

Analysis of tourists' perceptions of the management of the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden Agrotourism destination in Deli Serdang Regency



¹*Via Marlina, ²Dewi Shinta Wulandari Lubis

^{1,2} Prodi Manajemen, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Manajemen Sukma Medan - Indonesia

e-mail:

¹*marlinavia17@gmail.com (corresponding author)

²dewishintawulandari83@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Public agritourism destinations play an important role in promoting environmental education, community engagement, and sustainable tourism development. However, maintaining service quality and destination sustainability remains a challenge, particularly for sites operating under non-profit and free-entry models. This study investigates tourists' perceptions of destination management at Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park, Indonesia, through the lens of the 5A tourism attributes (attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, and ancillary services), identifies the cognitive factors shaping these perceptions, and proposes strategies for sustainable destination management. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using passive participatory observation, in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected informants, and secondary data analysis of Google Maps reviews and documentary evidence. Data credibility was ensured through source and technique triangulation, while analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal an ambivalent pattern of tourist perceptions. Visitors highly value the park's natural landscape, shaded environment, and free fruit-picking experiences as its primary attractions. Conversely, sanitation facilities, playground cleanliness, parking management, and inter-institutional coordination are perceived negatively due to limitations in operational maintenance resources. The study further identifies the emergence of a "Tragedy of the Commons" phenomenon, whereby the free-entry policy has gradually shifted the destination's function from an educational agritourism site to a lowcost recreational space. The findings suggest that sustaining public agritourism destinations requires collaborative governance mechanisms, including Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCP), digital interpretation initiatives, the revitalization of environmental education programs, and improved spatial planning for local MSMEs. This study contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by providing empirical evidence on the governance challenges of free-access agritourism destinations in emerging economies.

Keywords: *Tourist Perception; Destination Management; Public Agritourism; S-O-R Model; Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park*



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INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector plays a strategic role in supporting regional economic growth by boosting local revenue (PAD), expanding employment opportunities, and empowering local communities. Among various forms of tourism, urban agrotourism based on urban green open spaces is rapidly growing as a means of fulfilling recreational needs, providing agricultural education, and supporting environmental conservation (Sznajder et al., 2022; Spillane, 2023). Urban agrotourism offers unique added value because it brings urban communities closer to horticultural cultivation activities despite the limited availability of urban land.

Deli Serdang Regency in North Sumatra possesses a unique public agrotourism site: the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden. Located within the Deli Serdang Regency Government Office Complex on a 4-hectare plot, this destination is managed through a cross-sectoral approach by the Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning (Cikataru) for physical infrastructure and the Department of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Disbudporapar) for tourism awareness development and promotion (Sahputra, 2021). The main uniqueness of this destination lies in its non-profit, free-entry policy, where visitors are treated to a tropical fruit garden (durian, guava, mango, rambutan, star fruit) and granted free access to pick fruit during the peak harvest season.

However, the reality on the ground reveals a rather contradictory dynamic. Based on initial observations and public online reviews, the primary function of Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park as a center for modern agricultural education has undergone a shift in purpose (function shift). Educational facilities such as the Compost House and the plant nursery area are currently neglected and no longer operational. On the other hand, the area is dominated by passive recreational activities, the proliferation of non-educational children's play facilities, piles of post-harvest waste, and the deterioration of basic sanitation facilities such as restrooms and lactation rooms.

From a destination management perspective, visitor perceptions are the primary cognitive indicators that determine the level of satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainability of a tourist attraction (Cooper et al., 2021; McKercher, 2021). The formation of perceptions is not an instantaneous mechanical reaction but rather an internal psychological process in which individuals filter (sensation), focus (attention), and assign meaning (interpretation) to the environmental stimuli they experience (Solso et al., 2021; Rakhmat, 2025). Referring to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2024), the quality of a destination's attributes (S) is processed by the tourist's cognition (O) to produce a behavioral response (R) in the form of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

A number of previous studies have examined this destination from different dimensions. Sahputra (2021) analyzed the destination's macro-physical potential; Lestari et al. (2024) formulated a SWOT strategy for ecotourism development; and Pardosi et al. (2024) identified the diversity of Zingiberaceae flora as a medium for biology education. However, most of the existing literature tends to focus on physical-ecological analysis or on evaluating tourists' perceptions of privately owned, fee-based commercial destinations (Damayanti & Anggreni, 2022; Rifansyah & Sihombing, 2022; Syah et al., 2023). This is where the research gap lies, underpinning the importance of this study.

Very little literature has qualitatively explored how tourists perceive and interpret the "free harvest access" facility and the 5A service components at non-profit public agrotourism destinations managed by local government bureaucracies. Non-profit destinations have far more complex managerial dynamics due to limited maintenance

budgets from the local government budget (APBD) and the vulnerability to the “Tragedy of the Commons” phenomenon (Wulandari & Setiawan, 2025).

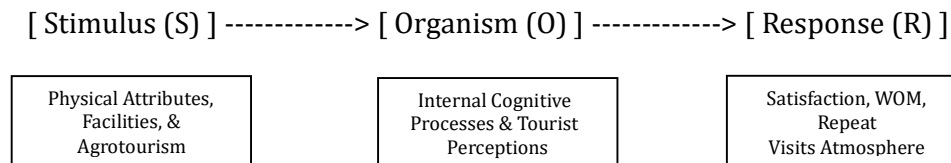
This study, aims to describe and thoroughly analyze tourists' perceptions regarding the management of facilities and infrastructure at the site. Furthermore, it seeks to deeply explore the determining factors that shape visitors' perspectives on the quality of destination management. Ultimately, this research aims to assess tourist perceptions specifically concerning service quality and the environmental sustainability initiatives implemented at the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden Agrotourism Destination.

This study is expected to deliver both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on sustainable tourism through a qualitative approach focused on tourist perceptions, particularly within the context of agrotourism in Indonesia. Additionally, it serves as a valuable academic reference for similar studies conducted in rural destinations. Practically, the findings provide actionable recommendations for the management of Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park to enhance site administration based on direct visitor feedback.

LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH FRAMEWORK, AND HYPOTHESES **Grand Theory: Consumer Behavior**

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the grand theory of Consumer Behavior. According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2024), consumer behavior is a dynamic study of how individuals, groups, and organizations make decisions to allocate their resources whether in the form of time, money, or effort to consume, use, and evaluate a product or service to meet their needs.

In analyzing how environmental stimuli influence consumer actions, marketing experts often use the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Kotler & Keller, 2021). This framework assumes that human behavior does not occur randomly but is the result of internal processes triggered by external stimuli.



If this S-O-R model is integrated into the context of consumer behavior at tourist destinations, its elements can be described as follows:

1. Stimulus (S): Represented by all physical stimuli provided by destination managers, such as the beauty of the park, the availability of facilities, ease of access, and the quality of service provided by on-site staff.
2. Organism (O): This refers to the visitor's internal cognitive and emotional system. It is at this stage that tourists actively process the various stimuli they experience using their perceptual systems.
3. Response (R): This is the output or final action demonstrated by the visitor as a result of their cognitive process. This response can take the form of a positive or negative subjective evaluation, a level of satisfaction, a willingness to provide word-of-mouth recommendations, or even a decision to return.

Sensation

Sensation is the first gateway through which information enters human consciousness, where the senses receive direct stimuli from the physical environment (Rakhmat, 2025). At Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park, it is this physical sensation that forms the basis of visitors' initial sense of comfort.

Researchers explore how visitors' five senses react directly on-site: what their eyes take in (such as lush green trees or giant fruit replicas), what their noses smell (the aroma of ripe fruit or the freshness of the air), and what their skin feels (the shade under a tree or, conversely, the scorching sun that warms them).

Attention

Because human cognitive capacity is limited, tourists will not process all the physical stimuli they experience equally. This is where the attention process acts as a filter for information that is sensitive to visitors' personal needs, expectations, and motivations (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2024).

In the field, a tourist's attention might be fully focused on the beauty of hanging fruit. However, their attention can also be easily distracted by things that disrupt their comfort, such as piles of trash left by other visitors or poorly maintained restrooms.

Interpretation

Interpretation is the culmination of the perception process, in which the brain assigns cognitive meaning to the information filtered during the attention stage (Mulyana, 2023). This stage is highly subjective because it is influenced by social and cultural backgrounds, past experiences, and the personal values held by each visitor.

For example, when seeing a simple gazebo or resting area within a park, a tourist with an adventurous perspective might interpret it positively as the concept of "returning to authentic nature." Conversely, a tourist who craves modern comforts might interpret it negatively as "an old, poorly maintained facility." It is these differences in subjective interpretation that this study aims to explore in depth.

Characteristics of Tourists

As a specific branch of consumer behavior studies, tourist behavior has its own unique characteristics because the objects of consumption are largely intangible. According to McKercher (2021), tourists act as specialized consumers who do not merely purchase visible physical commodities but rather seek out, experience, and evaluate a series of experiential travel journeys.

Tourists' characteristics in evaluating a destination are heavily influenced by their initial expectations prior to visiting. Modern tourists no longer act merely as passive observers but as active participants who actively seek interaction with the destination's environment. Therefore, understanding their perceptions requires an approach that is sensitive to the subjective aspects of their social and emotional interactions with the destinations they visit.

Destination Management

Destination management is an integrated coordination process among various tourism elements to maintain the sustainability, competitiveness, and appeal of a tourist destination (Sutawa et al., 2022). Effective management must align the vision of the managers with the actual needs of visitors on the ground.

In the context of nonprofit public services, destination management faces far more complex challenges than those encountered in commercial destinations. When a tourist destination is managed by a local government without charging an entrance fee, managers are often confronted with limited maintenance budgets and the difficulty of controlling the behavior of large crowds of visitors. Therefore, management evaluation tools rely heavily on direct input and perceptions from the community, as service users, to prevent a sustained decline in the destination's quality.

The Concept of Agritourism

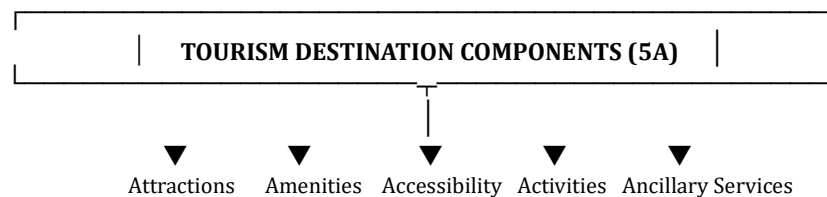
Agrotourism is defined as a form of recreation that utilizes agricultural, horticultural, livestock, or forestry activities as its primary attractions. Agrotourism serves a dual purpose: providing recreational opportunities, educating the public about the agricultural sector, and supporting environmental conservation (Sznajder et al., 2022).

In urban areas, urban agrotourism serves as a vital oasis both as green open space and as an educational resource for urban residents who rarely interact with the agricultural sector (Spillane, 2023). The success of this type of agrotourism is not only measured by the number of visitors but also by the extent to which the educational and environmental conservation functions are internalized and their benefits experienced by visitors during their time in the area.

Analysis of Destination Attributes Using the 5A Concept

To link all of the theoretical concepts above with the practical reality at Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park, this study adopts the concept of tourism destination components adapted from Cooper et al. (2021). This theory states that a destination's appeal and visitors' comfort are determined by the fulfillment of five mutually integrated tourism components, namely: Attractions, Amenities, Accessibility, Activities, and Ancillary Services.

Through this 5A concept, the researcher categorized tourists' perceptions into the following five dimensions of qualitative analysis.



Source: Adapted from Cooper et al. (2008)

Figure 1
Components of Tourism Destination (5A)

Attractions

Attractions are the heart of a tourism destination and serve as the primary motivator driving people to visit (Cooper et al., 2021). At the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden agrotourism site, these attractions were analyzed through three qualitative aspects:

- **Natural Beauty and Horticultural Landscapes:** Assessing the aesthetic layout of the garden, the neatness of vegetation arrangement, and the visual cleanliness of the environment, which provide a sense of tranquility for visitors.

- Uniqueness and Diversity of Fruit Varieties: Exploring tourists' responses to the availability of fruit collections, rare fruit plants, and iconic fruit trees characteristic of Deli Serdang Regency.
- Environmental Purity: Examining the freshness of the air and the shade of the park area, which distinguish this agrotourism site from ordinary city parks.

Facilities

Facilities refer to all supporting infrastructure provided to meet basic needs and ensure the physical comfort of tourists while at the location (Yoeti, 2022). This aspect of facilities is evaluated through three key elements:

- Primary Public Facilities: This includes the suitability of prayer facilities (mushola), the availability of clean water, the comfort of restrooms, and the capacity and safety of the vehicle parking area.
- Recreational and Leisure Facilities: Assessing the physical comfort of gazebos, park benches under shady trees, the suitability of children's play areas, and the availability of attractive photo spots.
- Cleanliness and Security Facilities: Examining the adequacy of trash bin placement, the cleanliness of pedestrian paths, and the presence of security personnel on-site.

Accessibility

Accessibility measures the level of ease tourists experience in reaching a tourist destination, in terms of road conditions, navigation, and transportation options (Cooper et al., 2021). This aspect is analyzed based on the following indicators:

- Road Infrastructure Conditions: Assessing the physical quality of roads leading to the destination entrance, road width, and traffic flow in the area surrounding the regent's office.
- Ease of Navigation: Analyzing the effectiveness of physical directional signs (signage) on main roads, as well as the accuracy of location coordinates on digital mapping apps such as Google Maps or Waze.
- Transportation Options and Travel Time: Highlights the availability of transportation modes and the efficiency of travel time from visitors' points of origin to the park location.

Activities

The "activities" component focuses on various recreational and educational activities that tourists can actively engage in while at the tourism destination. At this Fruit Garden agrotourism site, these activities are explored through:

- Agricultural Education Activities: Assessing opportunities for visitors to learn about seedling propagation, plant care, the use of compost bins, and hands-on introduction to various types of fruit plants.
- Family Recreational Activities: Exploring tourists' comfort while enjoying family picnics, supervising children at play, or engaging in light physical activities in open green spaces.
- Fruit-Picking Experience: Examining how tourists experience, wait in line for, and appreciate the opportunity to pick fruit for free directly from the trees during the peak harvest season.

Ancillary Services

Tourism services (including ancillary services) encompass the presence of a managing organization, the friendliness of staff, and the availability of supporting information systems that ensure order at the destination. This dimension is explored through the following aspects:

- Attitude and Hospitality of Management: Assessing the politeness, responsiveness, and friendliness of cleaning staff, parking attendants, and park managers in assisting visitors.
- Clarity of Botanical Information: Assessing the readability and accuracy of plant information (tree name tags) affixed to trees as a means of knowledge transfer.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive focus (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The qualitative approach was chosen to analyze and gain an in-depth understanding of tourists' subjective meanings, perceptions, and authentic experiences regarding the management of the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park within a naturalistic setting, without any manipulation of variables.

The research was conducted at the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park Agrotourism Destination, Jalan Karya Jasa, Deli Serdang Regency Government Office Complex, North Sumatra Province. The location was selected using purposive sampling, considering that this site is the only 4-hectare public, free-access green open space with an agrotourism concept that is directly managed by a local government agency in Deli Serdang Regency. Field research was conducted over a period of 4 (four) months, from April through July 2026.

Informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which involves choosing research subjects deemed to have direct understanding of, firsthand experience with, or executive authority over the management of the research object (Sugiyono, 2021; Prasetyo & Gunawan, 2022). The number of informants was not determined based on quantitative probability sampling calculations but rather guided by the principle of data saturation, a condition in which adding more informants no longer yields new information or codes but results in data redundancy (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mwita, 2022; Sebele-Mpofu, 2021).

The number of informants in this study was saturated at 15 individuals, classified into three groups:

1. Primary Informants (10): Active tourists/visitors interviewed on-site. The composition was selected to be diverse, covering age categories (teens, adults, seniors), regional origin (local residents of Deli Serdang and those from outside the region, such as Medan, Tebing Tinggi, and Sergai), and visit frequency (firsttime visitors and repeat visitors). Code saturation was achieved with informants 8 through 10, where complaints about sanitation and satisfaction with shade were consistently repeated.
2. Key Informants (3): Policy makers and technical operational staff, consisting of the Head of the Tourism Division at the Department of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Mr. Rahmansyah), the Field Management Coordinator (Ms. Nandira), and the Field/Cleaning Officer (Mr. Romi).
3. Supporting Informants (2): Micro-business owners in the surrounding area, consisting of a food vendor (Ms. Mardinah) and a children's toy vendor (Mr. Johan).

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2024). A qualitative paradigm was selected to thoroughly analyze and gain an in-depth understanding of tourists' subjective meanings, perceptions, and authentic experiences regarding the management of the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park within a naturalistic setting, free from variable manipulation.

The research was conducted at the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park Agrotourism Destination, located on Jalan Karya Jasa, within the Deli Serdang Regency Government Office Complex, North Sumatra Province. The site was selected via purposive sampling, considering it is the sole 4-hectare public, free-access green open space featuring an agrotourism concept directly managed by a local government agency in Deli Serdang Regency. Field research was carried out over four months, from April to July 2026.

Informants were chosen using a purposive sampling strategy, selecting subjects deemed to possess direct understanding, firsthand experience, or executive authority regarding the management of the study site (Sugiyono, 2021; Prasetyo & Gunawan, 2022). Sample size was not determined through quantitative probability calculations, but rather governed by the principle of data saturation—a threshold where recruiting additional informants yields no novel information or codes, but instead leads to data redundancy (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mwita, 2022; Sebele-Mpofu, 2021).

Data saturation was achieved at 15 informants, classified into three distinct categories:

1. Main Informants (10): Active tourists/visitors interviewed on-site. The sample was deliberately diversified across age cohorts (adolescents, adults, and seniors), geographic origins (local residents of Deli Serdang and regional visitors from Medan, Tebing Tinggi, and Sergai), and visit frequency (first-time vs. repeat visitors). Code saturation was attained between informants 8 and 10, as grievances regarding sanitation and satisfaction with park shading recurred consistently.
2. Key Informants (3): Policymakers and technical operational personnel, comprising the Head of the Tourism Division at the Department of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Mr. Rahmansyah), the Field Management Coordinator (Ms. Nandira), and the Site Sanitation Officer (Mr. Romi).
3. Supporting Informants (2): Local micro-business operators (MSMEs), consisting of a food vendor (Mrs. Mardinah) and a children's ride provider (Mr. Johan).

Table 1
Summary Profile of Research Informants

No.	Informant Code	Initials / Name	Age	Role / Position / Profile	Informant Category	Main Information Focus
1	IK-01	Mr. Rahmansyah	48	Head of Tourism Division (Disbudporapar)	Key Informant	Macro policy, budget, and departmental vision
2	IK-02	Mrs. Nandira	41	Field Management Coordinator	Key Informant	Daily operations and staff coordination
3	IK-03	Mr. Romi	36	Field Officer (Sanitation & Vegetation)	Key Informant	Physical maintenance,

						sanitation, and facilities
4	IU-01	Mr. Wegimin	20	University Student (Local Lubuk Pakam)	Main Informant	Visual aesthetic perspectives and landscape
5	IU-02	Ms. Dini	22	University Student (From Medan City)	Main Informant	Park lushness/greenery and road access appropriateness
6	IU-03	Mrs. Ariyani	34	Homemaker (Local Lubuk Pakam)	Main Informant	Family and child recreation perspectives
7	IU-04	Mrs. Linda	41	Elementary Teacher / Educational Visitor (Pantai Labu)	Main Informant	Effectiveness of agricultural educational facilities
8	IU-05	Ms. Renata	23	Agriculture Student (Local Lubuk Pakam)	Main Informant	Functional botanical conditions and Compost House
9	IU-06	Mr. Suyanto	50	Community Figure Visitor (Local)	Main Informant	Dynamics of public space utilization
10	IU-07	Mr. Sulemin	19	Youth (Local Lubuk Pakam)	Main Informant	Picnic activities and free fruit harvesting
11	IU-08	Mrs. Aminah	38	Adult Visitor (Tebing Tinggi)	Main Informant	First impressions and sanitation facilities
12	IU-09	Mr. Joko	45	Adult Visitor (Serdang Bedagai)	Main Informant	Accessibility and location navigation
13	IU-10	Mr. Aris	62	Elderly Visitor (Galang)	Main Informant	Area shade and walking comfort
14	IP-01	Mrs. Mardinah	45	Culinary Vendor / MSME (Front Parking Area)	Supporting Informant	Local economic dynamics and littering behavior
15	IP-02	Mr. Johan	38	Children's Ride Provider / MSME	Supporting Informant	Commercialization of play areas and visitor density

Source: Processed primary research data, 2026

Primary and secondary data collection was conducted using three main techniques:

1. Passive Participatory Observation: Researchers directly observed the physical conditions of the environment, the availability of sanitation facilities, the presence of vendors, and the behavioral dynamics of tourists on weekdays and weekends based on the 5A indicators.

2. In-Depth Interviews: Conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide to elicit informants' cognitive narratives, perceptions, and complaints in a free-flowing and natural manner.
3. Documentation and Digital Review Study: Collecting physical photographic evidence of facility conditions, local government regulatory documents, and extracting data from public digital reviews on Google Maps over the past year to track an authentic record of visitor satisfaction.

To ensure the credibility, transparency, and validity of the qualitative data findings, this study employs source triangulation: comparing and cross-checking the reliability of interview data obtained from three different perspectives, namely tourists (demand side), government agency administrators (supply side).

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on a synthesis of field data, tourists' perceptions of the management of the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden Agrotourism Site were mapped onto the five pillars of the 5A components of a tourism destination proposed by Cooper et al. (2021):

Attractions

The attractions component is the main pillar of a destination's strength. Tourists highly appreciate the natural beauty of the landscape, the shade provided by tropical fruit trees, and the cool atmosphere, a rarity in urban areas. The experience of picking fruit for free directly from the trees during the harvest season is a highly valued distinguishing feature.

However, tourists complained about the loss of educational value due to the fading and damage to the botanical information tags on the trees.

"This park is actually really nice—the air is cool and the trees are lush, perfect for bringing the kids out for a relaxing afternoon. But if it's called a fruit park, why are the fruits barely visible? The information on the trees has also faded in many places, so we're confused about what kinds of trees these are..." (Interview with IU-03, April 14, 2026).

Park management acknowledges the limitations of their ability to monitor and prevent the theft of unripe fruit by certain visitors:

"The fruit trees here are seasonal by nature... The problem is, often the fruit is still small and unripe when it's secretly picked by mischievous visitors—even though the rules clearly prohibit picking." (Interview with IK-02, April 14, 2026).

Amenities

Supporting facilities are the elements that receive the most negative feedback from tourists. Observations and interviews confirmed that the public restrooms are severely damaged, lack a consistent supply of clean water, emit an unpleasant odor, and feature neglected children's play equipment (rusty swings and slides) that pose a safety hazard to toddlers. Additionally, the Compost House has completely ceased functioning as an agricultural education center.

"Just trying to use the restroom in the park was a huge hassle. The water was off, it smelled awful, and the door wouldn't lock properly. I had no choice but to take my child to use the restroom at the mosque outside the park complex..." (Interview with IU-05, May 23, 2026).

Department officials explained that these challenges stem from limited local budget (APBD) allocations for routine maintenance of non-profit destinations:

"Since this park is free with no admission fees, all daily operational costs rely entirely on the department's APBD. When budget allocations are limited or disbursement is delayed, daily maintenance of restrooms and play facilities does indeed experience delays." (Interview with IK-01, May 23, 2026).

Accessibility

Road access to the location is perceived as very good because it is situated along the main corridor of the Regency Government office complex and is connected to the TransSumatra Highway (Jalinsum). Digital map navigation (Google Maps) has also proven accurate. However, accessibility issues arise at the point of arrival, namely the lack of an officially licensed parking area. Tourists complained about the prevalence of illegal parking operations on the side of public roads by individuals not wearing uniforms, who charge arbitrary fees.

"The drive here is smooth, and it's easy to find using Google Maps. But once you arrive, the parking is haphazard along the roadside. Then there are people not wearing official uniforms who suddenly ask for parking fees... They say entry to the park is free, but parking ends up being subject to illegal extortion..." (Interview with IU-06, May 15, 2026).

Activities

The various types of tourist activities within the park are dominated by passive family recreation, such as spreading out a mat under a shady tree (picnicking), taking photos (selfies), and watching children play. Conversely, agricultural education activities have come to a halt due to the lack of tour guides and the suspension of operations at the Compost House. During the harvest season, the free fruit-picking activity often devolves into chaos due to the absence of a structured queuing system.

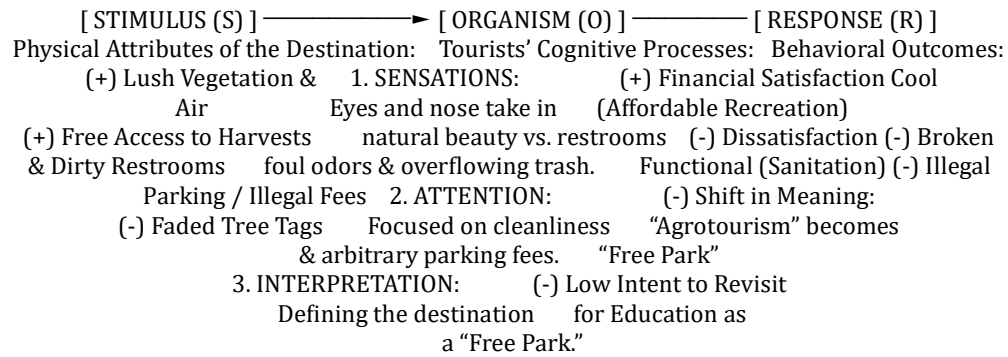
Ancillary Services

The managing agency is perceived as passive and bureaucratic. There is a lack of coordination between the Cikataru Office (responsible for physical management) and the Department of Culture, Tourism, Youth, and Sports (responsible for promotion and tourism awareness). This results in slow waste cleanup in the afternoons and the absence of supervisory staff or Satpol PP officers who patrol the park area regularly.

"We at the tourism office focus on fostering community tourism awareness and promoting destinations. However, the physical execution of cleanup, nighttime security, and facility repairs falls entirely within the purview of the Cikataru Office..." (Interview with IK-03, June 15, 2026).

Analysis of Cognitive Perception Formation (Application of the S-O-R Model)

By integrating field findings into the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2024), the psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of tourists' perceptions can be formulated as follows:



1. Stimulus (S): Tourists receive two conflicting sets of stimuli. Positive stimuli include the park's lush atmosphere and free-entry policy, while negative stimuli include damaged restrooms, piles of trash in the afternoon, and faded botanical information.
2. Organism (O):
 - Sensations: Visitors' senses of sight and smell perceive the contrast between the beauty of the green vegetation and the flooded, foul-smelling restrooms.
 - Attention: Educated visitors and families focus their attention on sanitation issues and playground safety, while local visitors focus on unauthorized parking fees.
 - Interpretation: Tourists arrive at the final cognitive conclusion that this destination has been degraded into nothing more than a poorly maintained "Free City Park," no longer an "Educational Agrotourism Center."
3. Response (R): This generates two types of affective and behavioral responses: financial satisfaction with inexpensive recreation, yet accompanied by deep disappointment over poor basic sanitation facilities, which triggers a negative public image in Google Maps reviews.

Dialectical Discussion and Comparison with Empirical Literature

The findings of this study reinforce, expand upon, and update the results of previous research on the management of public destinations and agrotourism. Comparison with Sahputra (2021) concluded that, based on a macro-level physical inventory, Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park possesses adequate facilities. The qualitative findings of this study update that conclusion by demonstrating that quantitative physical availability does not guarantee qualitative functionality. Restroom facilities exist physically but are "dead" in terms of functionality from the users' perspective.

Lestari et al. (2024) recommended spatial zoning through a SWOT analysis. This study confirms those findings by showing that the absence of clear zoning has led to the encroachment of commercial activities such as children's toy vendors and street vendors into the core garden area, thereby obscuring the essence of agrotourism. Pardosi et al. (2024) identified the rich plant diversity at the site as a natural laboratory. This study addresses a research gap by demonstrating that the potential of this natural laboratory is currently "dormant" due to the loss of plant identification signs and the absence of educational guided tours.

Damayanti & Anggreni (2022) and Widiarto & Pratama (2023): found that the active participation of the local community in Subak Sembung, Denpasar, helped maintain the sustainability of agrotourism. In contrast, findings at Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park indicate that management relying solely on top-down government bureaucracy leads to

operational delays and uncertainty regarding facility management. Wardani & Susanto (2024) and Simarmata & Ilvira (2025) state that at free natural tourist destinations, public sanitation facilities serve as the primary hygiene factor. This study demonstrates that management's failure to maintain restrooms is the main trigger for the formation of negative perceptions among tourists.

The "Tragedy of the Commons" Phenomenon in Public Agrotourism

This study reveals that a no-admission-fee policy (free-entry public goods) gives rise to the "Tragedy of the Commons" phenomenon (Wulandari & Setiawan, 2025). Unrestricted free access drives a surge in overtourism on weekends. Because they feel they are not paying an entrance fee, some visitors exhibit a decline in ecological moral responsibility (pro-environmental behavior), manifested in littering and picking unripe fruit.

On the other hand, the local government bureaucracy is constrained by limited regional budget (APBD) funds to cover daily operational costs (operational gap). This vicious cycle can only be broken if the governance model is shifted from passive bureaucratic management to a Public-Private-Community Partnership (PPCP) model.

Overview of the Management of Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park

Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park is located within the Deli Serdang Regent's office complex, approximately 34 kilometers from the city of Medan, covering an area of about four hectares planted with which is planted with various types of tropical fruit trees. Since its establishment in the 1990s, management of this area has shifted several times from one agency to another, and it currently falls under the jurisdiction of the agency responsible for housing, residential areas, and land affairs, in conjunction with the Deli Serdang Regency Office of Culture, Tourism, Youth, and Sports (Disbudporapar Deliserdangkab, 2023). Available facilities include a children's play area, a prayer room, restrooms, and a parking lot, with a policy of no admission fee, except for vehicle parking fees.

The policy of free admission and the permission to pick fruit for free are key differentiators not found in many other commercial agrotourism destinations in North Sumatra. However, this policy also carries managerial consequences, namely limited internal revenue sources to fund plant maintenance, cleaning, and the development of new facilities. This situation aligns with findings from other community-based agrotourism sites in Indonesia, which indicate that limited management resources often pose the primary obstacle to a destination's sustainability despite its significant potential for attraction (Masanda et al., 2024).

Analysis of Tourist Perceptions Based on the Sapta Pesona Dimensions

To map tourist perceptions more systematically, the following analysis uses the seven dimensions of Sapta Pesona as the standard framework for assessing the quality of tourist destinations in Indonesia (Kemenparekraf, 2021). This mapping is based on a synthesis of official documentation and media reports regarding the on-site conditions at Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park.

Table 2
Mapping of Management Conditions at Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park Based on the Sapta Pesona Dimensions

No.	Sapta Pesona Dimension / Management Quality	Conditions Observed at Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park
1	Safe	Perimeter fencing and area layout are in place, but supervision during peak visitor times remains limited.
2	Orderly	Parking lanes and visitor flow are not yet fully regulated by signs or staff on weekends.
3	Clean	The park's cleanliness is relatively well-maintained, but the number of trash bins is considered unevenly distributed throughout the area.
4	Cool	The shade provided by fruit trees is the main attraction and is considered a strength of the destination.
5	Beautiful	Landscape design remains simple; photo spots are available but have not yet been designed thematically.
6	Friendly	Staff interaction with visitors is considered quite good, although the number of guides/educators is limited.
7	Memorable	The experience of picking fruit directly is a unique selling point, but it has not yet been complemented by distinctive souvenir products.

Source: Adapted from Kemenparekraf (2021) and field research data (2026)

Table 2 demonstrates that the two dimensions most positively perceived by tourists are coolness (*sejuk*) and memorable experiences (*kenangan*), both stemming directly from the fruit orchard's natural environment and the opportunity for free fruit harvesting. These two elements are consistent with the argument by Utama and Junaedi (2018) that the main appeal of agrotourism lies in the direct experience of interacting with agricultural processes, not merely in passively enjoying the scenery. In other words, the competitive advantage of Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden is truly experiential in nature, not merely infrastructural.

Conversely, the organized and aesthetic dimensions show relatively weaker conditions. The lack of management of parking and visitor flow during peak times has the potential to reduce comfort, especially on weekends or during the fruit season when visitor volume spikes sharply. Similarly, the lack of a thematic landscape design causes this destination to lose out in terms of visual appeal compared to commercial agrotourism sites that specifically design photo spots as part of their digital marketing strategy. In fact, compelling visual content has been proven to play a crucial role in shaping prospective visitors' expectations before they actually visit the location.

These findings reinforce the argument that tourists' perceptions of destination management are multidimensional and cannot be generalized simply as "good" or "bad." Tourists may give positive evaluations of the core experience while offering critical assessments of supporting facilities; therefore, an effective management strategy must prioritize improvements based on the dimensions that most significantly influence overall satisfaction.

Factors Supporting and Hindering Management

Based on the analysis, there are several supporting factors that strengthen Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park's position as an agrotourism destination. First, its strategic location within a local government office complex makes it relatively easy to reach from both downtown Medan and Tanjung Morawa. Second, the free admission policy makes this destination inclusive for various segments of the public, including families with limited travel budgets. Third, the diversity of tropical fruit varieties grown here provides unique educational value regarding biodiversity in.

On the other hand, there are several constraints that managers need to address. First, limited self-financing due to the absence of an admission fee makes managers heavily reliant on the local government budget, the amount and timing of which do not always align with the seasonal maintenance needs of the fruit orchard. Second, changes in the managing agency over time risk causing inconsistencies in service standards, as each agency has different program priorities. Third, the lack of a well-planned digital promotion strategy means this destination is not fully leveraging its potential to build positive expectations among prospective visitors before their visit, as studies of other tourist destinations have shown, social media content plays a key role in shaping visitors' deep-seated perceptions of a destination.

Managerial Implications

From a tourism management perspective, the results of this analysis indicate the need to strengthen three key areas. First, institutional governance must be strengthened by establishing a single, sustainable management unit with clear authority over the maintenance, security, and development of facilities, thereby preventing overlapping responsibilities among agencies. Second, diversifying funding sources through partnership schemes with the private sector or regionally owned enterprises for example, by providing stalls selling local fruit products without eliminating the core policy of free fruit-picking access, which is the main attraction. Third, strengthening visitor management during peak visitation periods through phased parking arrangements, increasing the number of on-site staff, and utilizing official social media channels to provide real-time updates on visitor density, thereby improving orderliness without compromising the open-access policy that has become the identity of this destination.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Tourists' perceptions of the management of the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Garden agrotourism destination are ambivalent but clearly patterned when analyzed through the Sapta Pesona framework. The dimensions of tranquility and the profound impression left by the experience of picking fruit for free are perceived very positively and constitute the identity and primary competitive advantage of this destination. Conversely, the dimensions of orderliness, landscape beauty, and digital promotional support are still perceived as suboptimal due to limitations in self-financing, changes in the managing institution, and a lack of well-planned marketing strategies. Thus, the main challenge in managing the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park lies not in the weakness of its natural attractions, but rather in the consistency of governance and the strengthening of supporting aspects beyond the core attractions.

Managers and local governments are advised to establish a stable management body fully focused on tourism, develop collaborative funding schemes that do not compromise the free-access policy, and formulate a well-planned digital promotion strategy consistent with on-the-ground conditions.

For future research, it is recommended to supplement this study with a quantitative survey of actual tourists to measure satisfaction levels in a more quantifiable and generalizable manner. Tourists' perceptions regarding the management of the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park agrotourism destination are ambivalent yet distinctly patterned when evaluated through the *Sapta Pesona* framework. The dimensions of coolness (*sejuk*) and the memorable experience of free fruit harvesting are perceived very positively, representing the destination's core identity and primary competitive advantage. Conversely, the dimensions of orderliness, landscape aesthetics, and digital promotional support are perceived as suboptimal, largely stemming from self-financing constraints, institutional governance shifts, and the absence of a structured marketing strategy. Consequently, the central challenge in managing the Lubuk Pakam Fruit Park lies not in any deficiency of its natural attractions, but rather in the consistency of governance and the enhancement of supporting elements beyond its core attractions.

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