

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Tourism is currently one of the strategic sectors that contributes significantly to regional development, whether through increased revenue, job creation, or the strengthening of local cultural identity (Dewi, 2025). In the process of developing tourist attractions, promotion plays a crucial role as it serves to introduce these attractions to the general public in a planned and sustainable manner (Kotler et al., 2017). Promotional activities go beyond merely conveying information; they also reflect how managers effectively communicate the unique value of a tourist attraction. Therefore, promotional efforts serve as a key indicator in assessing the quality of management of a tourism tourist attraction. Without adequate promotion, significant tourism potential may remain underutilized and fail to develop optimally (Gato et al., 2022).

Sidoarjo Regency offers a wide range of tourism opportunities ready for development, with a strong emphasis on natural marine attractions. One prominent attraction is Tlocor Marine Tourism, located in Tlocor Hamlet RT.16 RW.05, Kedungpandan Village, Jabon Subdistrict, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). By integrating natural aesthetics with local coastal heritage, this site creates a highly distinctive and genuine tourist visit. In addition to offering coastal views, Tlocor Marine Tourism also provides various engaging pursuits. Guests can enjoy boat rides to Lusi Island, navigate

mangroves while pelican watching, view traditional fishing, and access facilities such as free fishing areas, campsites, and sightseeing buses (Putra, 2025).

The appeal of Tlocor Marine Tourism extends beyond beautiful shorelines to include a rich diversity of specialized ecosystems. The site contains expansive mangrove areas where visitors can enjoy captivating boat rides. Additionally, this zone acts as an essential ecological transit route for migratory birds, prominently featuring the Australian Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) (Widyatama et al., 2025). While the periodic appearance of these pelicans offers a unique natural attraction that is currently under-promoted, tourists also have the chance to observe various mangrove species. These include *Avicennia marina* (Api-Api), *Rhizophora mucronata* (bakau), *Sonneratia alba* (Pedada), *Avicennia alba* (White Api-Api), *Acanthus ilicifolius* (Jeruju), and *Acanthus ebracteatus* Vahl (Jeruju) (Azzahro & Fatimah, 2022). Maximizing this untapped prospect through specialized birdwatching and ecotourism initiatives could successfully attract niche markets interested in educational and exceptional travel experiences.

On the other hand, Tlocor's appeal is also deeply rooted in the local wisdom of the fishing community, which is characteristic of coastal life. Fishing activities here are not merely a sight to behold, but a way of life that reflects a harmonious relationship between humans and the coastal environment. Sustainable conventional aquaculture methods, ancestral fishing skills, and the creation of regional seafood goods collectively form a foundation for experiential tourism. Rather than just taking boat rides, visitors ought to have the chance to engage actively, perhaps by experiencing a fisher's daily life or studying the aquatic

farming process. Nevertheless, these traditional practices are currently restricted to daily livelihood activities. Because they have not yet been transformed into viable cultural tourism offerings, the destination loses the chance to offer guests a deeply engaging and immersive visit.

In this context, analyzing the promotion mix becomes important when the previously described tourism potential is considered alongside the dynamics of tourist visits. Tlocor Marine Tourism possesses natural, ecological, and cultural attractions, but these strengths alone do not guarantee that it will be widely known among the public. Rather than evaluating how successful the marketing efforts are, this research focuses on cataloging the specific promotional methods implemented by the management. Therefore, tourist visit data serves as an initial illustration of why it is relevant to discuss the promotional activities undertaken at Tlocor Marine Tourism.

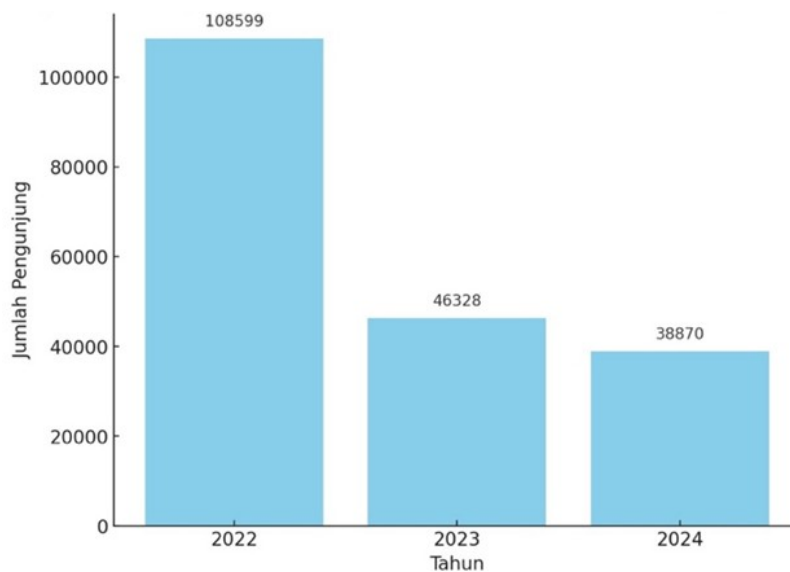


Figure 1.1 Number of Tourist Visits to WBT in 2022-2024

Source: Ningtyas & Rosdiana, 2025

Despite its inherent appeal, Tlocor Marine Tourism experiences inconsistent annual visitor numbers rather than a steady growth pattern. Based on data published by Ningtyas and Rosdiana (2025), obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation, the number of tourist visits to Tlocor Marine Tourism showed a fluctuating trend during the 2022–2024 period, as presented in Figure 1.1. The data indicates that in 2022, visitor numbers reached 108,599, making it one of the most popular attractions in Sidoarjo at the time, although it still lagged behind other marine attractions in East Java (Arista, 2023). This situation has become increasingly critical amid highly competitive tourism conditions, where many competing attractions have implemented more integrated and aggressive promotions, both online and offline. If extensive marketing strategies are not employed, the destination faces the danger of being outpaced by rivals and forfeiting its target audience. Then, in 2023 tourist visits dropped drastically to 46,328 and continued to decline the following year, 2024, to 38,870 visitors.

This drastic decline not only threatens the operational sustainability of WBT but also has the potential to reduce the positive economic impact on local communities that depend on this sector. Furthermore, local media reports highlight that tourism promotion in Sidoarjo Regency, including Tlocor, remains inadequate and needs to be supported by structured promotional efforts to increase its wider recognition (Arista, 2022). This situation indicates that the promotional efforts implemented by managers to date have fallen short of securing a steady flow of tourists. A drop in attendance does not inherently equate to flawed advertising;

instead, it points to a disconnect between the actual destination experience and how it is marketed. Because the core function of marketing is to convey a destination's worth to prospective visitors, ineffective campaigns can cause the site's best features to be ignored, forgotten, or passed over. Consequently, this research concentrates on evaluating the promotional mix, a vital marketing mechanism that dictates information reach, content attractiveness, and the overall stability of WBT's brand reputation.

The sharp decline in tourist visitation numbers during the 2022–2023 period, despite WBT's strong potential, indicates that the promotional efforts undertaken by managers have not been sufficient to sustain visitation. This issue stems from limited promotion, as highlighted by Ramadhan & Sukmana (2023), who state that current WBT promotion relies solely on Instagram and word-of-mouth, and is therefore considered unable to reach a broader market. This is reinforced by the research of Ningtyas & Rosdiana (2025), which concluded that the decline in visits is largely due to a lack of marketing and a scarcity of attraction innovations.

Furthermore, while many studies discuss tourism promotion for major or wellknown attractions, research on the application of promotional mixes for local tourism attractions particularly marine tourism remains limited. Most studies focus on attractions managed by large institutions or already well-known regions, so WBT, managed by BUMDes and local communities, has not received much attention. This gap is evident given Tlocor's immense potential in terms of natural beauty and local culture, yet promotional efforts remain limited and poorly structured. Although WBT has been the subject of some previous studies, the focus

has largely been macro and managerial. The study by Agustina et al. (2021), for example, placed greater emphasis on general development governance as well as the identification of factors supporting and hindering operations. On the other hand, Ramadhan & Sukmana (2023) analyzed tourism development efforts focusing on the institutional role of BUMDes as the primary driver. Furthermore, a recent study by Ningtyas & Rosdiana (2025) examined Tlocor's development through the 4A components (Attraction, Accessibility, Amenity, Ancillary) and Pentahelix stakeholder collaboration.

From the mapping of these previous studies, a significant research gap is evident: while weak promotion is identified as a key barrier to visitor growth at WBT, no prior study has specifically examined which promotional elements are being implemented, to what extent, and how their conditions relate to the ongoing decline in visitor numbers. Ningtyas & Rosdiana (2025) noted WBT's promotional status as low, yet did not elaborate on which specific elements account for this assessment, or why certain elements have ceased to function. This study fills that gap by conducting a granular analysis of all five promotional mix elements — identifying not only what is being done, but also which element remains most active under the current operational constraints, and what structural factors explain the overall weakening of WBT's promotional capacity.

In this context, one approach considered relevant is identifying the promotional mix for analysis, as it effectively integrates various promotional efforts to highlight tourism attractions. According to Kotler & Keller (2016), a combination of promotional elements such as advertising, sales promotion, public

relations, personal selling, and direct marketing can increase tourists' awareness and preference for attractions. In the context of Tlocor Marine Tourism, this approach can serve as a solution to address the limitations of promotional efforts that have traditionally been conducted in a conventional manner. This approach also enables managers to create promotional messages consistent with local character. Consequently, local tourism can contribute more significantly to regional economic development.

Given this context, research is needed to map the actual state of Tlocor Marine Tourism promotional mix implementation examining which elements are still actively carried out, which have stalled, and what structural constraints have led to this condition. Preliminary observation and prior research suggest that, of the five promotional elements, public relations stands as the most active evidenced by Tlocor Marine Tourism ongoing media engagement, cultural events such as Sedekah Bumi, and academic collaborations. However, because advertising channels have been inactive since 2020, direct marketing remains reactive, and the promotion budget has effectively been zeroed out following past mismanagement, public relations alone cannot sustain the destination's visibility among new visitors. Therefore, this study analyzes all five elements of the promotional mix to provide a comprehensive picture of Tlocor Marine Tourism current promotional capacity, identify which element bears the greatest functional weight, and explain the structural barriers that prevent a more integrated promotional effort from being realized.

1.2 Research Focus

Based on the background outlined above, this study focuses on the following research question: 'How has the promotional mix been implemented by the managers of Tlocor Marine Tourism, and which element has been most dominantly carried out under existing operational constraints?' This study is not intended to measure the direct causal relationship between promotional activities and visitor numbers. Rather, it focuses on three interrelated dimensions: the current state of each promotional element whether it is actively implemented or has stalled; the structural barriers that shape and limit its implementation; and which element of the promotional mix bears the greatest functional weight in WBT's current promotional landscape, and why that condition exists. This focus was chosen to move beyond an inventory of activities and toward an explanation of why Tlocor Marine Tourism promotional mix, despite having all five elements, has not been able to generate sustained visitor growth

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions outlined above, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1.3.1 To analyze the implementation of each promotional mix element carried out by the managers of Tlocor Marine Tourism, including extent to which each element is actively practiced.
- 1.3.2 To identify the challenges and structural barriers faced by the managers in implementing tourism promotion.

1.3.3 To determine which element of promotional mix is most dominantly implemented under the Tlocor Marine Tourism current operational constraints, and to explain its significance in the context of the tourist attraction on going visitor decline.

1.4 Research Benefits

Having presented the research problem and objectives, this section aims to highlight the tangible benefits for relevant stakeholders. The results of this study are expected to yield various benefits, both theoretical and practical, as follows:

1.4.1 Theoretical Benefits

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of tourism promotion, particularly regarding the application of the promotional mix concept within the context of marine tourism attractions. Through a qualitative approach, this study aims to provide a deep understanding of how promotional efforts are implemented in the field, the challenges faced by managers, and how promotions can be developed in alignment with local characteristics. The results of this study are expected to enrich the literature on promotional practices in emerging regional tourism attractions. Additionally, this study can serve as a reference for academics and students in examining the application of the promotional mix model in community-based tourism sectors.

1.4.2 Practical Application

A. For Managers

This research can serve as input to understand the actual state of promotional efforts that have been carried out, identify the obstacles faced, and formulate development steps, as well as serve as an operational guide for budget allocation and the implementation of annual promotional programs with more optimal, targeted, and sustainable promotions.

B. For Local Governments

The results of this study can serve as valuable considerations and input in policy formulation, particularly in drafting the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA) based on more targeted data. Specifically, for tourism-related agencies or institutions in Sidoarjo Regency, this study is expected to provide insight into the importance of promotional support for local tourist attractions to enhance the region's tourism competitiveness.

C. For The Local Community

This research is expected to raise awareness and create new entrepreneurial opportunities in the field of tourism support services (e.g., content providers, local guides, etc.), and to demonstrate that active involvement in promotional activities such as documenting events, providing tourism services, and disseminating positive information can contribute to increased tourist visits and local economic opportunities.

D. For Academics and Tourism Practitioners

This study can serve as a reference and a real-world case study on how to address the challenge of promoting attractions that are still relatively unknown to the general public, thereby fostering discussion among academics and providing practical insights for practitioners in developing innovative promotional strategies.