emphasize the importance of developing green infrastructure to support the sustainability of the tourism and hospitality sector, thereby creating a balance between economic growth and environmental protection. Therefore, the concept of sustainability in the travel industry should not only focus on economic aspects, but

must also take into account the overall environmental impact, with policies that promote more efficient and environmentally friendly resource utilization.

### **Sustainable Tour Operator**

The fundamental concept of sustainable tourism is based on four key aspects: management, environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions (Amerta et al., 2018; Kadi et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2021). Management refers to the approach of organizing, operating, or utilizing resources while considering their long-term impacts on social, environmental, and economic factors. In terms of the environmental aspect, it is crucial to manage natural resources responsibly to minimize the negative effects of tourism on ecosystems, such as pollution, habitat degradation, and other forms of environmental damage. The socio-cultural aspect is equally important, as tourism can influence local values and traditions (Zunaidi et al., 2022). Therefore, involving local communities in tourism planning and management is essential to ensure that local culture is preserved and not eroded by modernization. Furthermore, sustainable tourism must also provide equitable economic benefits, enhance local community income, and create employment opportunities without compromising social welfare or environmental sustainability (Xing, 2024).

Based on the study by Ariya et al. (2021), Travelife, as an international certification scheme, establishes four principal dimensions as criteria for assessing the sustainability of tour operators: management, environmental, socio-cultural, and economic aspects. From a management perspective, the criteria emphasize the implementation of a comprehensive sustainability management system, encompassing staff training, risk management, as well as systematic documentation and reporting of sustainability practices. The environmental dimension entails tangible measures such as energy conservation, waste management, water conservation, and the provision of environmental education to travelers. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural criteria underscore respect for local cultures, engagement of local communities, safeguarding of cultural heritage, and the promotion of inclusive social values. Conversely, the economic dimension advances sustainability by supporting local economies, ensuring fair business practices, and fostering ethical partnerships throughout the supply chain (Fernando et al., 2022). All these indicators are reinforced through a rigorous, tiered independent audit process—progressing from Travelife Engaged, to Partner, and ultimately to Certified status—to ensure that sustainability commitments are genuinely integrated across all corporate operations (Ariya et al., 2021).

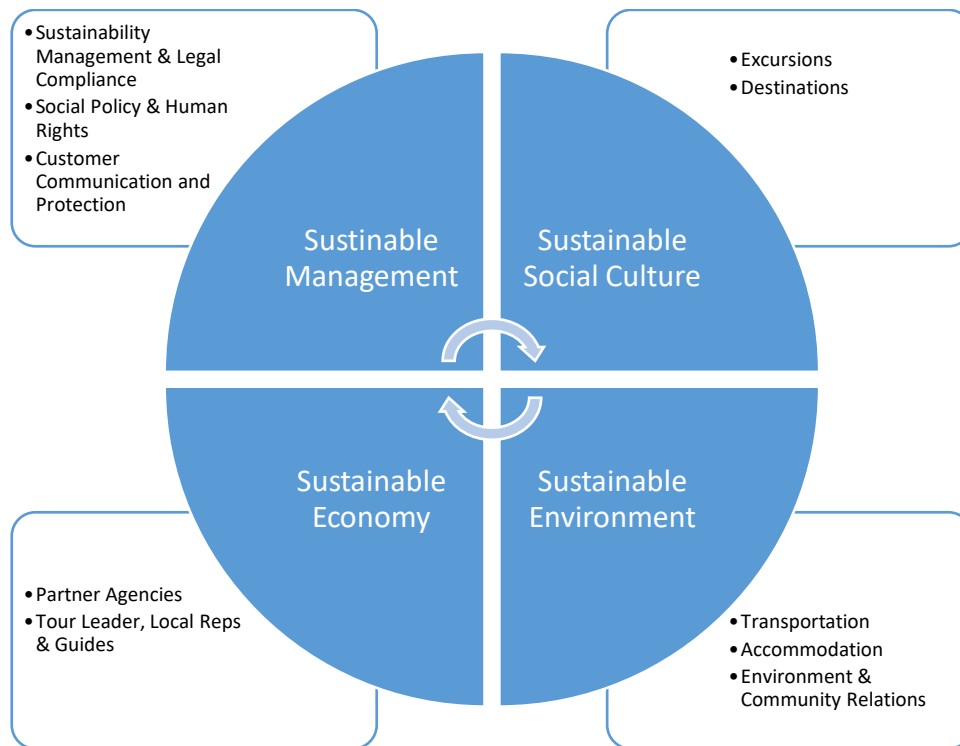
In the discourse on sustainable management from the perspective of tour operators, the literature presents a range of viewpoints that, while diverse, are mutually reinforcing. Hamid et al. (2021) assert that sustainability in tourism requires the implementation of both Sustainable Business Management (SBM) and Sustainable Destination Management (SDM) practices, which have a direct impact on the business performance of tour operators. They emphasize that operators who adopt these practices not only contribute to environmental preservation but also gain additional business benefits, indicating that sustainability enhances both ecological stewardship and profitability. Conversely, Ariya et al. (2021) place greater emphasis on the role of tour operators as key drivers of sustainability agendas within the tourism value chain, particularly in developing countries such as Kenya. They highlight the capacity of tour operators to influence both suppliers and tourists by fostering ongoing communication and promoting the selection of environmentally responsible tourism products. Despite the considerable advantages discussed, several studies point to persistent challenges, such as intense price competition and limited resources among certain operators, which may hinder the full implementation of sustainability certification. In this context, the integration of sustainable supply chain management with strong business performance is deemed essential, with a focus on meeting long-term needs without compromising the sustainability of destinations (Abrate et al., 2020). Therefore, while real challenges in adopting sustainable practices remain, sustainability should be viewed not only as a moral obligation but also as a strategic business approach that can enhance the competitiveness of tour operators in an increasingly environmentally conscious global market (Abrate et al., 2020; Hamid et al., 2021).

The sustainable economic aspect within the practices of tour operators is closely linked to the implementation of policies and practices that not only promote economic growth but also consider their impacts on local communities and the environment. Tour operators possess significant potential to contribute to the local economy by promoting tourism destinations that prioritize sustainability, such as supporting local products and utilizing environmentally friendly infrastructure (Saidmamatov et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies indicate that economic sustainability in this sector can also be achieved through efficient management and the establishment of management systems that facilitate collaboration among tour operators, suppliers, and tourism destinations (Khan et al., 2023). These practices focus not only on the stewardship of natural and cultural resources but also on empowering local communities through their participation in tourism-related decision-making (Ariya et al. (2021).

However, there are divergent perspectives regarding the level of commitment tour operators exhibit in implementing sustainable economic practices. Some studies suggest that although tour operators acknowledge the importance of social and environmental sustainability, the primary drivers of their business decisions remain financial profit and market demand (Ullah et al., 2021). This contrast highlights the challenges faced in integrating sustainable economic priorities as a central focus, despite the substantial potential for the sector to contribute meaningfully to more equitable and sustainable economic development (Turturica & Pauna, 2023). While differences exist in the extent to which sustainable economic practices are adopted by tour operators, a growing consensus suggests that there are long-term economic benefits associated with embracing more integrative sustainability practices.

The environmental sustainability aspect in the practices of tour operators plays a crucial role in minimizing the negative environmental impacts that tourism activities may generate. Tour operators have significant opportunities to implement environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing carbon emissions, prudent management of natural resources, and decreasing the use of non-renewable energy sources in their operations (Saidmamatov et al., 2020). Ecotourism certification programs, exemplified by those implemented in Costa Rica, demonstrate that effective management can reduce pollution, conserve nature, and promote the use of renewable energy (Ullah et al., 2021). Additionally, tour operators also bear responsibility for educating tourists about the importance of responsible natural resource management and encouraging them to reduce their ecological footprint by adopting practices such as using public transportation or bicycles during their travels (Turturica & Pauna, 2023). However, despite growing awareness among many tour operators regarding the importance of environmental sustainability, a primary challenge lies in the lack of incentives to promote the adoption of stronger environmental policies within their practices (Khan et al., 2023). Several studies indicate that decisions made by tour operators are often influenced more by short-term financial gains than by long-term considerations of environmental conservation (Ariya et al. (2021). Conversely, some larger tour operators demonstrate a strong commitment to environmental management by implementing guidelines that support energy conservation, waste management, and resource use efficiency (Saidmamatov et al., 2020). Although challenges persist in the full implementation of environmental sustainability practices, the growing awareness signals that tour operators play a key role in advancing more environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism (Khan et al., 2023).

Guidelines or criteria for sustainable tour operators are essential tools that enable tour operators to enhance their business competitiveness, attract new potential customers, increase social benefits, and fulfill their responsibilities as sustainable tour operators (Elizabeth, 2021). According to the official GSTC platform, certification as a Sustainable Tour Operator signifies that a product, journey, or tourism activity complies with prevailing social and environmental standards in the marketplace. The Travelife award and certification as a tour operator can be attained by registering as a Travelife member and successfully implementing the ten assessment themes established by Travelife.



(Source: Adapted from Travelife, 2022 and GSTC, 2016)

**Figure 1.** Mapping of Travelife Certification Criteria onto the GSTC Sustainable Tour Operator Aspects

The discourse surrounding tourism sustainability and the role of sustainable tour operators has increasingly faced critiques—especially in contexts lacking robust third-party oversight. Liu emphasizes the challenge of applying sustainable tourism principles within mainstream mass tourism, urging that a focus on clear standards and accreditation is crucial for actualizing sustainability (Liu, 2003). In contrast, Jamal et al. argue that existing sustainable tourism frameworks often ignore the influence of broader socio-economic factors, advocating for a re-examination of the principles underlying sustainable tourism through a critical lens (Jamal et al., 2013). Similarly, Saarinen (2013) discusses the frustrations scholars have with tourism as a predominantly profit-driven enterprise, suggesting that the inherent tensions between economic growth and sustainability principles result in superficial implementations of sustainability practices among tour operators. Moreover, Budeanu (2005) highlights the significant impact of tour operators on sustainable tourism trajectories and critiques their often inadequate accountability, particularly when the operators act as intermediaries lacking direct engagement with local sustainability efforts. This concern is echoed by Tolba (2014) who identifies a disconnection in mass tourism's adoption of sustainability frameworks, indicating that many tour operators prioritize immediate economic gains over long-term sustainability goals. Lastly, the transparency called for in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, as indicated by Farrington et al. (2017), highlights that without robust accountability mechanisms, the sustainability discourse risks becoming just another marketing strategy rather than an authentic commitment to ecological and social responsibility. Collectively, these critiques reveal a pressing need for scrutinizing the effectiveness and depth of sustainability efforts within the tourism industry, a situation compounded by insufficient oversight that can dilute the genuine implementation of sustainable practices.

## Methodology

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of field phenomena, particularly the implementation of sustainable tour operator practices in



enhancing competitive advantage at PT Destination Asia, Bali. The descriptive qualitative method, as outlined by Moleong & Surjaman (2014) aims to explore phenomena within their natural context without manipulating variables. Additionally, this study adopts a case study approach, following (Yin, 2009), which is effective for investigating contemporary social or cultural phenomena through research questions that focus on "how" or "why" events occur, especially when the researcher has limited control over dynamic research objects. This methodology enables the researcher to gather diverse and in-depth information, providing a comprehensive understanding of the application of these concepts in real-world settings.

For data collection, the researcher utilized interviews and documentation to obtain necessary information, employing purposive sampling to select relevant informants, including the general manager, tour manager, and tour staff. The instruments used consisted of structured interview guidelines and documentation protocols to guide the data collection process systematically. The data collected pertained to the fundamental concepts of sustainable tourism, which encompass four aspects—management, environment, socio-culture, and economy—as well as the criteria established by Travelife. The data were categorized according to these aspects to assess their implementation at PT Destination Asia, Bali.

Data analysis was conducted through three main stages: first, data reduction to simplify information for easier comprehension; second, data presentation in a clear format to facilitate reader understanding; and third, drawing conclusions by organizing and synthesizing the data to produce clear and accountable findings. Specifically, the analysis focused on identifying which components were implemented and documented in operations, based on information derived from interviews and existing documents.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

Based on the findings derived from interviews and document analysis employed as data collection instruments, this study elucidates the dimensions of sustainability through the lens of the Travelife criteria. The research outcomes are presented in the following tables.

**Table 1.** Sustainable Management Aspect

| No | Criteria                                     | Implementation  | Source of Data  |
|----|--|---|---|
| 1  | Sustainability Management & Legal Compliance | PT Destination Asia publishes an Annual Report that outlines the company's performance, achievements, and financial condition over a specified fiscal year.   | Document type: Annual Report<br><a href="https://www.destination-asia.com/downloads/PDF/DA_Sustainability_Report_2024.pdf">https://www.destination-asia.com/downloads/PDF/DA_Sustainability_Report_2024.pdf</a> |
| 2  | Social Policy & Human Rights                 | The company's management demonstrates a strong commitment to employing local community members while upholding non-discriminatory practices regardless of gender, background, or age (with a minimum employment age of 17 years). | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff  |
| 3  | Customer Communications & Protection,        | Information regarding sustainability programs and activities implemented at the business's operational sites is publicly accessible through the official website.   | Document type: Digital document (website)   |

In relation to Sustainability Management and Legal Compliance, PT Destination Asia has demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability by publishing an annual report that provides a comprehensive overview of the company's performance and achievements. This publicly available document serves as a critical source of information for stakeholders, enabling them to assess the extent to which the company adheres to established sustainability standards.

With respect to the criterion of Social Policy and Human Rights, PT Destination Asia's dedication to equitable social policies—such as employing local community members without

discrimination—exemplifies the practical implementation of social sustainability principles as outlined by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Insights gained through interviews with company representatives reveal that inclusivity and social equity are embedded in the company's operational ethos.

Under the criterion of Customer Communications and Protection, PT Destination Asia also underscores its commitment to transparency by disseminating information on its sustainability initiatives and programs through easily accessible digital platforms. By ensuring that this information is both clear and readily available, the company reinforces its dedication to consumer protection and the continuity of responsible communication with its clientele.

**Table 2.** Sustainable Social Culture Aspect

| No | Criteria     | Implementation   | Source of Data   |
|----|--------------|--|--|
| 1  | Excursions   | In response to the evolving trends among travelers who increasingly seek tourism experiences that are mindful of their environmental and socio-cultural impact, PT Destination Asia offers a diverse portfolio of tourism products encompassing 11 distinct and authentic themes, allowing customers to select experiences aligned with their values | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff; product offering documents |
| 2  | Destinations | The company's collaboration with destinations that are managed in accordance with sustainable principles plays a crucial role in safeguarding biodiversity, preserving ecosystems, and protecting exceptional cultural heritage from the adverse effects of over tourism.  | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff                             |

In this study, PT Destination Asia has demonstrated the integration of sustainability principles within the sociocultural dimension by offering tourism products that emphasize authenticity and partnerships with sustainably managed destinations. The findings highlight two primary aspects: excursions and destinations.

Firstly, in response to the growing awareness among travelers regarding the environmental and social impacts of tourism, PT Destination Asia provides a curated selection of eleven thematically diverse and authentic travel products. These products include art and culture, wellness, nature and adventure, beach, luxury, local life, culinary, family, classic, offbeat, and responsible travel. This variety enables customers to engage in experiences that are not only enriching and immersive but also aligned with sustainable values. Through such offerings, the company actively contributes to the preservation of local cultures while mitigating the adverse effects of mass tourism. Secondly, in terms of destination management, PT Destination Asia collaborates with sites that adhere to sustainable management practices, with a particular emphasis on the conservation of ecosystems and cultural heritage. This strategic alignment represents a significant step towards ensuring the long-term viability of tourist destinations and reflects the principles of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC), which underscore environmental stewardship and the minimization of tourism's negative impact on biodiversity and cultural assets. Through these collaborative efforts, PT Destination Asia seeks to foster a balanced relationship between tourism development and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, thereby promoting a more responsible and sustainable model of tourism.



**Table 3. Sustainable Economy Aspect**

| No | Criteria                         | Implementation  | Source of Data  |
|----|----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1  | Partner Agencies                 | Collaboration with local business partners who embrace the principles of sustainable tourism is a key strategic approach adopted by the company.  | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff. |
| 2  | Tour Leader, Local Reps & Guides | By engaging local guides and community representatives, the company fosters stronger relationships with the host communities and co-creates environmentally and socially responsible travel experiences. This collaborative model serves as a compelling exemplar of how visitors can meaningfully and respectfully engage with both the natural environment and local societies, thereby promoting mutual understanding and sustainable interaction. | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff. |

Based on the findings of this study, PT Destination Asia has implemented the principles of economic sustainability in its operations through two key elements: partner agencies and local tour leaders, representatives, and guides. These two components significantly contribute to the advancement of sustainable tourism, which extends beyond mere economic gains to encompass social and environmental considerations as well. Firstly, PT Destination Asia engages in strategic partnerships with local business entities that adhere to sustainable tourism principles. These collaborations not only facilitate the delivery of responsible travel services but also support local economic development and the preservation of natural resources. Secondly, the company fosters strong ties with local communities by collaborating with local guides and representatives. This initiative not only helps craft environmentally and socially responsible travel experiences but also serves as a model of how tourists can engage meaningfully with local people and environments. By directly involving the local population, PT Destination Asia ensures the equitable distribution of economic benefits while contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage.

**Table 4. Sustainable Environment Aspect**

| No | Criteria       | Implementation   | Source of Data  |
|----|----------------|--|---|
| 1  | Transportation | The utilization of efficient and environmentally friendly modes of transportation serves to mitigate negative impacts such as pollution and congestion in popular tourist destinations, in a manner that aligns with sustainable and responsible travel practices.   | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff.         |
| 2  | Accommodation  | The company prioritizes partnerships with local business entities that implement sustainable practices—such as minimizing the environmental impact of accommodation operations and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This commitment is further demonstrated by the promotion of sustainability certifications or awards received by these accommodations, which are prominently featured in marketing materials and on the company's official website. | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff; Website |

|   |                                    |   |  |
|---|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 3 | Environment & Community Relations, | The company actively collaborates with local social organizations to foster a holistic balance between economic growth, environmental conservation, and social empowerment. | Interviews with the General Manager, Tour Manager, and staff |
|---|------------------------------------|---|--|

Based on the research conducted on PT Destination Asia, the company demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental sustainability through three critical dimensions: transportation, accommodation, and environment & community relations. Environmental sustainability is a highly pertinent factor in the tourism industry, and PT Destination Asia has undertaken a range of strategic measures to advance this objective.

The company prioritizes the use of efficient and environmentally friendly transportation solutions. This approach aims to reduce pollution and traffic congestion in popular tourist areas, while simultaneously enhancing the cleanliness and comfort of the travel experience for visitors. The adoption of eco-friendly transportation—such as electric vehicles or renewable energy-based transit—not only minimizes the company's carbon footprint but also strengthens its brand image among environmentally conscious consumers.

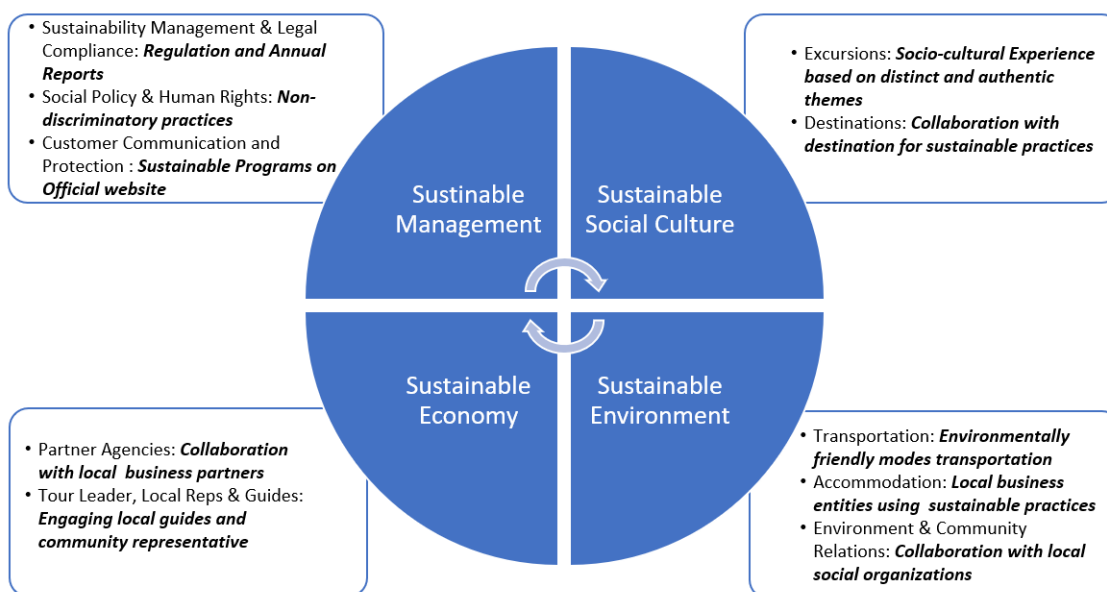
Furthermore, PT Destination Asia gives precedence to partnering with local businesses that implement sustainable practices, particularly those that reduce the environmental impact of accommodation operations. This includes energy management, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and eco-friendly waste management. Sustainability certifications or awards earned by such accommodations are prominently featured in the company's promotional materials and on its website, thereby encouraging more accommodation providers to adopt environmentally responsible practices.

In terms of community and environmental relations, the company collaborates with local social organizations to establish a balanced integration of economic growth, environmental preservation, and social empowerment. These partnerships not only contribute to environmental conservation but also enhance the quality of life for local communities through a variety of development programs that support long-term sustainability.

## Discussions

In the discourse on sustainable tourism, four principal dimensions merit thorough consideration: managerial, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental. These facets are integrally interconnected within the broader framework of ensuring tourism generates equitable benefits for all stakeholders, including local communities, tourists, and the natural environment. The implementation of managerial, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental aspects at PT Destination Asia, when mapped with the indicators for each aspect, has been fulfilled by the company, as shown in Figure 2 below. This reflects that the company has recognized the importance of sustainable tourism practices, both for the continuity of their business and the well-being of local communities and tourism destinations.

The dimension of Sustainable Management within sustainable tourism, as articulated by Bricker & Schultz (2011), underscores the paramount importance of transparency and accountability in the governance of tourism enterprises. The implementation of Sustainability Management & Legal Compliance by PT Destination Asia epitomizes a tangible commitment to the principles of sustainable management. It is manifested through the publication of annual reports delineating the company's performance, achievements, and financial standing. This aligns closely with the GSTC which mandates that every tour operator must establish not only an effective practice but also a transparent managerial system to oversee its operations. The adoption of an open and accountable governance framework enables stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the enterprise's sustainability performance, thereby facilitating the identification of areas in need of improvement and fostering long-term sustainability (Ariya et al., 2021; Bricker & Schultz, 2011).



**Figure 2.** The Implementation of Sustainable Tour Operator in PT Destination Asia

Furthermore, the Sustainable Social Culture component represents an indispensable pillar of sustainable tourism. This extends beyond the preservation of indigenous cultural expressions to encompass the empowerment of local communities, enabling their active participation in destination governance. Within the literature, Zunaidi et al. (2022) accentuate that social sustainability in the tourism sector is profoundly contingent upon equitable community management and the recognition of cultural rights. PT Destination Asia has operationalized this principle commendably by curating tourism products that emphasize cultural authenticity and collaborating with sustainably managed destinations. By offering tourism experiences that both respect and incorporate local cultural heritage, the company contributes to the preservation of social values while concurrently mitigating the adverse impacts of mass tourism. This approach coheres with the sustainable tourism framework advanced by Shekhar (2024), who posits that inclusive destination governance involving local populations and the promotion of inclusive socio-cultural values are foundational to achieving sustainability in tourism. Consequently, the integration of communities into the social sustainability agenda can enhance their quality of life while simultaneously enriching the authenticity and longevity of tourism experiences.

In parallel, the notion of a Sustainable Economy within sustainable tourism seeks to guarantee that the economic benefits derived from tourism activities are equitably distributed among all parties, including local residents and tour operators. The concept of economic sustainability emphasizes the prudent stewardship of natural resources and the equitable distribution of economic gains. According to Khan et al. (2023), a genuinely sustainable tourism sector must engender economic opportunities for local populations without compromising social welfare or ecological integrity. PT Destination Asia has exemplified best practices in this realm through its collaboration with local business partners who prioritize sustainability in tourism and foster robust linkages with local communities. This aligns with the assertions of Fernando et al. (2022), who argue that economic sustainability in tourism is inextricably linked to the efficient management of natural resources and the cultivation of ethical partnerships within the supply chain. In this regard, PT Destination Asia not only supports the local economy but also sustains an equilibrium between environmental stewardship and equitable economic development for surrounding communities.

The final dimension, Sustainable Environment, constitutes a foundational pillar in the sustainable tourism paradigm. Saidmatov et al. (2020) emphasize the critical importance of environmental stewardship within the tourism sector to mitigate adverse ecological impacts, such as pollution, ecosystem degradation, and elevated greenhouse gas emissions. PT

Destination Asia has demonstrated a robust commitment to environmental sustainability by employing energy-efficient and environmentally conscious modes of transportation, as well as selecting business partners whose accommodation practices align with sustainability principles. This evidences the company's orientation beyond mere economic profitability toward the minimization of tourism-induced environmental degradation. Ullah et al. (2021) reinforce the imperative for tour operators to reduce their ecological footprints through waste management, energy conservation, and carbon emission reduction. PT Destination Asia actively pursues these objectives by incorporating renewable energy-based transportation and partnering with sustainability-certified accommodation providers. Thus, the company significantly contributes to the preservation of natural ecosystems and the mitigation of tourism's environmental impact, in accordance with the tenets of green tourism, which advocate for the efficient and environmentally conscious utilization of resources.

PT Destination Asia has successfully operationalized an integrated sustainability framework across its business model. Through the implementation of Sustainable Management practices, the company ensures that all operational processes are conducted with a high degree of transparency and accountability. In the realm of Sustainable Social Culture, the company has effectively engaged local communities in destination governance while safeguarding socio-cultural diversity. With regard to Sustainable Economy, PT Destination Asia bolsters the local economy by partnering with stakeholders who prioritize sustainable tourism and foster equitable benefits for local populations. Lastly, in the domain of Sustainable Environment, the company evidences a strong environmental ethic by prioritizing eco-friendly transportation and accommodation solutions. These four interdependent sustainability pillars not only enhance the operational sustainability of the enterprise but also reinforce its reputation as a tour operator that is ethically accountable to environmental, societal, and economic dimensions. The holistic implementation of sustainability principles by PT Destination Asia serves as a paradigmatic exemplar for other tourism operators in cultivating environmentally, socially, and economically responsible tourism.

The examination of PT Destination Asia's operational adherence to sustainability principles reveals substantial alignment with established frameworks such as Travelife and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) across managerial transparency, equitable socio-cultural engagement, economic benefit distribution, and environmental stewardship. This congruence is evident in the company's robust reporting, non-discriminatory local employment practices, culturally authentic product offerings, strategic collaborations with sustainable partners, and the prioritization of eco-friendly transport and accommodation. Nevertheless, a comprehensive understanding of sustainability implementation necessitates a critical reflection on the inherent practical complexities and limitations often unaddressed in such assessments. Significant hurdles include resource constraints, both financial and human, which can impede rigorous verification of partner sustainability claims or the widespread adoption of high-capital eco-friendly technologies. Furthermore, persistent cost pressures within competitive market environments may necessitate operational compromises, thereby creating a discernible gap between aspirational policy standards and their pragmatic execution. The heterogeneous capacities among partner entities, where some stakeholders may lack the requisite resources or expertise to fully embrace sustainable practices, present a continuous challenge to upholding a uniform and elevated standard of sustainability across the entire value chain. Acknowledging these nuanced practicalities is crucial for a balanced and realistic portrayal of the sustainability landscape in the tourism sector, underscoring the continuous and multifaceted efforts required to bridge the divide between theoretical frameworks and real-world applications.

## Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation of sustainability principles within the tourism industry, focusing on PT Destination Asia as a case study. The findings indicate that the company has successfully integrated sustainability principles across all operational dimensions, including Sustainable Management, Sustainable Social Culture, Sustainable Economy, and Sustainable Environment as pointed out by several scholars such as Kadi et al. (2015), Amerta et al. (2018) and Khan et al. (2021), Zunaidi et al. (2022), Xing (2024),

Ariya et al. (2021), Fernando et al. (2022) and Ariya et al. (2021). The application of these principles aligns with the guidelines established by the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) and Travelife, which emphasize transparent management, local community empowerment, equitable economic management, and environmental protection. In terms of management, PT Destination Asia demonstrates accountability and transparency by publishing annual reports that detail the company's sustainable operations. The social-cultural dimension is reflected in the active involvement of local communities in the planning and management of tourism destinations, respecting local cultures and mitigating the negative impacts of mass tourism. Economically, the company prioritizes local economic empowerment through partnerships with business associates who uphold sustainability principles, thereby ensuring equitable economic benefits. Environmentally, PT Destination Asia is committed to minimizing negative environmental impacts by utilizing environmentally friendly transportation and collaborating with accommodations that prioritize sustainability.

Theoretically, this research reinforces the existing literature on sustainability in the tourism industry as argued by Kadi et al. (2015), Amerta et al. (2018), and Khan et al. (2021), particularly regarding the implementation of Sustainable Tourism principles developed by GSTC (2016) and Travelife (2022). The findings also offer insights into the importance of transparency, inclusive management, and collaboration with local communities as key elements in fostering sustainable tourism. Moreover, this study expands the understanding of the interrelationship between social, economic, and environmental sustainability within the tourism context, illustrating how these three dimensions are interconnected in shaping a responsible and sustainable tourism industry. Practically, the results of this study provide guidance for tour operators to integrate sustainability principles into all aspects of their business. Tour operators are encouraged to adopt best practices exemplified by PT Destination Asia, such as transparent management, local community involvement in destination management, and the creation of equitable economic benefits through partnerships with local business partners committed to sustainability. Furthermore, it is important for policymakers in tourist destinations to develop policies that support sustainable tourism, including facilitating cooperation between tour operators and local communities and promoting environmentally friendly destination management. Such policies not only enhance the attractiveness of destinations but also strengthen the image of the region as a socially and environmentally responsible tourism destination.

The limitations of this study lie in its reliance on interviews and documentation, which do not fully capture consumer perceptions of the sustainability practices implemented by PT Destination Asia. Therefore, further research employing quantitative approach is necessary to measure the depth of sustainability implementation and to develop more precise standards for assessing the success of sustainability programs within the tourism industry. Furthermore, another limitation of this study is its singular focus on internal perspectives, overlooking crucial external viewpoints from stakeholders such as customers, business partners, and local communities, whose voices would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the actual outcomes and perceived value of the sustainability initiatives, a scope that future research could broaden to enhance relevance and practical applicability.

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