



“Pasti Ke Singkawang!”: Tourism-Oriented City Branding and the Role of Local Government in Promoting Sustainable Cultural Tourism

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Article Info

Article history:

Received September 15, 2025

Approved December 25, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of tourism-oriented city branding in Singkawang and the role of local government in promoting sustainable cultural tourism through community participation. As one of Indonesia's most multicultural cities, Singkawang has introduced the brand “Pasti Ke Singkawang!” to position itself as a unique and attractive destination. The research adopts a qualitative case study approach, combining interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that while the branding initiative has increased tourist visibility, it remains largely top-down and event-focused. Key challenges include limited integration of communal cultural assets, lack of grassroots involvement, and untapped potential in using intellectual property tools such as Geographical Indications (GI). Comparisons with other Indonesian cities—Yogyakarta, Solo, Denpasar, and Pekalongan—highlight the importance of community engagement, cultural protection, and institutional innovation in sustainable tourism branding. The study concludes that Singkawang's brand can be strengthened by transforming it into a participatory platform that supports local creatives, protects intangible heritage, and integrates place-based cultural products into tourism strategies. This research contributes conceptually to the discourse on city branding as a tool for inclusive governance and sustainable development.

Keywords:

City Branding; Cultural Tourism; Local Government; Singkawang; Sustainable Tourism

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How to cite: Yulius, K. G., Sofiani, S., & Situmorang, J. M. H. (2026). “Pasti Ke Singkawang!”: Tourism-Oriented City Branding and the Role of Local Government in Promoting Sustainable Cultural Tourism. *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education*, 7(1), 332–344. <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v7i1.4614>

INTRODUCTION

Singkawang, a coastal city in West Kalimantan, has emerged as one of Indonesia's most unique and dynamic tourism destinations (Fantony et al., 2023; Wicaksono et al., 2024). With its multicultural social fabric, distinctive heritage architecture, and annual festivals, the city offers a cultural experience that is rarely found elsewhere (Kurniawan et al., 2023). The local identity of Singkawang is shaped by the coexistence of Chinese, Dayak, and Malay communities

who have lived harmoniously for generations (Maisondra, 2023). This cultural blend is not only reflected in religious buildings and rituals but also in culinary traditions, creative products, and shared public spaces. Tourism is one of the key sectors driving regional development (Ardiansyah & Iskandar, 2022).

Over the past decade, tourism arrivals in Singkawang have increased significantly, driven by government initiatives, the rise of digital tourism promotion, and events such as Cap Go Meh that draw national and international attention (BPS Kota Singkawang, 2025; Kurniawan et al., 2023). The city experienced a dramatic recovery in tourism after the pandemic, with visitor numbers reaching over one million in 2024 (BPS Kota Singkawang, 2025). Supporting this growth, the construction of a new airport in Singkawang marks a turning point in regional accessibility (Jendela Dunia, 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2020), aiming to reduce travel time from Pontianak and position the city as a more independent gateway. This infrastructure upgrade is expected to trigger further investments in tourism and hospitality services. Maintaining customer loyalty through high-quality products can be an effective strategy for businesses like restaurants (Djunaid, 2019).

To strengthen its identity and appeal, the city government introduced a formal tourism brand, "Pasti Ke Singkawang!" as part of a broader cultural strategy (Putra, 2024; Valiansyah & Fadilla, 2020). This brand is intended to position Singkawang as a destination rooted in tolerance, diversity, and cultural richness (Wicaksono et al., 2024). However, city branding in the context of tourism is not only a matter of logos or slogans—it requires an integrated policy framework that connects cultural assets, local economic potential, and sustainable tourism principles (Fatmawati & Maharani, 2023; Jojic, 2018; Kasapi & Cela, 2017). While the city has made efforts to build such a framework, its success depends on effective coordination between government institutions and active community participation (Yulius et al., 2025).

Despite its tourism potential, Singkawang still faces strategic and operational gaps. Several studies and policy assessments have pointed to challenges such as limited infrastructure in rural areas, weak community involvement in planning processes, and insufficient integration of cultural heritage into economic activities (Akbar et al., 2022; Fantony et al., 2023; Pynanjung & Junaidi, 2024; Wicaksono et al., 2024). Moreover, many promotional efforts tend to focus on events rather than long-term destination development (Rosanto & Sofiani, 2022). While the Cap Go Meh festival has proven effective in attracting tourists (Atmojo, 2019; Kurniawan et al., 2023), there is a risk of over-reliance on seasonal tourism without deeper investment in cultural ecosystems and creative industries (Zvaigzne et al., 2022).

Previous research on tourism in Singkawang has often concentrated on documenting attractions, highlighting local harmony, or describing cultural festivals. Although these perspectives are important, they rarely address how branding strategies align with long-term sustainability or how local governance mechanisms facilitate community empowerment in tourism. Few studies have examined how city branding functions as a developmental tool beyond tourism promotion, particularly in terms of its ability to incorporate local knowledge, communal creativity, and regional identity (Putra, 2024; Valiansyah & Fadilla, 2020). This gap reveals the need for a more holistic and participatory approach to branding in tourism planning.

This study builds on and critiques existing perspectives by positioning city branding as a strategic function of local governance, particularly within the realm of tourism development. It argues that in the case of Singkawang, city branding must move beyond symbolic representation

to become an integrated system that aligns with sustainable tourism objectives. While previous research has emphasized cultural appeal and heritage narratives, this study shifts the focus toward how local government's branding can develop sustainable cultural tourism in Singkawang. By examining the governance mechanisms behind tourism branding, the study offers new insight into municipal leadership roles in developing sustainable tourism through city branding.

Adopting normative stance, this study asserts that tourism, particularly in culturally rich cities like Singkawang, should deliver tangible and equitable benefits to the local population. Cultural tourism, when guided by thoughtful governance, can serve as a vehicle for heritage preservation, inclusive economic development, and place-based identity reinforcement. In this regard, the role of local government is pivotal—not only in regulating and promoting tourism but in shaping the policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms that ensure tourism contributes to long-term sustainability and cultural integrity.

The objective of this article is to examine how tourism-oriented city branding is practiced in Singkawang and to evaluate the strategic role of local government in advancing sustainable cultural tourism. Through an analysis of official policies, promotional efforts, and the integration of cultural assets, this study identifies the effectiveness and limitations of current branding strategies. It argues that Singkawang's city branding can be significantly strengthened by embedding place-based cultural identity into its policy instruments—particularly through the recognition and institutionalization of communal intellectual property. By doing so, the local government can elevate branding from a promotional exercise into a developmental strategy that supports resilience, cultural continuity, and inclusive tourism growth.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method, which is particularly suitable for exploring contemporary phenomena within their real-life context (Risfandini & Mustika, 2023; Šťastná et al., 2020). The case study approach allows the researcher to investigate city branding and sustainable tourism development in Singkawang in a detailed and context-specific manner (Faradies, 2020; Ramadania et al., 2025). This method enables a holistic understanding of how the local government engages in tourism branding and facilitates a sustainable cultural tourism.

Primary data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and field observations (Jamshed, 2014; Picken, 2018; Thelwall & Nevill, 2021) conducted at the Dinas Pariwisata, Pemuda dan Olahraga Kota Singkawang (Department of Tourism, Youth, and Sports of Singkawang City). The interviews were designed to explore institutional perspectives on branding implementation, local government strategies, and community involvement in cultural tourism programs. Observations were conducted at key tourism locations, city landmarks, and public events, especially those that represent the city's identity, such as the Cap Go Meh festival, heritage sites, and creative villages.

Secondary data was collected from a variety of sources to support and contextualize the findings (Unachukwu et al., 2018). These include academic journal articles, official tourism statistics from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) Kota Singkawang, and various promotional materials such as tourism profiles, booklets, and city branding documents published by the local government. These sources were examined to trace the evolution of tourism promotion in

Singkawang and to assess how cultural elements and stakeholder collaboration have been framed in public discourse (Pynanjung & Junaidi, 2024; Wicaksono et al., 2024).

The data analysis technique followed the principles of thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning across the qualitative dataset (Ahmed et al., 2025; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis proceeded through the following stages: (1) data familiarization and transcription of interview and observation notes; (2) coding and classification of data into thematic categories such as “city branding strategy,” “stakeholder participation,” “cultural assets,” and “sustainability discourse”; (3) synthesis of findings through triangulation of primary and secondary sources; and (4) interpretation of themes in relation to the research objectives.

The design and method used in this study were tailored to the specific context of Singkawang’s tourism development. While the core approach is consistent with established case study practices, certain modifications were made to suit the complexity of local governance structures and the availability of data. For example, due to limited official records on some cultural initiatives, the study relied more heavily on visual and narrative observations gathered from fieldwork and promotional materials (Ayalasomayajula & Sawadkar, 2018; Cuka et al., 2015). This integrative method ensures a comprehensive understanding of how branding and policy interact with local socio-cultural dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of City Branding “Pasti Ke Singkawang!”

The implementation of the city branding “Pasti Ke Singkawang!” represents a strategic step by the local government to position Singkawang as a competitive tourism destination with a strong cultural identity. The slogan, which translates to “Surely to Singkawang!” was created through Singkawang Mayor Regulation No. 27 of 2017, has been formally adopted as the official branding language and appears on tourism signage, promotional brochures, event backdrops, social media campaigns, and even uniforms during city events. It reflects the city’s aspiration to become a nationally recognized cultural tourism hub known for its harmony and multiculturalism.



Figure 1. Logo of “Pasti ke Singkawang!”

Source: (Peraturan Walikota Singkawang Nomor 27 Tahun 2017 Tentang Brand Pariwisata Daerah Kota Singkawang, 2017)

Despite these efforts, the reach and resonance of the branding remain uneven. While the brand is consistently used during high-profile festivals such as Cap Go Meh, its visibility outside of major events is still limited. In some cases, the logo and messaging lack visual appeal or narrative depth that could emotionally connect with prospective tourists, whether domestic or international. There is also a gap in how the branding integrates with tourism services such as travel apps, digital storytelling, or visitor experience design. Interviews suggest that while city officials are committed to the brand's rollout, there is an ongoing effort to improve its creative execution, especially through collaborations with content creators, tourism ambassadors, and community influencers.

Another key aspect of the branding is its attempt to unify various sectors in tourism under one identity. Destinations, community-based attractions, culinary hubs, and local festivals are gradually being branded under the same theme. However, the branding is still dominantly centralized in city government efforts, with limited participation from private businesses or community-led initiatives. This top-down orientation poses a challenge to branding authenticity and long-term sustainability. To reach its full potential, the branding initiative must evolve into a citywide movement that actively involves multiple stakeholders and reflects local voices and cultural symbols more holistically.

Role of Local Government in Supporting Tourism in Singkawang

The local government plays a vital and multifaceted role in developing tourism in Singkawang. Its responsibilities span planning, budgeting, organizing events, establishing partnerships, and engaging with various tourism stakeholders. Through the Office of Tourism, Youth and Sports (*Dinas Pariwisata, Pemuda dan Olahraga*), the city facilitates flagship events, disseminates promotional content, and supports tourism operators in expanding their networks. Strategic programs are regularly initiated to increase tourist arrivals, enhance destination quality, and empower local communities through tourism.

One of the most impactful projects led by the local government is the development of the new Singkawang Airport. This infrastructure investment is expected to reduce travel time from Pontianak and significantly improve regional accessibility. Although the airport has begun operating, several logistical gaps remain, including a stretch of unpaved roads exceeding five kilometers and the absence of official transport services such as taxis connecting the airport to the city. These shortcomings highlight the importance of synchronizing infrastructure development with transportation systems and tourism services.



Figure 2. Main Road in front of Singkawang Airport (left) & Singkawang Airport Terminal Building (right)
Source: Researcher's Documentation (2025)

Beyond infrastructure, the government actively fosters community participation in tourism through creative competitions, youth engagement programs, and collaboration with schools and cultural organizations. It also encourages the private sector and state-owned enterprises to contribute to tourism development through corporate social responsibility. However, observations reveal that much of the support still focuses on seasonal or event-driven tourism, rather than fostering long-term innovation in products and services. There remains a need to build institutional capacity that supports small tourism entrepreneurs, invests in human resource development, and strengthens inter-agency coordination for inclusive growth.

Tourism Development Outcomes and Challenges

Tourism in Singkawang has experienced significant growth in recent years, particularly after the easing of COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions (Rosanto & Sofiani, 2022). The total number of tourist visits surpassed one million in 2024, demonstrating a steady upward trend. This growth is largely attributed to the success of cultural tourism, especially during the Cap Go Meh celebration, which draws attention from across Indonesia and neighboring countries. The influx of tourists during such festivals stimulates the local economy, increasing revenues in sectors like hospitality, transportation, culinary services, and retail.

From 2010 to 2019, tourist visits to Singkawang increased steadily by approximately 57%, from 459,348 to 722,932, reflecting consistent annual growth driven by rising domestic tourism and interest in cultural events. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 caused a temporary decline, with total visits dropping to 560,357 and then slightly recovering to 642,114. However, by 2022, the number of visits rebounded sharply to over one million, marking a 59% increase from the previous year. This growth trend continued in 2023, reaching a record high of 1.66 million, before stabilizing at 1.12 million in 2024. These figures illustrate not only the resilience of Singkawang's tourism sector but also its capacity to recover quickly and maintain a stable post-pandemic performance, particularly through its strong appeal in domestic tourism and heritage-based attractions.

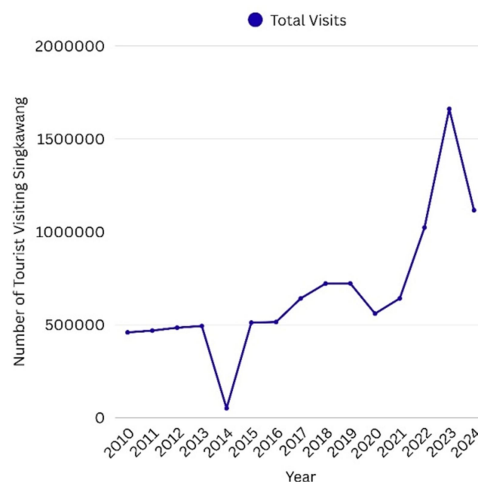


Figure 3. Line Chart of Tourist Visiting Singkawang
Source: BPS Kota Singkawang (2025)

Nevertheless, several challenges hinder the city from maximizing its tourism potential. Infrastructure development, especially in rural and peripheral areas, lags behind demand. Tourist facilities at certain attractions remain underdeveloped, and access to some natural and cultural sites is difficult due to poor road conditions or limited signage. Additionally, tourism remains concentrated in a few peak periods each year, creating an imbalance in revenue distribution and underutilization of resources during off-seasons.

There is also a concern about the limited diversification of tourism products. While cultural festivals dominate promotional narratives, alternative experiences such as nature tourism, wellness retreats, and creative economy tours are underrepresented. Interviews reveal that the city has yet to fully develop guided cultural routes, integrated tour packages, or digital platforms that can elevate tourist engagement throughout the year. Human capital in the tourism industry, particularly trained guides, hospitality workers, and cultural interpreters, also requires further investment to maintain quality service standards.

Despite these issues, there is growing awareness among stakeholders of the need for integrated development. The city's medium-term planning documents already list tourism as a key sector, and tourism performance indicators are regularly monitored. If managed effectively, Singkawang's tourism development has the potential to contribute to inclusive economic growth, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Communal Cultural Assets for City Branding and Sustainable Tourism

Singkawang holds a rich array of communal cultural assets—shaped by centuries of interaction among Chinese, Malay, and Dayak communities—that remain largely underutilized in its tourism branding strategy. The city's multicultural composition has produced a variety of living traditions, rituals, and knowledge systems that hold potential as unique selling points. Events like the Cap Go Meh festival feature intricate cultural performances and processions, including the traditional Tatung parade, which represents a syncretic blend of religious, spiritual, and local values. These events not only entertain but also communicate deeper cultural narratives that could be leveraged in more structured tourism experiences such as storytelling sessions, cultural exhibitions, or educational tours.

Beyond festivals, Singkawang is home to many forms of intangible cultural heritage, including culinary knowledge, healing practices, and communal rituals. However, these elements have not yet been systematically catalogued, protected, or incorporated into tourism products. For instance, while local food items such as *Choi Pan*, *Bubur Gunting*, *Rujak Juhi*, *Lek Tau Suan* are widely consumed, their origins, preparation methods, and symbolic meanings are rarely showcased as part of the tourist experience. Similarly, local crafts such as batik Tidayu (*Tionghoa*, *Dayak-Melayu*), ceramics craft, traditional woven textiles, and Dayak-style beadwork remain largely confined to local markets, with minimal branding or integration into tourism packages. These cultural products with careful identification and development might be registered as Geographical Indications to improve city branding.



Figure 4. Cultural Products of Singkawang (Batik Tidayu, Ceramic Crafts, Tenun Singkawang, and Dayak-style Beads)

Source: (MBC Singkawang, 2025)

There is also a clear gap in institutionalizing communal cultural assets as intellectual property. Although some steps have been taken to register festivals and crafts under communal intellectual property protection, most community-driven products lack legal recognition or marketing support. This prevents them from being fully utilized as economic and branding assets. The creative economy sector, while emerging, still operates in silos and lacks comprehensive support mechanisms to scale up or reach broader markets.

Efforts such as establishing creative hubs, organizing entrepreneurship training, and involving local youth in cultural projects show promise. Yet without a cohesive framework that links these initiatives to tourism branding and visitor experiences, much of this potential remains dormant. To address this, the city government needs to integrate its cultural assets into long-term tourism strategies, empower community artisans and storytellers, and promote local products through curated experiences that reflect Singkawang's identity and city branding.

Discussion

City branding in the context of sustainable tourism development is a strategic approach employed by many local governments across Indonesia. It serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a cultural and developmental framework that reflects a city's identity, values, and aspirations. In this process, local governments play a critical enabling role—regulating, investing, promoting, and coordinating various stakeholders to ensure that tourism contributes to cultural preservation, economic growth, and community empowerment.

Table 1. City Branding & Local Government Roles in Indonesia

City Name	City Branding	Brand Theme / Tourism Assets	Role of Local Government
Singkawang	<i>Pasti Ke Singkawang!</i>	Multicultural identity; Cap Go Meh festival; Chinese-Dayak-Malay heritage; culinary traditions	Developed tourism master plan; promoted city slogan and logo; funded events; coordinated cultural festivals; initiated airport development; limited grassroots involvement in branding decisions
Yogyakarta	<i>Jogja Istimewa</i>	Sultanate heritage; temples and palaces; batik; gamelan; Kotabaru heritage zone	Enacted heritage protection law; integrated tourism into spatial planning; funded cultural events and creative hubs; promoted city identity nationally and internationally
Pekalongan	<i>Kota Batik Dunia</i>	Batik culture; batik museums and workshops; GI-registered sarong batik; textile heritage	Supported GI registration for batik; created cultural tourism campaigns; facilitated artisan development and exhibitions; engaged local communities in branding
Solo/Surakarta	<i>The Spirit of Java</i>	Javanese culture; keraton (palaces); wayang (shadow puppets); traditional markets	Revitalized cultural districts; invested in performance tourism; collaborated with creative economy sectors; branded Solo through arts and cultural preservation programs
Denpasar (Bali)	<i>Denpasar Kota Kreatif</i>	Balinese culture; temples; traditional crafts; dance and ceremonies	Promoted city as part of Bali's cultural heart; developed community-based tourism programs; supported creative industry development; connected local products with tourism branding

Source: Secondary Data (2025)

As seen in the comparative table, cities like Yogyakarta, Solo, Pekalongan, Denpasar, and Singkawang have each adopted distinctive branding strategies rooted in their cultural assets. Yogyakarta, through “Jogja Istimewa,” projects its identity as a special region with rich royal traditions, supported by spatial planning policies and heritage zoning. Solo promotes “The Spirit of Java” by revitalizing cultural districts and encouraging the growth of performing arts. Pekalongan builds its brand as the “World Batik City” by leveraging its GI-registered batik sarongs, integrating legal protection with branding and economic promotion. Denpasar, under the “Kota Kreatif” banner, actively develops community-based tourism and supports traditional crafts and ceremonies, strengthening the link between local creativity and tourism.

Compared to these cities, Singkawang’s branding initiative “Pasti Ke Singkawang!” is relatively recent but demonstrates significant potential. The city’s multicultural heritage—particularly its Chinese, Dayak, and Malay influences—offers a compelling narrative that is already evident in iconic events such as the Cap Go Meh festival. The government has

successfully elevated this festival into a nationally recognized attraction, backed by infrastructure development like the new airport. However, unlike cities such as Pekalongan or Yogyakarta, Singkawang has yet to fully institutionalize the protection and promotion of its communal cultural assets through tools like Geographical Indications (GIs) or cultural zoning.

While Singkawang's local government plays an active role in funding events, managing promotional campaigns, and developing infrastructure, its branding process still leans heavily on government-led efforts. In contrast, cities like Denpasar and Solo have made greater progress in integrating community-based programs and local creative industries into their branding strategy. This more participatory model tends to produce stronger local ownership and sustainability in tourism practices.

The discussion also highlights how the formal recognition of intellectual property—especially communal forms like GI—can reinforce branding and sustainable tourism. Pekalongan's experience demonstrates that GI designation not only protects the authenticity of cultural products but also enhances the visibility of the city brand in domestic and international markets. Singkawang's culinary and craft heritage, such as batik Tidayu, ceramics, and traditional cakes, holds similar potential for GI registration. Doing so would allow the city to promote its cultural identity while ensuring that local producers benefit from tourism-driven demand.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis reveals that while Singkawang has laid a strong foundation for tourism branding, it needs to adopt a more inclusive and legally grounded approach to fully realize its potential. Local government must shift from being only the promoter to becoming a facilitator—enabling collaboration among artisans, cultural institutions, and tourism actors. Strengthening policy support for communal intellectual property, investing in grassroots capacity-building, and integrating cultural products into structured branding efforts can help Singkawang transition toward a more sustainable and resilient tourism future.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how the city of Singkawang implements its tourism-oriented city branding strategy and how the local government contributes to sustainable tourism development through cultural assets and community participation. While the “Pasti Ke Singkawang!” branding initiative has successfully elevated the city's visibility—particularly through events like the Cap Go Meh festival—its long-term impact depends on how deeply the brand reflects and involves local communities. As tourism in Singkawang continues to grow, the city faces a critical juncture where branding must evolve beyond promotional slogans to become a participatory platform rooted in cultural authenticity and inclusive governance.

Comparative insights from other Indonesian cities such as Yogyakarta, Solo, Denpasar, and Pekalongan reveal the importance of integrated policy, intellectual property tools, and grassroots engagement in building resilient city brands. Singkawang's diverse cultural resources position it well for such integration, yet many of its communal assets remain underutilized or unrecognized in formal tourism frameworks. The local government holds a central role in bridging this gap by facilitating institutional support, protecting intangible heritage, and empowering community stakeholders.

The research contributes conceptually by framing city branding not as a static image but as a developmental process intertwined with sustainability, identity, and governance. Its impact lies in highlighting the need for local governments to shift from top-down promotion to co-creative

branding strategies that activate cultural ecosystems and reinforce community pride. By advancing policies that recognize communal intellectual property—such as Geographical Indications—and embedding them into the city brand, Singkawang can strengthen its tourism sector while safeguarding the values and knowledge that make it unique. This approach not only enhances the competitiveness of the destination but also ensures that tourism serves as a vehicle for inclusive, culturally grounded development.

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