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**Cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations: portraits of Siantar, Indonesia, in the past [version 1; peer review: 1 approved with reservations, 2 not approved]**

Erond Litno Damanik, Daniel H.P. Simanjuntak, Daud Daud

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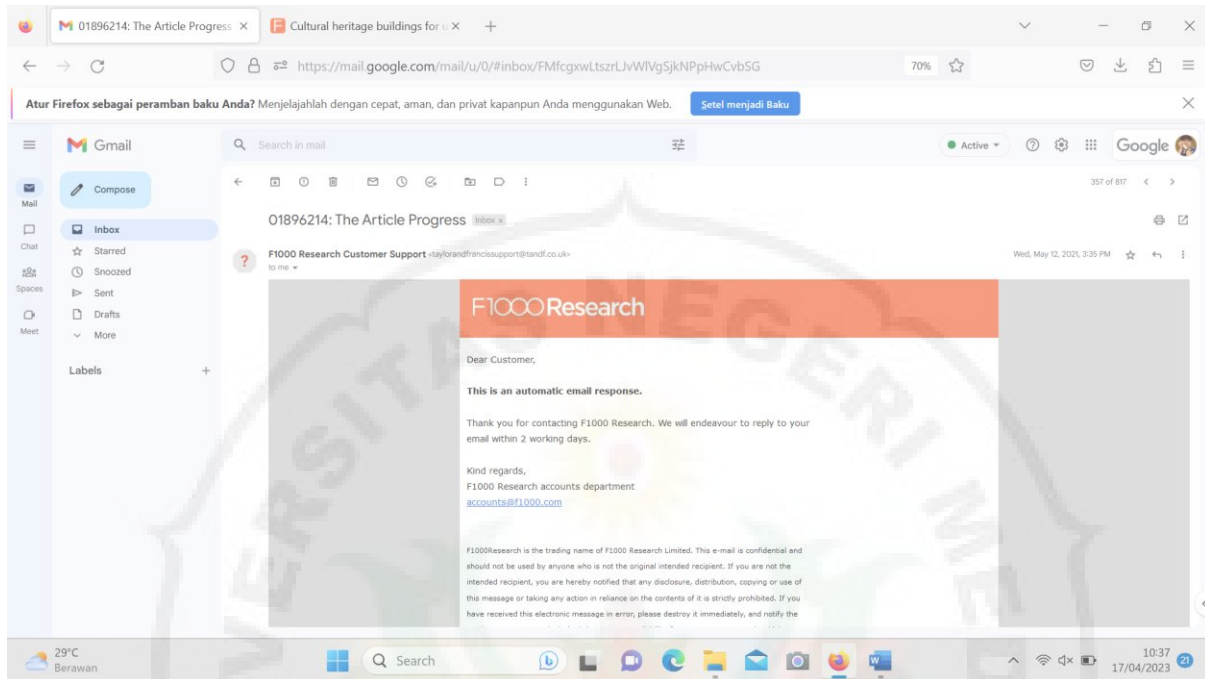
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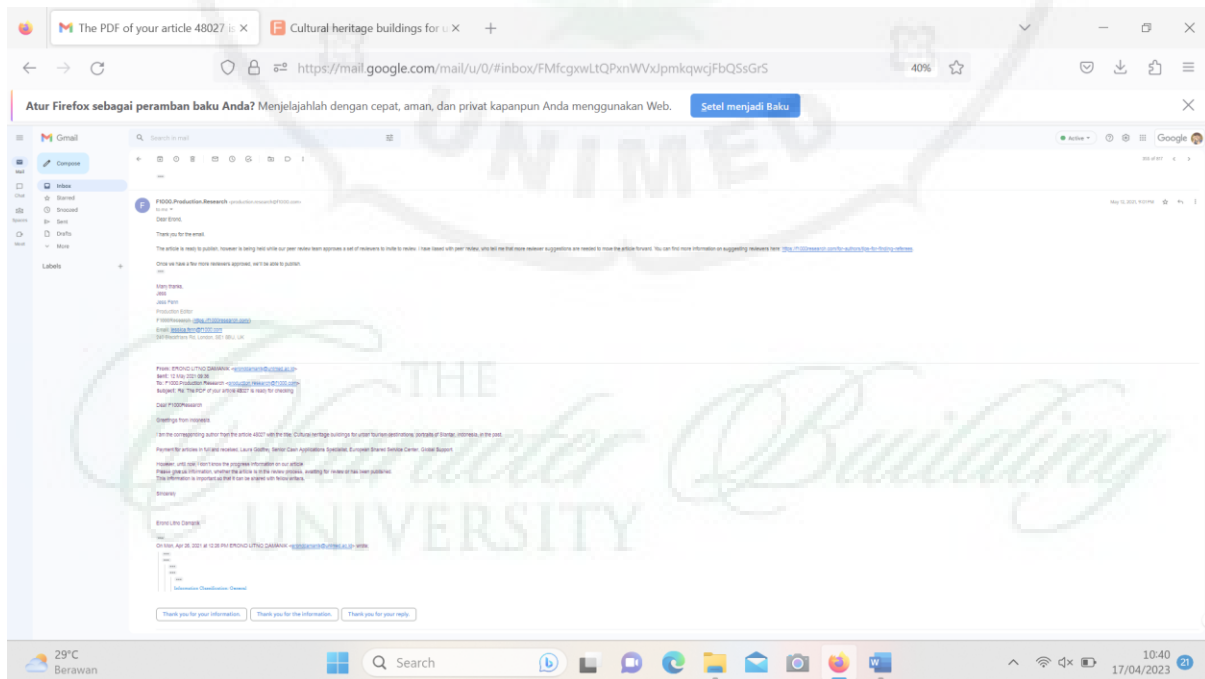
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations: portraits of Siantar, Indonesia, in the past [version 1; peer review: 1 approved with reservations, 2 not approved]

Erond Litno Damani<sup>1</sup>, Daniel H.P. Simanjuntak<sup>1</sup>, Daud Daud<sup>1</sup>  
Author details

This article is included in the Research Synergy Foundation gateway.

Abstract

**Background:** This study was motivated by the failure to use historic buildings, plantations heritage, and modernization of Siantar. The problem is focused on the optimization of historic buildings, icons for urban tourism destinations. The study contribution is useful for the protection, utilization, and development of cultural heritage buildings into a tourist destination in urban areas. More specifically, the study aims to explore and discuss the optimization of urban tourism to support economic and territorial growth.

**Methods:** The study was carried out qualitatively with a pragmatic methodological approach according to the tourism paradigm. The study departs from the colonial archives: photographs, maps, notes, and field research focused on the identification, significance, and contribution to urban history. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed

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management incentives, and determining urban tourism designs.

**Conclusions:** Utilization of cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations reflects the urban with plantation characteristics, portraits of cities in the past, packed into urban tourism experiences.

Keywords

Heritage, buildings, urban, tourism

Corresponding author: Erond Litno Damani<sup>1</sup>  
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Introduction

In Pematangsiantar, Indonesia, based on an infrastructure map dating back to 1926, at least 57 monumental buildings were recorded during the plantation period<sup>12</sup>. All of these buildings were offices, schools, worship places, hospitals, hotels, cinemas, train stations, cafes, swimming pools, and banks. Initially, the 57 buildings belonged to the colonial

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Cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations:  
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Erond Litno Damanik<sup>a1</sup>

Conceptualization

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Formal Analysis

Funding Acquisition

Investigation

Methodology

Project Administration

Resources

Supervision

Validation

Visualization

Writing – Original Draft Preparation

Writing – Review & Editing

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## Abstract

**Background:** This study was motivated by the failure to use historic buildings, plantations heritage, and modernization of Siantar. The problem is focused on the optimization of historic buildings, icons for urban tourism destinations. The study contribution is useful for the protection, utilization, and development of cultural heritage buildings into a tourist destination in urban areas. More specifically, the study aims to explore and discuss the optimization of urban tourism to support economic and territorial growth.

**Method s:** The study was carried out qualitatively with a pragmatic methodological approach according to the tourism paradigm. The study departs from the colonial archives: photographs, maps, notes, and field research focused on the identification, significance, and contribution to urban history. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Raw information was reduced and coded according to the relevance of the study. Data are combined into categories and themes reflecting descriptive analysis, classification, and interpretation. Data validation was done through triangulation strategies, member checking, rich descriptions, and saturation.

**Results :**The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, the findings of this study were carried out in three stages; development based on national consensus in law, utilization into public space, appreciation for managers, and management incentives, and determining urban tourism designs.

**Conclusions:** Utilization of cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations reflects the urban with plantation characteristics, portraits of cities in the past, packed into urban tourism experiences.

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## Introduction

In Pematangsiantar, Indonesia, based on an infrastructure map dating back to 1926, at least 57 monumental buildings were recorded during the plantation period <sup>1,2</sup>. All of these buildings were offices, schools, worship places, hospitals, hotels, cinemas, train stations, cafes, swimming pools, and banks. Initially, the 57 buildings belonged to the colonial government, plantation companies, and missionaries. The exception is that the map does not include buildings belonging to the native Siantar's autonomous elites or shops scattered around the city. The construction of buildings was motivated by three main factors: (1) plantation expansions, (2) transformation of villages into cities, and (3) evangelism.

Pematangsiantar is a city of plantations, its growth having been determined relatively by plantations, notably since 1907. Except for Medan, no other region in the Eastern part of Sumatra claims to be more developed than Siantar. As a plantation area, the number of historic building units undoubtedly increased with the construction of shops, houses, offices, bridges, warehouses, and factories around the city. The entire heritage is estimated to consist of more than 300 buildings <sup>1</sup>.



In this study, the heritage of the plantation, according to Law number 11 of 2010 concerning Cultural Heritage, is Cultural Heritage Buildings. After the independence in 1945 and the Nationalization policy, especially against Dutch assets in 1958, most of the buildings were controlled by the government, private sector, and individuals. Some of them were returned to their original function and some of them switched functions <sup>2</sup>.

During 1970–2015, 22 buildings were abandoned, 11 were damaged and 17 were destroyed. Today, at the time of this research, 36 iconic units have been found concentrated around the heart of the city, at ground zero, to the north and south sides of the city. In general, the remaining heritages are government-owned offices, churches, hotels, and private schools.

The reality of heritage is summarized in six pejorative assumptions; (1) relatively high resistance to urban development, (2) irrelevance to modernity and social change in urban areas, (3) obsolete, worthless, and out of date, (4) symbols of colonialism, slavery and exploitation, (5) no longer relevant nor under the spatial planning and building layout of an urban setting, and (6) an eyesore to the city's aesthetics.

In this study, heritage is seen as having at least six urgencies and significances; (1) an icon of the city, containing memory and identity, (2) urban monuments, history of development and modernization, (3) source of knowledge, architecture, land use, and spatial planning, (4) relevance to territorial development, (5) historic zonation in urban areas, and (6) urban nostalgia. All of the above six urgencies and significances contributed to economic and territorial development through their use as a heritage tourist destination.

Optimization of heritage tourism in Siantar correlates with its geographical position and absolute advantages; (1) being adjacent to Lake Toba which offers panoramic views of nature <sup>3</sup>, (2) being known as a student-friendly, tolerant, multicultural city, and urbanization destination, (3) surrounded by tea, rubber, palm oil, and cocoa, packaged into a single plantations-tourism, (4) as a bridge connecting the west and south coasts of North Sumatra.

This study emphasizes the use of heritage as an urban tourist destination. Urban tourism is correlated with economic benefits based on position and strategic advantage <sup>4</sup>. Urban tours require planning and design, the latter being intended to protect, preserve, and take advantage of heritage, especially buildings that exist. Heritage becomes an urban icon, containing memory and identity <sup>4</sup>, sustainability and development of the city <sup>5</sup>, contains architecture <sup>6</sup>, aesthetics, land use, climate adjustment and becomes the cradle for designing a historic area <sup>7</sup>, requires conservation <sup>8,9</sup> developed into a tourist destination in urban areas <sup>10</sup>.

The focus of the study is formulated on the following first question: why is heritage tourism important? The answer is summarized in the following four points; (1) preserving the remaining heritage as historic evidence, memory and city identity, (2) helping the development of the city through the tourism sector, (3) increasing the attractiveness and tourist destinations of the city, and (4) encouraging economic and territorial growth. The second question is how to design heritage-based urban tourism, which is at the core of this study.

Based on these two questions, the two main assumptions of the study are formulated as follows; (1) the implementation of urban tourism contributes significantly to economic and territorial growth, (2) urban tourism is correlated with the conservation of icons, monuments, and nostalgia. Our goal is to design urban tourism based on existing buildings according to a strategic position.

Although the political will of the government or stakeholders is relatively low, a logical and rational tourism design and model is very helpful for heritage conservation in urban areas. At a minimum, the government and stakeholders must change their perspectives on historic

buildings. Heritage-based urban tourism is nostalgia, a portrait of Siantar in the past, in addition to providing economic incentives, as well as contributing greatly to territorial growth.

## Literature review

Historic buildings or cultural heritage buildings become the basis for tourism development in urban areas and their surroundings. Heritage-based urban tourism is the type of tourism that is most developed today <sup>11</sup>. Heritage tourism is the fastest-growing travel segment and is changing the nature and trends of tourism in the world. Recent studies have shown a relatively high and more competitive demand to visit places that have a heritage in the tourism domain <sup>12</sup>. Heritage, thus, contributes to local income and development and at the same time preserves the history of an area's past <sup>13</sup>.

Heritage is the cultural wealth of an area. Cultural property includes both movable and non-transferable cultural property <sup>14</sup>. The conception of cultural wealth refers to all aspects, including works of art, customs, museums, monuments, construction, folk art, natural history, and even wildlife, all of which are considered to be heritage <sup>15</sup>. In the World Heritage Convention in 1972, heritage includes architecture, groups of buildings, and sites <sup>16</sup>. More specifically, historic monuments are not just any single architecture but also include urban settings in which evidence of certain civilizations or developments of historic importance is found <sup>16</sup>. Based on this statement, the entire urban is a monument, an accumulation of cultural creations and expressions over the years.

The historic nuance of the city is recorded in its heritage, a mainstay of tourism in the city, and its surroundings. Urban tours are different from other types of tourism. Urban tourism reflects high population density and diverse cultural offerings in a relatively small area but attracts many types of tourists. Urban tourist attractions and facilities lead to the interaction between tourists and residents. Tourism is directed at all things about the past that anyone can visit <sup>17</sup>. Urban tourism includes museums, districts, reconstructions, sculptures, monuments, and shrines, using a historic perspective in various manners <sup>18</sup>. Both, historic heritage and urban tourism are collaborative industries, turning the location into a destination and making it economically viable <sup>19-21</sup>.

Heritage-based tourism is rooted in nostalgia, an economic determinant for urban development <sup>22</sup>. Tourism is an agent and tool for social and cultural change in urban areas. Heritage tourism reflects the growth and success of historic heritage management <sup>17</sup>. Heritage tourism is seen as optimizing the use of the cultural heritage of a community, region, country, or even continent in the global tourism market <sup>23</sup>. Global interest in downsizing public spaces increases the privatization of goods and services. Urban tourism is becoming a trend that is oriented towards entrepreneurship and entertainment <sup>24</sup>, two determinants of tourism success in urban areas. Tourism, in many cases, becomes a force of rejuvenation and a loss of heritage integrity.

Urban tourism has consistently been one of the fastest-growing segments of the travel phenomenon in developed economies. This fact is relevant and in line with the rise of mass tourism in the 1960s <sup>25-26</sup>. The trips of tourists to cities with high population density are short-duration, usually 1–3 days <sup>27</sup>. Cities are a destination for migration, not only for business, trade, education, or those looking for work but also as places where people gather intending to seek pleasure <sup>27</sup>. The growth of urban tourism is driven by spatial, social, economic, and technological forces <sup>28</sup>. The urbanization process has led to an increase in the number of visits and to feel more connected to the urban lifestyle <sup>29</sup>. Urban tourism is a

significant driver of the economy. Facilitated with access to cellular information, the boundary between tourists and residents becomes increasingly blurred and encourages tourists to increasingly seek, find, and consume local experiences <sup>30</sup>.

Being cultural centres, the largest tourist destinations in the world are cities. More than half of the world's population lives in cities, and it is calculated that by 2030, about 5 billion people will live in cities <sup>31</sup>. Every year, hundreds of thousands of villagers visit cities. Based on Euromonitor, international tourist arrivals in 2013 had increased by 4.8% <sup>31</sup>. In the same year, the top 100 cities in the world experienced a growth of 5.4% <sup>31</sup>. Urban vacations include business, education, and family visits. Sun and beach holiday activity grew by 31% in 2013-2018, representing 29% of all vacation trips <sup>31</sup>. The holiday tourism segment grew by 28% and reached a market share of 23%. Since 2013-2018, urban trips have increased by 72%. In fact, in some cities, travel goes beyond sun and beach holidays as the most popular holiday <sup>31</sup>.

In the UK for example, urban vacations reached 42% in 2014 compared to 38% for sun and beach holidays in the same year <sup>32</sup>. The reality in developed countries is different from Indonesia. 1,530,268 international tourist visits in August 2019, decreased by 89.22% or 164,970 in August 2020 <sup>32</sup>. The largest numbers of international visitors were from Timor Leste, Malaysia, China, the United States, and the Netherlands <sup>33</sup>. This decline is closely related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, national political conditions, and the gradual decline in the quality of tourist attractions.

In this study, urban tourism is intended to encourage urban growth through the utilization of heritage. Heritage is important to remind the city of nostalgia and all aspects that influence it. Siantar, for the record, the territory of the Damanik clan in Simalungunese, was assigned as a municipality in 1917 <sup>1</sup>. The transformation into a city started in 1907, when Sang Nauluh Damanik, a local ruler, was exiled to Bengkalis, Riau <sup>34</sup>. After the arrest, six other local rulers in Simalungun recognized Dutch authority <sup>35, 36</sup>. The motivation for the conquest was the expansion of plantations on the east coast of North Sumatra, starting from Medan, extending to Binjai, Langkat, Serdang, Bedagei, Tebingtinggi, Simalungun, Batubara, Asahan, Kisaran to Labuhanbatu <sup>37- 39</sup>.

Before 1907, Siantar, as Anderson noted in 1823, had a low population of fewer than 5,000 <sup>39</sup>. The area was completely untouched by modernization until 1905 <sup>40, 41</sup>. Siantar, especially since 1907, transformed into a city <sup>42</sup>, as well as a colonial plantation economic centre <sup>43</sup>. On the one hand, plantations are an indicator of capitalism <sup>44</sup>, economic globalization and legal changes <sup>45</sup>, and urban modernization <sup>46, 47</sup>, but on the other hand, they marked the beginning of colonialism <sup>48</sup>, ethnic polarization <sup>49</sup>, agrarian disputes <sup>48</sup>, and slavery <sup>50</sup>.

Plantations are indicators of modernization <sup>51- 53</sup>. In Siantar and its surroundings, initially, historic buildings belonged to the companies Amsterdam Trade Union (HVA), the Amsterdam Rubber Culture Company (RCMA), the Dutch-American Plantation Company (HAPM), Rubber Plantation Investment Trust, Sumatera Rubber Plantation Ltd, and Harrison and Crossfield.

On the one hand, this study correlates with the improvement of the tourism-based urban economy, and on the other hand, it contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage buildings. Both of them are relevant, apart from being adjacent to the Lake Toba Caldera Geopark and tourism trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, potentially supporting growth and economic incentives offered by the tourism industry.

## Methods

### Study design

The study was conducted between April–September 2020 and carried out qualitatively with a pragmatic approach <sup>54, 55</sup>. The qualitative nature of the study was intended to identify and inventory all heritage units from the colonial period that still exist to this day. Identification and inventory were carried out by tracing references back to the colonial period, internet, and field studies. Field studies are required to obtain data on existing and demolished buildings. 36 buildings that still exist today were identified and registered, the data includes its state of the art, location, function, architectural style, owner, height, and area of the building. This strategy aims to obtain an accurate number of historical buildings and projected use as a tourist destination.

The pragmatic approach was intended to obtain a causal-functional explanation <sup>56</sup>, regarding the use of heritage to find locality-based tourist designs. Historic buildings are seen as having pragmatic, economic, and social values. Tourism design requires an interdisciplinary, anthropological, history, tourism, and economic development approach. This study is significant, especially in unravelling the potentials of historic buildings as well as for planning urban tourism according to geographical characteristics.

### Data collection

**Archival research.** We searched the Dutch-language colonial archives for records of buildings, notes, photos, maps and sketches, in June 2020 at the office of the Dutch Language, Land and Ethnology Institute (KITLV), Jakarta. The archives are magazines (Tijdschrift), reports (Verlag), historical records (geschiedenis), notifications (mededeelingen), handovers (overgave), encyclopedia, and newspapers. Besides, the KITLV and Tropenmuseum Institute websites were accessed to enrich resources. Maps, especially photos of building units are matched through observation to obtain details, architecture, area, height, recent conditions, functions, and sustainability.

**Field study.** Field studies were carried out between April–September 2020 by observing the existing buildings to obtain the latest conditions. Researchers and assistants were divided into three groups to record buildings in 4 segments. Field studies were summarized in a logbook, recorded by date, recent situation and building details <sup>57</sup>.

**Interview.** The interviews were conducted in two steps by the lead researcher (ED). Firstly, interviews with three heads of agencies for 2–3 hours, from the City Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), the Education and Culture Office, and the Tourism Office in their respective offices to obtain an explanation of the historical buildings in Siantar. The three of them were interviewed separately, in their respective offices. The interview was conducted after sending a formal letter and finding the right time. The interview was guided by a structured list and was not repetitive <sup>58</sup>. The focus of the interview was government policies on historical buildings, revitalization programs and long-term building utilization. A non-governmental organization, Sumatra Heritage Home, was also interviewed to obtain information and views on historical buildings in Siantar.

The four institutions were interviewed separately in a structured manner in May 2020 based on their authority, main tasks and functions as well as capacity. The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and field notes were taken. The interview was terminated when the information was repeated, i.e. data saturation was achieved. Logbooks were compiled during the research process <sup>59</sup>.

Secondly, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held for 5 hours, inviting 20 participants outside of government officials and journalists, consisting of academics, urban planners, architects, historians, travel agents, building owners, and non-governmental organizations. All participants were officially invited by email and reminded via the chat application. FGD is focused on the utilization of historical buildings as city tourist destinations. Each participant was asked to provide views and opinions on the urgency, significance, mechanisms and strategies of building utilization. The FGD committee is the researcher in charge of preparing a list of questions, managing discussions, taking notes and recording. In addition to developing questions, 16 main questions were asked to obtain information from each participant <sup>60</sup>. FGD was held in August 2020 at Siantar Hotel.

### Data analysis

All data were compiled and tabulated for chronological analysis, to measure the economic contribution of an existing building. Data were identified and organized into tree coding, and arrange in excel. Bias or subjectivity is reduced over comparisons between informants. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Data are combined into categories and themes reflecting descriptive analysis, classification, and interpretation. Data validation was done through triangulation, member checking, rich descriptions, and saturation. Results were presented to participants to obtain feedback.

Three researchers are male and lecturer, one doctorate, and two masters. The three of them have research experience during 2015–2020.

### Results

Siantar and its surroundings have more than 300 units of historic buildings as heritages from the plantation period. This number was obtained after calculating the building units in the city centre and its surrounding areas, including the Sidamanik tea plantation, Marjandi, Nagahuta, palm oil and rubber plantations in Sarbelawan, Bandar, and Tanohdjawa. The building units consist of offices, hotels, cinemas, banks, shops, schools, museums, houses of worship, hospitals, factories, warehouses, bridges, railway stations and yards, military and police barracks, employee official homes, residences, markets, and wildlife parks.

In the city centre, buildings are spread across three main settlements: (1) European buildings around Simbolon area at the South, (2) Chinese buildings around Cipto area at the city centre, and (3) Simalungunese buildings on Pamatang at the city centre. The city became the base for colonial government and administration which was adjacent to the Siantar self-government centre. The population of the city is European, Chinese, and indigenous. Around the city, buildings include factories, warehouses, coolie barracks, and homes of entrepreneurs.

In the colonial era, Siantar was divided based on ethnicity; the Muslims resided in Timbangalung, Christians lived in East Siantar, Toba in North Siantar, Karonese in Tomuan, Javanese on Jalan Bali and Simalungunese on Jalan Asahan. Plantation workers, especially Javanese, occupied the barracks provided by the company at the plantation. Historic buildings around the city are still being discovered, even though most of them have been destroyed.

All buildings were the supporting infrastructures of the city, such as offices, hotels, banks, cinemas, ice factories, schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. Based on the Siantar City infrastructure map of 1926, there were 57 such buildings were recorded. However, the map does not include shops with Chinese architecture and the Simalungunese noble houses in

Pamatang. Until today, of the 57 building units, 22 have been abandoned, 11 damaged and 17 destroyed.

This study found 36 iconic buildings that still exist. The 36 buildings are grouped into four segments: (1) Flower Gardens, (2) Pamatang, (3) Simbolon, and (4) Asahan. [Table 1](#) shows historic buildings from the plantation era in 4 segments of Siantar.

Table 1. A Segments of existing historic buildings in Siantar.

Segment	No	Buildings name
Flower Garden	1	Flower Garden
	2	Mayor Office
	3	Legislative Office
	4	Office of City Development Planning Agency
	5	Bank BRI
	6	District Court Office
	7	Ria Cinema
	8	Siantar Hotel
	9	National Office
	10	Telecommunication Office
	11	Railway Station and Warehouse
Pamatang	12	BPM Oil Tank
	1	King Siantar Palace and house
	3	Ice Factory
	4	Riatur Hotel
	5	Siantar Central Market
	6	Swimming pool
	7	Drinking water company
	8	Catholic church

Segment	No	Buildings name
	9	Museum of Simalungun
	10	Dr Djasamen Central Hospital
	11	Post Office
	12	A shophouse with Chinese architecture on Jalan Cipto
	13	Military Barracks
Simbolon	1	Mayors official residence
	2	Controleur official residence
	3	HKBP Church at Jalan Gereja
	4	Taman Asuhan School
	5	Simalungun Central Hospital
	6	Siantar Zoo
	7	Missionaries Schools
Asahan	1	HKBP Educational Foundation at Jalan Asahan
	2	SMPN 1 School
	3	HKBP Church
Total	36	

All 36 buildings are currently controlled or owned either by the government or social institutions. These remaining buildings are concrete evidence that marks the history of the city's growth and development. All of them have the potential to become objects and tourist destinations for the city if managed properly. It should be underlined that Siantaris located in the Flower Garden segment, the heart of Siantar which showcases European civilization. As the heart of the city, it interconnects government infrastructures, businesses, services, entertainment, and transportation. Precisely in the centre of the Flower Garden lies Ground Zero, the geographical point used for calculating the distance to other areas, connects the mayor's office, banks, Simalungun International Club, hotels, train stations, telecommunication offices, and cinemas. [Figure 1](#) shows the heart of Siantar City in 1930.



Figure 1. The Heart of Siantar in 1930.

Source <https://www.kitlv.nl>.

The figure to the right shows a Siantar Hotel, owned by a Swiss national, built-in 1925. Parallel to the hotel is a railway station, the first means of public transportation in North Sumatra, built-in 1883. The railway network to Siantar was built-in 1917. In its day, trains played an important role in the mobility of goods from Siantar to the Port of Belawan. Simalungun International Club was a White Collar lounge frequented during the plantation period. The two-storied building is the mayor's office. It was built in 1917 when Siantar was declared a city. At the time of its establishment, Siantar City covered an area of 1,024 hectares, donated by Riah Kadim Waldemar Damanik, the King of Siantar, to *Nagoriraad*, the forerunner of the City Council. The mayor's office serves as historical evidence, marking the transformation of a village into a city.

The current path that separates the yard from the mayor's office is Jalan Sutomo. The tamarind tree on the left side of the road was imported from Medan to add to the city's aesthetics. In the distance, there is an unmanaged forest area. The Flower Garden segment is the embryo of the city adjoining the autonomous dominion of the local ruler, the Damanik clan in Siantar. Siantar, starting from the Flower Garden segment, has expanded to the south (Simbolon segment) and north (Asahan segment).

Meanwhile, the Pamatang segment is a self-governing area, separated by the Bah (River) Bolon, upstream at Bah Sijengesan and emptying into the Malacca Strait. In 1938, Siantar began to develop rapidly. The orientation of the city's development to the north and south had an impact on the unique layout of Siantar, extending to north and south and narrowing to the west and east. This uniqueness is due to the two main roads in the city centre, Jalan Sutomo, and Merdeka, which serve as economic centres since the plantation period.

Based on city characteristics, by taking into account the surrounding environment and geographical position, the most relevant type of tourism in Siantar is urban tourism. As a medium-scale city, this heritage-based tourism is nostalgia-oriented, intended to preserve the city's collective identity and memory. Usually, in medium-scale cities, the urban's cradle and history, icon, and relative identity are preserved.

Compared to urban tourism where tourism tends to be directed at shopping, consumerism, and a modern lifestyle without much local experience, city tourism tends to reflect a complex recreational experience. In a medium-scale city, visitors can still find the cradle of the city, buildings from a past period that are hundreds of years old. The cuisine tends to reflect different local peculiarities and is not as homogeneous as it is in metropolitan cities. Urban tourism introduces the grandeur of the city through its historical heritage, culinary delights that reflect the uniqueness of the local community, cultural attractions that describe local characteristics that tend to be different and attractive to tourists.



Urban tourism tends to prioritize historical objects, packaged into tourist destinations. Thus, the essence of tourism is to sell nostalgia or memories of the past as a city identity. Cities in Turkey (such as Istanbul), Israel (such as Bethlehem and Jerusalem), Saudi Arabia (such as Mecca and Medina), Egypt (such as Cairo), Vietnam (such as in Ho Chi Min and Hanoi), Philippines (such as Intramuros), or Malaysia (such as on the island of Penang), and others, all sell their heritage as tourist destinations. The same fact is also found in the medium-scale city, Siantar in North Sumatra.

Tourism in Siantar does not offer the beauty of geographic or topographical landscapes. However, Siantar has historic nuances, namely as the seat of the autonomous Damanik clan, a plantation city, surrounded by plantations and adjacent to the Toba Caldera Geopark.

Urban tourism in a medium-scale city is an activity that monetizes nostalgia, converting collective identity, and memories into economic value. Nostalgia intends to package destinations that reflect the level of civilization, knowledge, and human intelligence from the past. Urban tourism, thus, involves human activities that are designed to shift the ordinary tastes of visitors to the extraordinary, fostering enthusiasm for the city, to spend more time, and to shop. Tourism is directed towards visiting buildings that still exist to this day, especially at the heart of the city. The stories behind the buildings are developed so they make an interesting attraction. Each building has its own story which is recorded in its architecture, construction, function, layout, building layout, and current conditions.

Visitors are directed to enjoy Siantar delicacies at the 105-year-old Kok Tong Cafe, stay at the 95-year-old Siantar Hotel, or enjoy a drink from the 95-year-old Siantar ice factory. Christian visitors can visit the 116-year-old Protestant Church on Jalan Gereja or the 86-year-old Catholic Church on Jalan Sibolga. Furthermore, visitors are directed to visit the two main hospitals in Siantar, namely the 87-year-old Djasamen Saragih, or the 82-year-old Army Hospital. Visitors can see the 91-year-old boarding school in Siantar or visit the 67-year-old Siantar Zoo. Besides, tourists are directed to the 82-year-old Simalungun Museum. The architectural style of plantation period buildings in Siantar ranges from art deco, modern to the renaissance.

After visiting the historic buildings, visitors are directed to the tea, rubber, and oil palm, and cocoa plantations located around Siantar. At the plantation location, some factories process raw materials into production goods, for example, the Bah Butong Tea Factory, or rubber in Sarbelawan and palm oil processing in Tanohdjawa. Plantation offers knowledge of raw materials, processing, and produce goods for consumption. This experience is especially indescribable for foreign tourists.

Furthermore, tourists are guided to visit the Toba Caldera Geopark <sup>61</sup>. This legendary destination was formed by a volcanic movement <sup>62</sup>. The lake tourism experience is coupled with mystical stories; the legend of the hanging stone, Samosir Island, ancient mountain peak which erupted 75,000 years ago, Pusukbuhit, the holy mountain where the ancestors of the Tobanese descended from the sky <sup>63</sup> and the observation tower of Tele.

More specifically, the concept of urban tourism offered in Siantar according to the city's character, local experience, and the geographical position, the findings of this study, is The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings. This concept offers a combination of heritage tourism, plantation-tourism, and the Toba Caldera Geopark which covers four main points; (1) to safeguard, protect and utilize heritage as tourist objects and destinations; (2) to encourage the creative economy and providing incentives for managers, owners, and stakeholders with an interest in heritage, (3) to preserve the collective memory and identity of the city, namely plantation heritage as the embryo of modernization, urban growth and

development, and (4) to provide city tourist destinations supported by plantation-tourism and Toba Caldera Geopark.

## Discussion

The implementation of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings can only be implemented through a synergy between the city government, the private sector, and the cultural community. Companies such as 4<sup>th</sup> State Plantation Companies which controls tea, rubber, and oil palm should work together with London Sumatra (Lonsum) for plantations-tourism purposes. The city government designates 36 sites as heritage, and cultural communities engaged in entrepreneurship and entertainment. [Figure 2](#) shows the steps for utilizing heritage in the concept of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings.

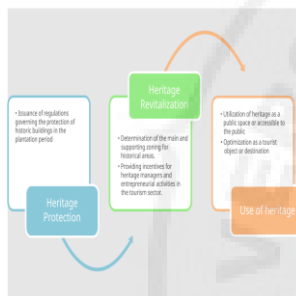


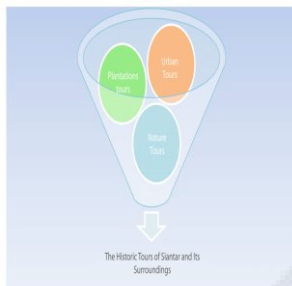
Figure 2. The steps of heritage utilization in Siantar.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings could potentially be developed based on historic buildings. The use of buildings not only preserves the heritage of the plantation but also provides destinations for urbanites. The opportunities for The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings will be wide if there is the synergy between the city government, private sector, and stakeholders. The government needs the political will to designate 36 buildings as protected and preserved sites in local regulations. After this stipulation, the synergies with stakeholders to design tourism programs, incentives, and stimuli. Urban tourism is necessary to open informal sector employment opportunities for 211.017 peoples, two-third of the city's population <sup>2</sup>.

Apart from presenting economic values as well as cultural experiences, The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings also serve as the basis for leisure activity to acquire the values of modern society. In this context, heritage plays an important role as a meaning factory for visitors, namely plantations. Cultural motivation in urban tourism parallels increasing interest in culture in general. Short visits to the city, for example, play a role in increasing the number of visitors to all kinds of attractions <sup>64</sup>. The creation of destinations is not limited to cities or regions that offer a rich heritage background. The revival of tourism associated with nostalgia has an impact on increasing conservation and interest in visiting <sup>64</sup>. Nostalgia, it seems, remains a lucrative business.

The need for The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings lies in the following five points: (1) the existence of heritage sites, (2) the opportunity for heritage preservation, (3) supports collective memory and identity, (4) a transit area, student city and urbanization destination from the north of Lake Toba and the South of the Malacca Strait and the industrial area of the special Sei Mangkei area, and (5) the availability of plantation commodities; tea, rubber, palm oil, and cocoa as well as the Toba Caldera Geopark which was set in May 2020 around Siantar.

[Figure 3](#) shows a model of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, a typical tourism concept combining with historical building objects, plantations-tourism as well as nature tourism with the Toba Caldera Geopark.



[Figure 3](#). The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and its Surroundings are focused on experiencing the cultural environment of a plantation in the city centre covering landscaping, visual arts, special lifestyles, values, traditions, and events. Furthermore, from the city centre visitors can visit tea, oil palm, or rubber plantations, the legacy of colonial plantations around Siantar, ending with the highlight of their tour at the Toba Caldera Geopark. Through this concept, Siantar as a buffer for the East coast of North Sumatra and Lake Toba should be able to seize tourism opportunities that take advantage of historic buildings in the city centre.

In this way, heritage tourists will spend longer and spend more, making tourism an important economic development tool [65](#). This strategy was chosen primarily to optimize cultural resources that are used and promoted to increase the number of jobs and gross national product created by the tourism industry [66, 67](#). The visitors are those who are busy at school, business, or want to spend their spare time. Visitors are differentiated based on their special interests. This tourism is distinguished from other special interests such as nature and adventure.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings focuses on 12 items at once; (1) language, (2) people, (3) handicrafts, (4) food and eating habits, (5) music and art, (6) the history of a place, (7) ways of working and technology, (8) religion that is stated in the story, (9) special architectural forms and characters, (10) the dress code of the local population, (11) the education system, and (12) activities during free.

However, the difficulties faced today regarding the use of historic buildings as tourist destinations are summarized in the following four points; (1) there is no historical building that is legally protected as cultural heritage. This situation results in the vulnerability of buildings to abandonment, vandalism, and destruction. (2) No city government regulation establishes historic sites. This has a certain impact on the vulnerability of eliminating traces of urban embryo. (3) Not all historical buildings are used as public spaces accessible to visitors. (4) Historic buildings have not been included as tourist destinations. The reality is that tourism in Siantaris still focused on government-funded annual exhibitions, carnivals, and cultural attractions.

The four problems above lead to two main obstacles in designing The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings; (1) low public and private involvement in the preservation, protection, and use of heritage sites as tourist destinations, and (2) lack of political will of the municipal government to issue regulations related to the preservation and protection of heritage sites. Midian Sianturi, Head of Bappeda, personal communication on August 23, 2020, stated [67](#):

"We are reviewing 36 historical buildings in downtown Siantar. To protect, we are currently drafting a regional regulation. Next year, 2021, we hope it will be final. Protection is intended for various things, for example, the interests of urban tourism."

Urban tourism contributes to the development and implementation of inward integrative strategies for future development <sup>68</sup>. Through urban tourism, local developments are designed based on historical zoning, industry, and development. The development of advanced tourism has an impact on the future growth of Siantar. The growth of urban tourism is reflected in four interrelated processes: (1) tourists, (2) local authorities, (3) attitudes to tourism, and (4) travel agency <sup>69</sup>.

The increase in tourism is influenced by four factors: (1) urbanization, (2) the development of low-cost airlines, (3) the tendency of the proportion to travel per year, and (4) the availability of internet-based services <sup>70-72</sup>. These four items reflect the synergy between government, stakeholders, and tourism actors. Synergy is needed to protect historic buildings, mobile-based optimization, and travel guides.

Based on the above, the government and city stakeholders should have the political will to protect and conserve the urban's tourism resources. Historic buildings have economic potential if managed properly and properly. Once the historic building is lost, it is difficult to rebuild it. Even if it can be built, some nuances are lost, and the storyline and scenario become irrelevant. Heritage sites require great attention, conservation policies, and appropriate use.

Optimization of heritage sites is packaged into heritage tourism, as a development tool to encourage economic growth through the participation of visitors from other regions, who are motivated partly or wholly by history, artistry, science, lifestyle, community, regional, group, or institutional worship <sup>73</sup>. The stories behind the buildings invoke awe, respect, and pride in the city's past. In it, they find value and meaning, namely nostalgia. Activities that package historic buildings as destinations are nostalgic tourism, activity summaries, and historic expressions embedded in monuments throughout the city.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings has a high potential for urban-development due to several reasons: (1) adjacent to the Toba Caldera Geopark and the Strait of Malacca; (2) a student city, a migration destination for junior high school, high school, and university students; (3) a plantation city marked by historic buildings that still exist today, (4) surrounded by tea, rubber and oil palm plantations, (5) a pluralistic and multicultural city, and (6) a trading city which has developed drastically in the last 2 decades, marked by the Sei Mangkei industrial area and the Teluk Nibung port.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, thus, offer three main tourism component: (1) historic building tours, supported by souvenir shops, cultural attractions, culinary delights, (2) plantations-tourism, visits to tea, rubber, and oil palm around Siantar, and (3) natural tourism in the Toba Caldera Geopark.

The research finding, based on the description above, the historic buildings in the centre of Siantar have an impact on economic development impact if they are managed as tourist destinations. In this case, the tourism concept offered is The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, which is a tourism concept that offers, among others, the following destinations; urban tours centred on historic buildings, plantations-tourism centred on tea, oil palm, and rubber plantations, and natural tourism centred on the Lake Toba Caldera Geopark. To discover the impact of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, the steps that need to be considered are the protection and revitalization of historic buildings from damage and destruction. In this step, the city government should issue local regulations protecting

historic buildings, so that they can be managed into public spaces or at least made accessible to the public.

The political will of the government and stakeholders is expected to make The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings a reality. Then, synergies with stakeholders such as entrepreneurs and agencies must be built to guide tourists while in Siantar. Without political will and synergy, historic buildings in the city centre will disappear and be replaced with new ones. This will undoubtedly erase traces of urban history, identity, and collective memory. The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings offers a tourism concept that is intended as an economic development tool. Based on this study, through the concept of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, nostalgia becomes an economically-empowered memory and identity. Urban tours, thus, offer the Siantar-based tourist content of the past.

## Conclusions

The existence of historic buildings only is maintained or preserved through their use as an urban tourist destination. Without the management and utilization of it to become an urban tourist destination, the historic buildings will undoubtedly be destroyed. The historic building is a plantation heritage that the city characterizes contains nostalgia, and reflects modernization, and transformation to a plantation city. Utilization as a tourist attraction correlates with the preservation of historic, economic, and regional development values. This study concludes that The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings are an optimization tool that links urban, plantations, and nature tourism. Its planning as urban tourism destinations reflect the history of development and modernization according to the characteristics of plantations, the portrait of Siantar in the past. This study recommends the protection of historic buildings through local regulations, revitalization, and utilization as public spaces or at least accessible to the public. Without the protection and revitalization, historic buildings will be lost.

## Data availability

### Underlying data

Figshare: Interview data. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14236202.v5> <sup>58</sup>.

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Anonymised interview transcripts from interviews

Figshare: Interview-Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Data. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14315768.v1> <sup>60</sup>.

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Anonymised interview transcripts from focus group

Figshare: Research logbook April-September 2020 and 36 existing historic building in Pamatangsiantar until 2020. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14316164.v1> <sup>57</sup>.

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Logbook for field study

### Extended data

Figshare: Research logbooks. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14236250.v1> <sup>59</sup>.

This project contains the following extended data:

- Researcher logbook/study timeline

Data are available under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license](#) (CC-BY 4.0).

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations: portraits of Siantar, Indonesia, in the past [version 1; peer review: 1 approved with reservations, 2 not approved]

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## Abstract

**Background:** This study was motivated by the failure to use historic buildings, plantations heritage, and modernization of Siantar. The problem is focused on the optimization of historic buildings, icons for urban tourism destinations. The study contribution is useful for the protection, utilization, and development of cultural heritage buildings into a tourist destination in urban areas. More specifically, the study aims to explore and discuss the optimization of urban tourism to support economic and territorial growth.

**Methods:** The study was carried out qualitatively with a pragmatic methodological approach according to the tourism paradigm. The study departs from the colonial archives: photographs, maps, notes, and field research focused on the identification, significance, and contribution to urban history. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Raw information was reduced and coded according to the relevance of the study. Data are combined into categories and themes reflecting descriptive analysis, classification, and interpretation. Data validation was done through triangulation strategies, member checking, rich descriptions, and saturation.

**Results:** The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, the findings of this study were carried out in three stages; development based on national consensus in law, utilization into public space, appreciation for managers, and management incentives, and determining urban tourism designs.

**Conclusions:** Utilization of cultural heritage buildings for urban tourism destinations reflects the urban with plantation characteristics, portraits of cities in the past, packed into urban tourism experiences.


## Keywords

Heritage, buildings, urban, tourism

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## Introduction

In Pematangsiantar, Indonesia, based on an infrastructure map dating back to 1926, at least 57 monumental buildings were recorded during the plantation period<sup>1,2</sup>. All of these buildings were offices, schools, worship places, hospitals, hotels, cinemas, train stations, cafes, swimming pools, and banks. Initially, the 57 buildings belonged to the colonial government, plantation companies, and missionaries. The exception is that the map does not include buildings belonging to the native Siantar's autonomous elites or shops scattered around the city. The construction of buildings was motivated by three main factors: (1) plantation expansions, (2) transformation of villages into cities, and (3) evangelism.

Pematangsiantar is a city of plantations, its growth having been determined relatively by plantations, notably since 1907. Except for Medan, no other region in the Eastern part of Sumatra claims to be more developed than Siantar. As a plantation area, the number of historic building units undoubtedly increased with the construction of shops, houses, offices, bridges, warehouses, and factories around the city. The entire heritage is estimated to consist of more than 300 buildings<sup>1</sup>.

In this study, the heritage of the plantation, according to Law number 11 of 2010 concerning Cultural Heritage, is Cultural Heritage Buildings. After the independence in 1945 and the Nationalization policy, especially against Dutch assets in 1958, most of the buildings were controlled by the government, private sector, and individuals. Some of them were returned to their original function and some of them switched functions<sup>2</sup>.

During 1970–2015, 22 buildings were abandoned, 11 were damaged and 17 were destroyed. Today, at the time of this research, 36 iconic units have been found concentrated around the heart of the city, at ground zero, to the north and south sides of the city. In general, the remaining heritages are government-owned offices, churches, hotels, and private schools.

The reality of heritage is summarized in six pejorative assumptions; (1) relatively high resistance to urban development, (2) irrelevance to modernity and social change in urban areas, (3) obsolete, worthless, and out of date, (4) symbols of colonialism, slavery and exploitation, (5) no longer relevant nor under the spatial planning and building layout of an urban setting, and (6) an eyesore to the city's aesthetics.

In this study, heritage is seen as having at least six urgencies and significances; (1) an icon of the city, containing memory and identity, (2) urban monuments, history of development and modernization, (3) source of knowledge, architecture, land use, and spatial planning, (4) relevance to territorial development, (5) historic zonation in urban areas, and (6) urban nostalgia. All of the above six urgencies and significances contributed to economic and territorial development through their use as a heritage tourist destination.

Optimization of heritage tourism in Siantar correlates with its geographical position and absolute advantages; (1) being

adjacent to Lake Toba which offers panoramic views of nature<sup>3</sup>, (2) being known as a student-friendly, tolerant, multicultural city, and urbanization destination, (3) surrounded by tea, rubber, palm oil, and cocoa, packaged into a single plantations-tourism, (4) as a bridge connecting the west and south coasts of North Sumatra.

This study emphasizes the use of heritage as an urban tourist destination. Urban tourism is correlated with economic benefits based on position and strategic advantage<sup>4</sup>. Urban tours require planning and design, the latter being intended to protect, preserve, and take advantage of heritage, especially buildings that exist. Heritage becomes an urban icon, containing memory and identity<sup>4</sup>, sustainability and development of the city<sup>5</sup>, contains architecture<sup>6</sup>, aesthetics, land use, climate adjustment and becomes the cradle for designing a historic area<sup>7</sup>, requires conservation<sup>8,9</sup> developed into a tourist destination in urban areas<sup>10</sup>.

The focus of the study is formulated on the following first question: why is heritage tourism important? The answer is summarized in the following four points; (1) preserving the remaining heritage as historic evidence, memory and city identity, (2) helping the development of the city through the tourism sector, (3) increasing the attractiveness and tourist destinations of the city, and (4) encouraging economic and territorial growth. The second question is how to design heritage-based urban tourism, which is at the core of this study.

Based on these two questions, the two main assumptions of the study are formulated as follows; (1) the implementation of urban tourism contributes significantly to economic and territorial growth, (2) urban tourism is correlated with the conservation of icons, monuments, and nostalgia. Our goal is to design urban tourism based on existing buildings according to a strategic position.

Although the political will of the government or stakeholders is relatively low, a logical and rational tourism design and model is very helpful for heritage conservation in urban areas. At a minimum, the government and stakeholders must change their perspectives on historic buildings. Heritage-based urban tourism is nostalgia, a portrait of Siantar in the past, in addition to providing economic incentives, as well as contributing greatly to territorial growth.

## Literature review

Historic buildings or cultural heritage buildings become the basis for tourism development in urban areas and their surroundings. Heritage-based urban tourism is the type of tourism that is most developed today<sup>11</sup>. Heritage tourism is the fastest-growing travel segment and is changing the nature and trends of tourism in the world. Recent studies have shown a relatively high and more competitive demand to visit places that have a heritage in the tourism domain<sup>12</sup>. Heritage, thus, contributes to local income and development and at the same time preserves the history of an area's past<sup>13</sup>.

Heritage is the cultural wealth of an area. Cultural property includes both movable and non-transferable cultural property<sup>14</sup>. The conception of cultural wealth refers to all aspects, including works of art, customs, museums, monuments, construction, folk art, natural history, and even wildlife, all of which are considered to be heritage<sup>15</sup>. In the World Heritage Convention in 1972, heritage includes architecture, groups of buildings, and sites<sup>16</sup>. More specifically, historic monuments are not just any single architecture but also include urban settings in which evidence of certain civilizations or developments of historic importance is found<sup>16</sup>. Based on this statement, the entire urban is a monument, an accumulation of cultural creations and expressions over the years.

The historic nuance of the city is recorded in its heritage, a mainstay of tourism in the city, and its surroundings. Urban tours are different from other types of tourism. Urban tourism reflects high population density and diverse cultural offerings in a relatively small area but attracts many types of tourists. Urban tourist attractions and facilities lead to the interaction between tourists and residents. Tourism is directed at all things about the past that anyone can visit<sup>17</sup>. Urban tourism includes museums, districts, reconstructions, sculptures, monuments, and shrines, using a historic perspective in various manners<sup>18</sup>. Both, historic heritage and urban tourism are collaborative industries, turning the location into a destination and making it economically viable<sup>19–21</sup>.

Heritage-based tourism is rooted in nostalgia, an economic determinant for urban development<sup>22</sup>. Tourism is an agent and tool for social and cultural change in urban areas. Heritage tourism reflects the growth and success of historic heritage management<sup>17</sup>. Heritage tourism is seen as optimizing the use of the cultural heritage of a community, region, country, or even continent in the global tourism market<sup>23</sup>. Global interest in downsizing public spaces increases the privatization of goods and services. Urban tourism is becoming a trend that is oriented towards entrepreneurship and entertainment<sup>24</sup>, two determinants of tourism success in urban areas. Tourism, in many cases, becomes a force of rejuvenation and a loss of heritage integrity.

Urban tourism has consistently been one of the fastest-growing segments of the travel phenomenon in developed economies. This fact is relevant and in line with the rise of mass tourism in the 1960s<sup>25–26</sup>. The trips of tourists to cities with high population density are short-duration, usually 1–3 days<sup>27</sup>. Cities are a destination for migration, not only for business, trade, education, or those looking for work but also as places where people gather intending to seek pleasure<sup>27</sup>. The growth of urban tourism is driven by spatial, social, economic, and technological forces<sup>28</sup>. The urbanization process has led to an increase in the number of visits and to feel more connected to the urban lifestyle<sup>29</sup>. Urban tourism is a significant driver of the economy. Facilitated with access to cellular information, the boundary between tourists and residents becomes increasingly blurred and encourages tourists to increasingly seek, find, and consume local experiences<sup>30</sup>.

Being cultural centres, the largest tourist destinations in the world are cities. More than half of the world's population lives in cities, and it is calculated that by 2030, about 5 billion people will live in cities<sup>31</sup>. Every year, hundreds of thousands of villagers visit cities. Based on Euromonitor, international tourist arrivals in 2013 had increased by 4.8%<sup>31</sup>. In the same year, the top 100 cities in the world experienced a growth of 5.4%<sup>31</sup>. Urban vacations include business, education, and family visits. Sun and beach holiday activity grew by 31% in 2013–2018, representing 29% of all vacation trips<sup>31</sup>. The holiday tourism segment grew by 28% and reached a market share of 23%. Since 2013–2018, urban trips have increased by 72%. In fact, in some cities, travel goes beyond sun and beach holidays as the most popular holiday<sup>31</sup>.

In the UK for example, urban vacations reached 42% in 2014 compared to 38% for sun and beach holidays in the same year<sup>32</sup>. The reality in developed countries is different from Indonesia. 1,530,268 international tourist visits in August 2019, decreased by 89.22% or 164,970 in August 2020<sup>32</sup>. The largest numbers of international visitors were from Timor Leste, Malaysia, China, the United States, and the Netherlands<sup>33</sup>. This decline is closely related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, national political conditions, and the gradual decline in the quality of tourist attractions.

In this study, urban tourism is intended to encourage urban growth through the utilization of heritage. Heritage is important to remind the city of nostalgia and all aspects that influence it. Siantar, for the record, the territory of the Damanik clan in Simalungunese, was assigned as a municipality in 1917<sup>1</sup>. The transformation into a city started in 1907, when Sang Nauluh Damanik, a local ruler, was exiled to Bengkalis, Riau<sup>34</sup>. After the arrest, six other local rulers in Simalungun recognized Dutch authority<sup>35,36</sup>. The motivation for the conquest was the expansion of plantations on the east coast of North Sumatra, starting from Medan, extending to Binjai, Langkat, Serdang, Bedagei, Tebingtinggi, Simalungun, Batubara, Asahan, Kisaran to Labuhanbatu<sup>37–39</sup>.

Before 1907, Siantar, as Anderson noted in 1823, had a low population of fewer than 5,000<sup>30</sup>. The area was completely untouched by modernization until 1905<sup>40,41</sup>. Siantar, especially since 1907, transformed into a city<sup>42</sup>, as well as a colonial plantation economic centre<sup>43</sup>. On the one hand, plantations are an indicator of capitalism<sup>44</sup>, economic globalization and legal changes<sup>45</sup>, and urban modernization<sup>46,47</sup>, but on the other hand, they marked the beginning of colonialism<sup>48</sup>, ethnic polarization<sup>49</sup>, agrarian disputes<sup>48</sup>, and slavery<sup>50</sup>.

Plantations are indicators of modernization<sup>51–53</sup>. In Siantar and its surroundings, initially, historic buildings belonged to the companies Amsterdam Trade Union (HVA), the Amsterdam Rubber Culture Company (RCMA), the Dutch-American Plantation Company (HAPM), Rubber Plantation Investment Trust, Sumatera Rubber Plantation Ltd, and Harrison and Crossfield.

On the one hand, this study correlates with the improvement of the tourism-based urban economy, and on the other hand, it contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage buildings. Both of them are relevant, apart from being adjacent to the Lake Toba Caldera Geopark and tourism trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, potentially supporting growth and economic incentives offered by the tourism industry.

## Methods

### Study design

The study was conducted between April–September 2020 and carried out qualitatively with a pragmatic approach<sup>54,55</sup>. The qualitative nature of the study was intended to identify and inventory all heritage units from the colonial period that still exist to this day. Identification and inventory were carried out by tracing references back to the colonial period, internet, and field studies. Field studies are required to obtain data on existing and demolished buildings. 36 buildings that still exist today were identified and registered, the data includes its state of the art, location, function, architectural style, owner, height, and area of the building. This strategy aims to obtain an accurate number of historical buildings and projected use as a tourist destination.

The pragmatic approach was intended to obtain a causal-functional explanation<sup>56</sup>, regarding the use of heritage to find locality-based tourist designs. Historic buildings are seen as having pragmatic, economic, and social values. Tourism design requires an interdisciplinary, anthropological, history, tourism, and economic development approach. This study is significant, especially in unravelling the potentials of historic buildings as well as for planning urban tourism according to geographical characteristics.

### Data collection

**Archival research.** We searched the Dutch-language colonial archives for records of buildings, notes, photos, maps and sketches, in June 2020 at the office of the Dutch Language, Land and Ethnology Institute (KITLV), Jakarta. The archives are magazines (Tijdschrift), reports (Verlag), historical records (geschiedenis), notifications (mededeelingen), handovers (overgave), encyclopedia, and newspapers. Besides, the KITLV and Tropenmuseum Institute websites were accessed to enrich resources. Maps, especially photos of building units are matched through observation to obtain details, architecture, area, height, recent conditions, functions, and sustainability.

**Field study.** Field studies were carried out between April–September 2020 by observing the existing buildings to obtain the latest conditions. Researchers and assistants were divided into three groups to record buildings in 4 segments. Field studies were summarized in a logbook, recorded by date, recent situation and building details<sup>57</sup>.

**Interview.** The interviews were conducted in two steps by the lead researcher (ED). Firstly, interviews with three heads of agencies for 2–3 hours, from the City Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), the Education and Culture Office, and the

Tourism Office in their respective offices to obtain an explanation of the historical buildings in Siantar. The three of them were interviewed separately, in their respective offices. The interview was conducted after sending a formal letter and finding the right time. The interview was guided by a structured list and was not repetitive<sup>58</sup>. The focus of the interview was government policies on historical buildings, revitalization programs and long-term building utilization. A non-governmental organization, Sumatra Heritage Home, was also interviewed to obtain information and views on historical buildings in Siantar.

The four institutions were interviewed separately in a structured manner in May 2020 based on their authority, main tasks and functions as well as capacity. The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and field notes were taken. The interview was terminated when the information was repeated, i.e. data saturation was achieved. Logbooks were compiled during the research process<sup>59</sup>.

Secondly, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held for 5 hours, inviting 20 participants outside of government officials and journalists, consisting of academics, urban planners, architects, historians, travel agents, building owners, and non-governmental organizations. All participants were officially invited by email and reminded via the chat application. FGD is focused on the utilization of historical buildings as city tourist destinations. Each participant was asked to provide views and opinions on the urgency, significance, mechanisms and strategies of building utilization. The FGD committee is the researcher in charge of preparing a list of questions, managing discussions, taking notes and recording. In addition to developing questions, 16 main questions were asked to obtain information from each participant<sup>60</sup>. FGD was held in August 2020 at Siantar Hotel.

### Data analysis

All data were compiled and tabulated for chronological analysis, to measure the economic contribution of an existing building. Data were identified and organized into tree coding, and arrange in excel. Bias or subjectivity is reduced over comparisons between informants. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Data are combined into categories and themes reflecting descriptive analysis, classification, and interpretation. Data validation was done through triangulation, member checking, rich descriptions, and saturation. Results were presented to participants to obtain feedback.

Three researchers are male and lecturer, one doctorate, and two masters. The three of them have research experience during 2015–2020.

## Results

Siantar and its surroundings have more than 300 units of historic buildings as heritages from the plantation period. This number was obtained after calculating the building units in the city centre and its surrounding areas, including the Sidamanik tea plantation, Marjandi, Nagahuta, palm oil and rubber plantations in Sarbelawan, Bandar, and Tanohdjawa. The building units consist of offices, hotels, cinemas, banks, shops, schools,

museums, houses of worship, hospitals, factories, warehouses, bridges, railway stations and yards, military and police barracks, employee official homes, residences, markets, and wildlife parks.

In the city centre, buildings are spread across three main settlements: (1) European buildings around Simbolon area at the South, (2) Chinese buildings around Cipto area at the city centre, and (3) Simalungunese buildings on Pamatang at the city centre. The city became the base for colonial government and administration which was adjacent to the Siantar self-government centre. The population of the city is European, Chinese, and indigenous. Around the city, buildings include factories, warehouses, coolie barracks, and homes of entrepreneurs.

In the colonial era, Siantar was divided based on ethnicity; the Muslims resided in Timbangalung, Christians lived in East Siantar, Toba in North Siantar, Karonese in Tomuan, Javanese on Jalan Bali and Simalungunese on Jalan Asahan. Plantation workers, especially Javanese, occupied the barracks provided by the company at the plantation. Historic buildings around the city are still being discovered, even though most of them have been destroyed.

All buildings were the supporting infrastructures of the city, such as offices, hotels, banks, cinemas, ice factories, schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. Based on the Siantar City infrastructure map of 1926, there were 57 such buildings were recorded. However, the map does not include shops with Chinese architecture and the Simalungunese noble houses in Pamatang. Until today, of the 57 building units, 22 have been abandoned, 11 damaged and 17 destroyed.

This study found 36 iconic buildings that still exist. The 36 buildings are grouped into four segments: (1) Flower Gardens, (2) Pamatang, (3) Simbolon, and (4) Asahan. **Table 1** shows historic buildings from the plantation era in 4 segments of Siantar.

All 36 buildings are currently controlled or owned either by the government or social institutions. These remaining buildings are concrete evidence that marks the history of the city's growth and development. All of them have the potential to become objects and tourist destinations for the city if managed properly. It should be underlined that Siantaris located in the Flower Garden segment, the heart of Siantar which showcases European civilization. As the heart of the city, it interconnects government infrastructures, businesses, services, entertainment, and transportation. Precisely in the centre of the Flower Garden lies Ground Zero, the geographical point used for calculating the distance to other areas, connects the mayor's office, banks, Simalungun International Club, hotels, train stations, telecommunication offices, and cinemas. **Figure 1** shows the heart of Siantar City in 1930.

The figure to the right shows a Siantar Hotel, owned by a Swiss national, built-in 1925. Parallel to the hotel is a railway station, the first means of public transportation in North Sumatra, built-in 1883. The railway network to Siantar was

**Table 1. A Segments of existing historic buildings in Siantar.**

Segment	No	Buildings name
Flower Garden	1	Flower Garden
	2	Mayor Office
	3	Legislative Office
	4	Office of City Development Planning Agency
	5	Bank BRI
	6	District Court Office
	7	Ria Cinema
	8	Siantar Hotel
	9	National Office
	10	Telecommunication Office
	11	Railway Station and Warehouse
	12	BPM Oil Tank
Pamatang	1	King Siantar Palace and house
	3	Ice Factory
	4	Riatur Hotel
	5	Siantar Central Market
	6	Swimming pool
	7	Drinking water company
	8	Catholic church
	9	Museum of Simalungun
	10	Dr Djasamen Central Hospital
	11	Post Office
	12	A shophouse with Chinese architecture on Jalan Cipto
	13	Military Barracks
	Simbolon	1
2		Controleur official residence
3		HKBP Church at Jalan Gereja
4		Taman Asuhan School
5		Simalungun Central Hospital
6		Siantar Zoo
7		Missionaries Schools
Asahan	1	HKBP Educational Foundation at Jalan Asahan
	2	SMPN 1 School
	3	HKBP Church
Total	36	



**Figure 1. The Heart of Siantar in 1930.** Source <https://www.kitlv.nl>.

built-in 1917. In its day, trains played an important role in the mobility of goods from Siantar to the Port of Belawan. Simalungun International Club was a White Collar lounge frequented during the plantation period. The two-storied building is the mayor's office. It was built in 1917 when Siantar was declared a city. At the time of its establishment, Siantar City covered an area of 1,024 hectares, donated by Riah Kadim Waldemar Damanik, the King of Siantar, to *Nagoriraad*, the forerunner of the City Council. The mayor's office serves as historical evidence, marking the transformation of a village into a city.

The current path that separates the yard from the mayor's office is Jalan Sutomo. The tamarind tree on the left side of the road was imported from Medan to add to the city's aesthetics. In the distance, there is an unmanaged forest area. The Flower Garden segment is the embryo of the city adjoining the autonomous dominion of the local ruler, the Damanik clan in Siantar. Siantar, starting from the Flower Garden segment, has expanded to the south (Simbolon segment) and north (Asahan segment).

Meanwhile, the Pamatang segment is a self-governing area, separated by the Bah (River) Bolon, upstream at Bah Sijengesan and emptying into the Malacca Strait. In 1938, Siantar began to develop rapidly. The orientation of the city's development to the north and south had an impact on the unique layout of Siantar, extending to north and south and narrowing to the west and east. This uniqueness is due to the two main roads in the city centre, Jalan Sutomo, and Merdeka, which serve as economic centres since the plantation period.

Based on city characteristics, by taking into account the surrounding environment and geographical position, the most relevant type of tourism in Siantar is urban tourism. As a medium-scale city, this heritage-based tourism is nostalgia-oriented, intended to preserve the city's collective identity and memory. Usually, in medium-scale cities, the urban's cradle and history, icon, and relative identity are preserved.

Compared to urban tourism where tourism tends to be directed at shopping, consumerism, and a modern lifestyle without much local experience, city tourism tends to reflect a complex recreational experience. In a medium-scale city, visitors can still find the cradle of the city, buildings from a past period that are hundreds of years old. The cuisine tends to reflect different local peculiarities and is not as homogeneous as it is in metropolitan cities. Urban tourism introduces the grandeur of the city through its historical heritage, culinary delights that reflect the uniqueness of the local community, cultural attractions that describe local characteristics that tend to be different and attractive to tourists.

Urban tourism tends to prioritize historical objects, packaged into tourist destinations. Thus, the essence of tourism is to sell nostalgia or memories of the past as a city identity. Cities in Turkey (such as Istanbul), Israel (such as Bethlehem and Jerusalem), Saudi Arabia (such as Mecca and Medina), Egypt (such as Cairo), Vietnam (such as in Ho Chi Min and Hanoi), Philippines (such as Intramuros), or Malaysia (such as on the island of Penang), and others, all sell their heritage as tourist destinations. The same fact is also found in the medium-scale city, Siantar in North Sumatra.

Tourism in Siantar does not offer the beauty of geographic or topographical landscapes. However, Siantar has historic nuances, namely as the seat of the autonomous Damanik clan, a plantation city, surrounded by plantations and adjacent to the Toba Caldera Geopark.

Urban tourism in a medium-scale city is an activity that monetizes nostalgia, converting collective identity, and memories into economic value. Nostalgia intends to package destinations that reflect the level of civilization, knowledge, and human intelligence from the past. Urban tourism, thus, involves human activities that are designed to shift the ordinary tastes of visitors to the extraordinary, fostering enthusiasm for the city, to spend more time, and to shop. Tourism is directed towards visiting



buildings that still exist to this day, especially at the heart of the city. The stories behind the buildings are developed so they make an interesting attraction. Each building has its own story which is recorded in its architecture, construction, function, layout, building layout, and current conditions.

Visitors are directed to enjoy Siantar delicacies at the 105-year-old Kok Tong Cafe, stay at the 95-year-old Siantar Hotel, or enjoy a drink from the 95-year-old Siantar ice factory. Christian visitors can visit the 116-year-old Protestant Church on Jalan Gereja or the 86-year-old Catholic Church on Jalan Sibolga. Furthermore, visitors are directed to visit the two main hospitals in Siantar, namely the 87-year-old Djasamen Saragih, or the 82-year-old Army Hospital. Visitors can see the 91-year-old boarding school in Siantar or visit the 67-year-old Siantar Zoo. Besides, tourists are directed to the 82-year-old Simalungun Museum. The architectural style of plantation period buildings in Siantar ranges from art deco, modern to the renaissance.

After visiting the historic buildings, visitors are directed to the tea, rubber, and oil palm, and cocoa plantations located around Siantar. At the plantation location, some factories process raw materials into production goods, for example, the Bah Butong Tea Factory, or rubber in Sarbelawan and palm oil processing in Tanohdjava. Plantation offers knowledge of raw materials, processing, and produce goods for consumption. This experience is especially indescribable for foreign tourists.

Furthermore, tourists are guided to visit the Toba Caldera Geopark<sup>61</sup>. This legendary destination was formed by a volcanic movement<sup>62</sup>. The lake tourism experience is coupled with mystical stories; the legend of the hanging stone, Samosir Island, ancient mountain peak which erupted 75,000 years ago, Pusukbukit, the holy mountain where the ancestors of the Tobanese descended from the sky<sup>63</sup> and the observation tower of Tele.

More specifically, the concept of urban tourism offered in Siantar according to the city's character, local experience, and the geographical position, the findings of this study, is The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings. This concept offers a combination of heritage tourism, plantation-tourism, and the Toba Caldera Geopark which covers four main points; (1) to safeguard, protect and utilize heritage as tourist objects and destinations; (2) to encourage the creative economy and providing incentives for managers, owners, and stakeholders with an interest in heritage, (3) to preserve the collective memory and identity of the city, namely plantation heritage as the embryo of modernization, urban growth and development, and (4) to provide city tourist destinations supported by plantation-tourism and Toba Caldera Geopark.

## Discussion

The implementation of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings can only be implemented through a synergy between the city government, the private sector, and the cultural community. Companies such as 4<sup>th</sup> State Plantation Companies which controls tea, rubber, and oil palm should

work together with London Sumatra (Lonsum) for plantations-tourism purposes. The city government designates 36 sites as heritage, and cultural communities engaged in entrepreneurship and entertainment. Figure 2 shows the steps for utilizing heritage in the concept of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings.

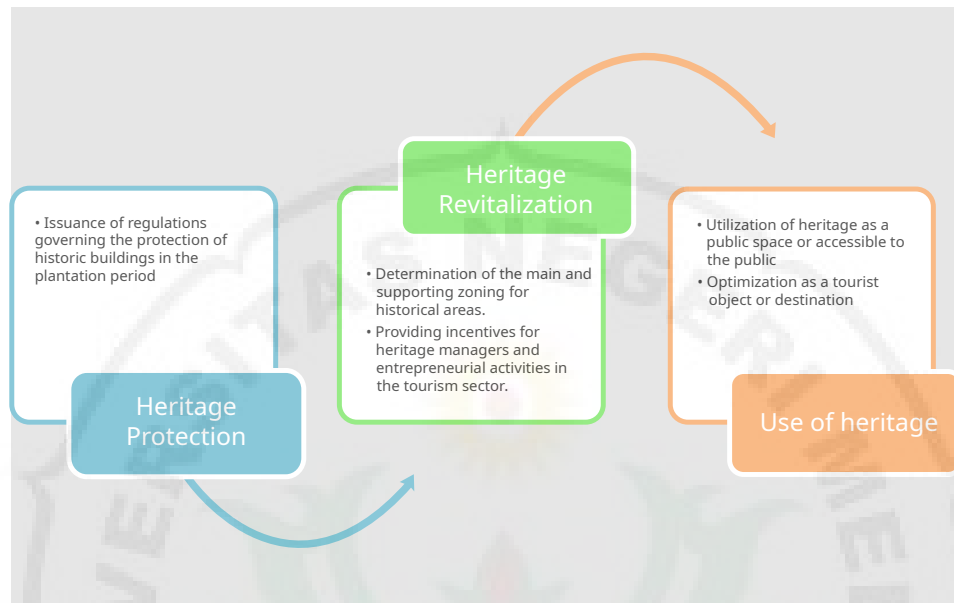
The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings could potentially be developed based on historic buildings. The use of buildings not only preserves the heritage of the plantation but also provides destinations for urbanites. The opportunities for The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings will be wide if there is the synergy between the city government, private sector, and stakeholders. The government needs the political will to designate 36 buildings as protected and preserved sites in local regulations. After this stipulation, the synergies with stakeholders to design tourism programs, incentives, and stimuli. Urban tourism is necessary to open informal sector employment opportunities for 211.017 peoples, two-third of the city's population<sup>2</sup>.

Apart from presenting economic values as well as cultural experiences, The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings also serve as the basis for leisure activity to acquire the values of modern society. In this context, heritage plays an important role as a meaning factory for visitors, namely plantations. Cultural motivation in urban tourism parallels increasing interest in culture in general. Short visits to the city, for example, play a role in increasing the number of visitors to all kinds of attractions<sup>64</sup>. The creation of destinations is not limited to cities or regions that offer a rich heritage background. The revival of tourism associated with nostalgia has an impact on increasing conservation and interest in visiting<sup>64</sup>. Nostalgia, it seems, remains a lucrative business.

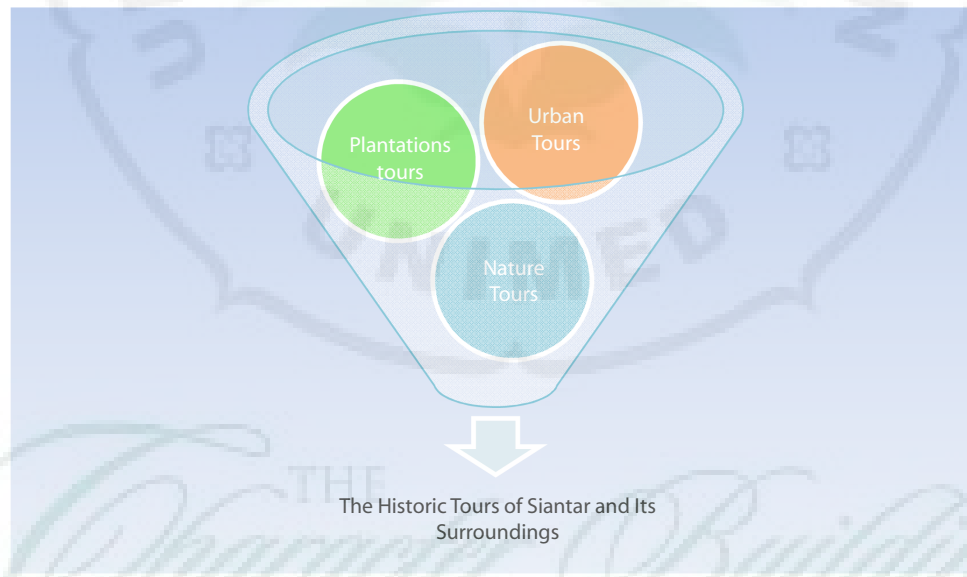
The need for The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings lies in the following five points: (1) the existence of heritage sites, (2) the opportunity for heritage preservation, (3) supports collective memory and identity, (4) a transit area, student city and urbanization destination from the north of Lake Toba and the South of the Malacca Strait and the industrial area of the special Sei Mangkei area, and (5) the availability of plantation commodities; tea, rubber, palm oil, and cocoa as well as the Toba Caldera Geopark which was set in May 2020 around Siantar.

Figure 3 shows a model of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, a typical tourism concept combining with historical building objects, plantations-tourism as well as nature tourism with the Toba Caldera Geopark.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and its Surroundings are focused on experiencing the cultural environment of a plantation in the city centre covering landscaping, visual arts, special lifestyles, values, traditions, and events. Furthermore, from the city centre visitors can visit tea, oil palm, or rubber plantations, the legacy of colonial plantations around Siantar, ending with the highlight of their tour at the Toba Caldera Geopark. Through



**Figure 2. The steps of heritage utilization in Siantar.**



**Figure 3. The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings.**

this concept, Siantar as a buffer for the East coast of North Sumatra and Lake Toba should be able to seize tourism opportunities that take advantage of historic buildings in the city centre.

In this way, heritage tourists will spend longer and spend more, making tourism an important economic development tool<sup>65</sup>. This

strategy was chosen primarily to optimize cultural resources that are used and promoted to increase the number of jobs and gross national product created by the tourism industry<sup>66,67</sup>. The visitors are those who are busy at school, business, or want to spend their spare time. Visitors are differentiated based on their special interests. This tourism is distinguished from other special interests such as nature and adventure.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings focuses on 12 items at once; (1) language, (2) people, (3) handicrafts, (4) food and eating habits, (5) music and art, (6) the history of a place, (7) ways of working and technology, (8) religion that is stated in the story, (9) special architectural forms and characters, (10) the dress code of the local population, (11) the education system, and (12) activities during free.

However, the difficulties faced today regarding the use of historic buildings as tourist destinations are summarized in the following four points; (1) there is no historical building that is legally protected as cultural heritage. This situation results in the vulnerability of buildings to abandonment, vandalism, and destruction. (2) No city government regulation establishes historic sites. This has a certain impact on the vulnerability of eliminating traces of urban embryo. (3) Not all historical buildings are used as public spaces accessible to visitors. (4) Historic buildings have not been included as tourist destinations. The reality is that tourism in Siantaris still focused on government-funded annual exhibitions, carnivals, and cultural attractions.

The four problems above lead to two main obstacles in designing The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings; (1) low public and private involvement in the preservation, protection, and use of heritage sites as tourist destinations, and (2) lack of political will of the municipal government to issue regulations related to the preservation and protection of heritage sites. Midian Sianturi, Head of Bappeda, personal communication on August 23, 2020, stated<sup>67</sup>:

“We are reviewing 36 historical buildings in downtown Siantar. To protect, we are currently drafting a regional regulation. Next year, 2021, we hope it will be final. Protection is intended for various things, for example, the interests of urban tourism.”

Urban tourism contributes to the development and implementation of inward integrative strategies for future development<sup>68</sup>. Through urban tourism, local developments are designed based on historical zoning, industry, and development. The development of advanced tourism has an impact on the future growth of Siantar. The growth of urban tourism is reflected in four interrelated processes: (1) tourists, (2) local authorities, (3) attitudes to tourism, and (4) travel agency<sup>69</sup>.

The increase in tourism is influenced by four factors: (1) urbanization, (2) the development of low-cost airlines, (3) the tendency of the proportion to travel per year, and (4) the availability of internet-based services<sup>70-72</sup>. These four items reflect the synergy between government, stakeholders, and tourism actors. Synergy is needed to protect historic buildings, mobile-based optimization, and travel guides.

Based on the above, the government and city stakeholders should have the political will to protect and conserve the urban's tourism resources. Historic buildings have economic potential if managed properly and properly. Once the historic building is lost, it is difficult to rebuild it. Even if it can be built, some nuances are lost, and the storyline and scenario become irrelevant.

Heritage sites require great attention, conservation policies, and appropriate use.

Optimization of heritage sites is packaged into heritage tourism, as a development tool to encourage economic growth through the participation of visitors from other regions, who are motivated partly or wholly by history, artistry, science, lifestyle, community, regional, group, or institutional worship<sup>73</sup>. The stories behind the buildings invoke awe, respect, and pride in the city's past. In it, they find value and meaning, namely nostalgia. Activities that package historic buildings as destinations are nostalgic tourism, activity summaries, and historic expressions embedded in monuments throughout the city.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings has a high potential for urban-development due to several reasons: (1) adjacent to the Toba Caldera Geopark and the Strait of Malacca; (2) a student city, a migration destination for junior high school, high school, and university students; (3) a plantation city marked by historic buildings that still exist today, (4) surrounded by tea, rubber and oil palm plantations, (5) a pluralistic and multicultural city, and (6) a trading city which has developed drastically in the last 2 decades, marked by the Sei Mangkei industrial area and the Teluk Nibung port.

The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, thus, offer three main tourism component:(1) historic building tours, supported by souvenir shops, cultural attractions, culinary delights, (2) plantations-tourism, visits to tea, rubber, and oil palm around Siantar, and (3) natural tourism in the Toba Caldera Geopark.

The research finding, based on the description above, the historic buildings in the centre of Siantar have an impact on economic development impact if they are managed as tourist destinations. In this case, the tourism concept offered is The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, which is a tourism concept that offers, among others, the following destinations; urban tours centred on historic buildings, plantations-tourism centred on tea, oil palm, and rubber plantations, and natural tourism centred on the Lake Toba Caldera Geopark. To discover the impact of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings, the steps that need to be considered are the protection and revitalization of historic buildings from damage and destruction. In this step, the city government should issue local regulations protecting historic buildings, so that they can be managed into public spaces or at least made accessible to the public.

The political will of the government and stakeholders is expected to make The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings a reality. Then, synergies with stakeholders such as entrepreneurs and agencies must be built to guide tourists while in Siantar. Without political will and synergy, historic buildings in the city centre will disappear and be replaced with new ones. This will undoubtedly erase traces of urban history, identity, and collective memory. The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings offers a tourism concept that is intended as an economic development tool. Based on this study, through the concept of The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings,

nostalgia becomes an economically-empowered memory and identity. Urban tours, thus, offer the Siantar-based tourist content of the past.

## Conclusions

The existence of historic buildings only is maintained or preserved through their use as an urban tourist destination. Without the management and utilization of it to become an urban tourist destination, the historic buildings will undoubtedly be destroyed. The historic building is a plantation heritage that the city characterizes contains nostalgia, and reflects modernization, and transformation to a plantation city. Utilization as a tourist attraction correlates with the preservation of historic, economic, and regional development values. This study concludes that The Historic Tours of Siantar and Its Surroundings are an optimization tool that links urban, plantations, and nature tourism. It's planning as urban tourism destinations reflect the history of development and modernization according to the characteristics of plantations, the portrait of Siantar in the past. This study recommends the protection of historic buildings through local regulations, revitalization, and utilization as public spaces or at least accessible to the public. Without the protection and revitalization, historic buildings will be lost.

## Data availability

### Underlying data

Figshare: Interview data. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14236202.v5><sup>58</sup>.

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Anonymised interview transcripts from interviews

Figshare: Interview-Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Data. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14315768.v1><sup>60</sup>.

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Anonymised interview transcripts from focus group

Figshare: Research logbook April-September 2020 and 36 existing historic building in Pamatangsiantar until 2020. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14316164.v1><sup>57</sup>.

This project contains the following underlying data:

- Logbook for field study

### Extended data

Figshare: Research logbooks. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14236250.v1><sup>59</sup>.

This project contains the following extended data:

- Researcher logbook/study timeline

Data are available under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (CC-BY 4.0).

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# Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ? X X

## Version 1

Reviewer Report 31 August 2021

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### X Milena Ivanovic

College of Business and Economics School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

The article presents an overview of the heritage buildings in Siantar from the plantation period, the need for their conservation and possible utilisation as attractions in urban tourism, and the development of the heritage tours through the Historic Tours of Siantar and its Surroundings. It could have been an interesting article, but the argument put forward by the researcher falls short of expectations.

The article lacks focus, organisation, and constructive argument. Sections presenting the study results and discussion of the findings are intertwined with the literature. Since the aim of the article is not clearly stated, the literature review is misguided and too generalised. In addition, the site description should not be discussed in the literature. Statistical data meant to highlight the growth of urban tourism is confusing, and none is referring to Sumatra and Siantar. The authors cannot use a percentage of urban tourism growth in Europe to argue the potential growth of urban tourism in Sumatra. Europe is the most visited continent globally, the continuous cultural heritage destination with the most famous cities in the world. What exactly are the points for comparison with Sumatra or Siantar?

The study is well designed, especially because historical records of historical buildings were checked, compared, and verified on the ground. This approach gives credibility to a study. In addition, the study design follows a strict procedure of the inventory phase of the cultural attractions selection process. The clustering of attractions into four districts is the result of this process. Still, the primary historical significance of each cluster, the linkage corridors and the relationship between the clusters are not explained. The geographical map should be presented showing each cluster and how they are linked. The unique selling point is an offering of European, Chinese, and local heritage clusters surviving in a medium-sized city.

The study is not designed to be replicated because it implements the well-known selection process of determining cultural attractions.

The sources of data are submitted.

### **General comments:**

The aim of the article is not clear. Also, the reason for the conservation of cultural heritage is misinterpreted and cannot be for tourism.

The main reason should be for education and in building national identity and pride. Tourism is just one of the uses of cultural heritage, but when heritage is negatively impacted by tourism numbers, it should be conserved and protected. Another way of conserving cultural heritage through tourism use is by creating clusters and possibly by theming the areas and, in turn, creating functional tourism precincts. This should be better explained, given the richness of the data obtained on the ground. The inventory is just a starting point - the first phase of the selection process in turning historic buildings into a tourist attractions. See chapter 7 of [ref 1].

The conceptual framework is too broad. Urban tourism destination is not synonymous with historical heritage destination. It is unclear how nostalgia fits in; it was not well integrated. It is not clear the link between Siantar as a student-friendly city and the further development and inclusion of tourism clusters into urban tours.

The size and population of the city and its main urban functions are not explained.

If the article is completely rewritten and restructured, it can present a valuable contribution to applying the selection process in creating viable tourism attractions. In its current form, the article is not suitable for indexing.

### **References**

1. Ivanovic M: Cultural Tourism. 2008. [Publisher Full Text](#)

**Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?**

Partly

**Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?**

Yes

**Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?**

No

**If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?**

Not applicable

**Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?**

Partly

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?**

Partly

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

**Reviewer Expertise:** cultural tourism development, development and management of cultural heritage, urban tourism, historical cultural heritage, tourism destination development

**I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to state that I do not consider it to be of an acceptable scientific standard, for reasons outlined above.**

Reviewer Report 18 August 2021

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**Michael Hitchcock**

Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK

Generally, the paper is descriptive, and it is not clear what the contribution is to debates about urban heritage and tourism. This is partly a consequence of a lack of an adequate literature review. For example, the paper mentions the World Heritage Site issue, but overlooks some critical texts such as (some I have been involved in): Harrison and Hitchcock (2005)<sup>1</sup>; Hitchcock, King and Parnwell (2010)<sup>2</sup>, and King (2016)<sup>3</sup>.

The methodology is a bit disorganised and there is no explanation as to why this one and not another one was selected. It also does not engage sufficiently with other papers on research methods. The name of the approach needs to be stated clearly and close to the beginning of the section. It takes a while to work out what is being done. The results are written in a largely descriptive manner and there is a curious lack of critical engagement. It was not quite clear what the aim of the paper is. It is also inconclusive even though there is an attempt at a Conclusion.

In its current form the paper is not indexable, and the authors would need to thoroughly re-write it for it to be accepted. It needs to be thoroughly rewritten with much more development of its analytical purpose and more critical engagement with the existing literature.

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**Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?**



Partly

**Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?**

No

**Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?**

No

**If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?**

Partly

**Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?**

Partly

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?**

Partly

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

**Reviewer Expertise:** Tourism, heritage, social science research methodology

**I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to state that I do not consider it to be of an acceptable scientific standard, for reasons outlined above.**

Reviewer Report 02 August 2021

<https://doi.org/10.5256/f1000research.51105.r89406>

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**Rita Margaretha Setianingsih**

Medan Tourism Polytechnic, Medan, Indonesia

1. There are no other resources or activities located in urban areas and providing entertainment. For example, what is in the Simbolon area or in the China area around Jalan Dr. Cipto, or in the Simalungun area? More discussion on matters related to The Historic Tours of Siantar and its Surroundings. So the discussion talks about Geopark and others - we recommend discussing the potential that exists in Pematang Siantar urban area.
2. Cultural heritage is indeed a primary element in urban tourism in Siantar City, but it must also be supported by secondary elements related to the combination of attractiveness that is felt to be unique and becomes a motivation for tourists. Secondary elements describe urban facilities that support and complement the tourist experience. For example,

Pematang Siantar has old transportation facilities (such as: BSA = Birmingham Small Arms Company, Java, and others) which may be accessible by tourists for short distances.

3. There is less description of what tourists should do in Siantar City – something to see, something to do, and something to buy. Something to see – cultural heritage. Something to buy – culinary at Cipto Street, Ganda Bakery, Horas Market. Something to do – walk in the garden, city park walks, Goddess Kwam Im Statue (Vihara Avalokitesvara), Maha Vihara Vidya Maitreya.
4. In the abstract section, it is mentioned about the research results, one of which is the determination of urban tourism design. But there is nothing in the conclusion and discussion section. It is better to discuss this, especially based on locality and it is better to focus on Siantar City (limited research).
5. For urban tourism, an itinerary should be made, so that tourists know the list of activities and budget estimates (this is for management incentives). It has been listed, but it extends outside the city of Siantar, for example to the areas of Sarbelawan and Tanohdjawa. This is not in accordance with the title of urban tourism. Maybe the title should be The Historic Tours of Siantar and its Surroundings.
6. As stated in the abstract on the results of research on the use of public space, the appreciation of managers and incentives for managers has not been discussed and is not included in the conclusions.
7. It is better to use a library about the city of Siantar, not a library about the Simalungun area or plantations. .

**Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?**

No

**Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?**

No

**Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?**

Yes

**If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?**

Partly

**Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?**

No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?**

No

**Competing Interests:** No competing interests were disclosed.

**Reviewer Expertise:** Archaeologists and Cultural Heritage Environment

**I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.**

Author Response 03 Aug 2021

**Erono Litno Damanik**, Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia

Thank you very much for the reviewer's suggestions.

Here is our response to reviewers' suggestions:

(1) More specifically, this study discusses historical buildings in Pematangsiantar City and its surroundings. In the manuscript, we mention that urban development marginalizes historical buildings, icons, collective memory, and identity as plantation cities. We describe that historical buildings must be preserved and can be optimized as tourist destinations, whether office buildings, cafes, gift shops, and others. In developing this city destination, we propose for a tourist attraction with its surroundings where there are plantations and also Geoparks. All three can be combined as a destination in North Sumatra.

(2) We agree that city tourism must be supported by secondary elements, whether BSA, culinary, or other cultural attractions. However, our focus, the most important and first is how to save historic buildings, especially through local regulations. If this potential is maintained, both in the city core and its surroundings, plantations and Geoparks, it will move to the next stage, namely development, both the use of historical buildings, BSA, culinary and other attractions.

(3) Appropriate. We are actually aware of this reviewer's suggestion. However, as we mentioned earlier that the initial motivation for writing this article was to save historical buildings that were managed to become city tourist destinations. If all the remaining buildings, these 33 units are designated as cultural heritage, we move to the next stage, namely development. These 33 buildings are to behold. This is the initial potential. All stakeholders and especially the city government must understand this first, furthermore move on to the next stage.

(4) The result of this research is historical tourism in Pematangsiantar City and its surroundings which combines historic buildings in the city core, plantations in the main buffer, and Geopark in the secondary buffer. The three are complementary and interrelated. In the plantation area are found gardens and historical buildings such as tea and oil palm factories, hospitals and research centers. In Geopark, especially Parapat, we can find hotels since the colonial era as well as the Pinus Research Centre.

(5) Sarbelawan, Marihat, and Balimbingan are an inseparable part of the building in the heart of the city. In addition to being a unit in the colonial era, at this time, the area is also a part of Pematangsiantar City today. In these areas historical buildings were found such as a Oilpalm Research Centre (Marihat), a hospital (Balimbingan), as well as emplacements and train stations in Sarbelawan. In our thinking, when talking about historical buildings in

Siantar City, all the areas covered should be included as a single unit. Then, plantations and Geoparks are added values, where Siantar is traffic that is impossible to pass. These three potentials become one unit. Then, in Parapat, for example, the Pine Research Center and hotels built since the colonial era were found. All this must be explained in advance to develop a real tourism.

(6) Appropriate. Historical buildings, 33 units were regulated and designated as cultural heritage through local regulations, then continued as public spaces so that the public can see them as evidence of history and culture. If all these remaining buildings can be saved and used as public spaces that can be enjoyed by the community, tourism managers will receive incentives from this utilization. For the time being, only a few buildings have survived and most of them are buildings managed as government offices and hotels.

(7) Appropriate. Two things we want to say; (1) Siantar is the Simalungun area which was liberated as a city in 1917. All colonial archives always write "Siantar-Simalungun" as a single unit, (2) references, more specifically to historical buildings in Siantar City, are minimal. The only reference is Tideman (1922). In addition, there were no other writings that specifically discussed historical buildings. I (Erond L. Damanik, one of the authors) have several articles about Siantar that I use as a reference. If we search on the internet, we can hardly find any journal articles or reliable sources about historical buildings in the city. The main sources of photographs are KITLV.NL, or the archives of both colonial and newspaper records at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta. However, the number is very limited. The limitations of this reference, on the one hand, become the motivation for this study, while on the other hand it is a challenge.

We thank the reviewers for their reading and suggestions for this article. We can consider a number of suggestions for further follow-up studies.

**Competing Interests:** The historical building which is the core of this study, is increasingly marginal. There is no serious effort from local authorities to optimize it into city tourism. This study: (1) describes the tourism potential of historic buildings combined with plantations and geoparks, (2) suggests the need for the issuance of regional regulations on urban cultural heritage, and (3) historic buildings as tourist objects and destinations built in public spaces.

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