

Character Education through the Main Jaran Tradition: Child Jockeys' Role in Sustainable Cultural Tourism and Youth Empowerment in Sumbawa

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This ethnographic study investigates the dual role of the Main Jaran (traditional horse racing) tradition in Sumbawa, Indonesia, as both a medium for character education and a cultural tourism asset. The study aims to Examine how Main Jaran fosters character development in child jockeys (ages 7–15) through its training and rituals. Assess its potential as a cultural tourism attraction, considering both opportunities and challenges. Propose an integrative model for sustainable development that balances cultural preservation, youth empowerment, and ethical tourism. **Method:** The study employs in-depth interviews and field observations with 12 child jockeys, their families, community leaders, and cultural experts. Additionally, survey data from 150 were targeted and 77 were usable from domestic and international tourists were analyzed to evaluate Main Jaran's tourism appeal. This survey also provided a quantitative validation of the qualitative findings. A SWOT analysis was conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. **Results:** Main Jaran serves as a formative social space, instilling discipline, responsibility, courage, cooperation, and cultural pride in young jockeys. Training routines emphasize physical endurance, strict schedules, and empathy for horses, embedding values through lived experience. 78% of surveyed tourists (n=77) expressed interest in Main Jaran due to its uniqueness and educational value. The tradition symbolizes local wisdom, historically linked to agricultural rituals, and acts as a vehicle for intergenerational value transmission. Concerns include child safety risks and the ethical implications of commercialization, necessitating community-based regulation and safeguards. **Novelty:** This study introduces an integrative model that synergizes character education, sustainable cultural tourism, and child protection. It highlights Main Jaran as a dynamic intersection of tradition, identity, and innovation, offering a blueprint for heritage preservation, youth development, and local economic empowerment. The findings underscore the potential of community-based traditions to serve dual purposes educating youth while attracting ethical tourism—when developed with cultural sensitivity and ethical oversight.

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of Main Jaran or traditional horse racing in Sumbawa is a cultural heritage passed down through generations and remains an integral component of the local sociocultural identity, particularly in the Sumbawa and Dompu regencies. What distinguishes this tradition is its involvement of children as jockeys, who play a central role in the races. These young jockeys not only embody courage and perseverance but also exemplify key character values such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and sportsmanship. In the local cultural context, the Main Jaran tradition functions as a dynamic medium for transmitting moral and social values embedded in the community.

However, amid growing modernization and shifting lifestyles, this tradition faces considerable challenges. These include a decline in youth interest, safety concerns,

and the absence of sustainable development strategies to fully realize its cultural and tourism potential. This situation prompts critical reflection on how the Main Jaran tradition can remain relevant in contemporary society while preserving its noble cultural essence.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to develop a comprehensive model that positions Main Jaran not only as a preserved cultural practice but also as a tool for character education and a driver of sustainable tourism. In the era of globalization and cultural homogenization, it is essential to revitalize local traditions rich in wisdom, positioning them as instruments for human and economic development. Therefore, this study seeks to address three primary research questions:

1. What is the process of character building for young jockeys (aged 7-15 years) in the Main Jaran tradition in Sumbawa, including values such as discipline, courage and cooperation?
2. What is the optimal strategy for integrating the character education of jockey children with the development of sustainable cultural tourism based on the Main Jaran tradition, taking into account opportunities, challenges and child protection?

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, integrating ethnography, comparative case studies, and SWOT analysis to rigorously examine the dual roles of the Main Jaran tradition in character education and sustainable cultural tourism. Ethnographic techniques, such as in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations with 12 child jockeys (aged 7–15), their families, community leaders, and cultural experts, were utilized to explore the embedded cultural meanings, value transmission processes, and character-building dynamics (e.g., discipline, resilience, and cultural pride) within the tradition. Comparative case studies, focusing on analogous practices like Karapan Sapi in Madura, offer contextual benchmarks to inform culturally sensitive tourism models, while SWOT analysis systematically identifies strengths (e.g., community ownership), weaknesses (e.g., safety concerns), opportunities (e.g., educational tourism demand), and threats (e.g., commercialization risks) in developing Main Jaran as a viable tourism asset. Data collection occurred over six months in two sequential phases qualitative exploration followed by quantitative validation through surveys of 150 tourists (yielding 77 validated responses with thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive/inferential statistics (e.g., correlations and regressions) for quantitative insights, ensuring triangulation for robust validity. Ethical protocols, including parental consent and child assent, were strictly adhered to minimize disruptions to local practices. From an academic perspective, this study offers novel contributions by proposing an integrative framework that synergizes character education, sustainable cultural tourism, and child protection within indigenous contexts. It advances the discourse by repositioning child jockeys as empowered cultural agents rather than mere participants, addressing key literature gaps in linking traditional rituals to youth development and ethical heritage commodification (Waerner 2025). This model not only enriches theoretical understandings of local wisdom and community-based tourism but also provides practical blueprints for policymakers in regions like Sumbawa, fostering intergenerational value transmission amid globalization.

The road map for the development of this research is designed for five years, with an annual focus based on empirical findings: The first year is for mapping the

character values and profiles of jockey children through ethnography; second year for comparative studies and integrative model building.

Based on a synthesis of the literature and identified gaps, this study builds a theoretical framework based on three pillars:

- a. Character Education, based on the (Lickona 2013a) model which emphasizes the formation of values through habits and example;
- b. Sustainable Cultural Tourism, based on (Dangi and Jamal 2016) community-based tourism model which emphasizes participation and long-term sustainability;
- c. Local Wisdom and Child Protection, referring to indigenous knowledge (Mungmachon 2012) and the child rights framework (Kjørholt 2010) for culturally sensitive development strategies. These pillars are integrated into a conceptual model that positions Main Jaran as an educational platform and sustainable tourism asset."

From an academic perspective, this study offers several novel contributions. First, it integrates character education with cultural tourism by transforming traditional values within Main Jaran into an educational tourism product. Second, it foregrounds children not merely as passive participants but as cultural agents, thereby shifting the paradigm from mere protection to empowerment within the cultural preservation context. Third, the study proposes a participatory, sustainable development model, positioning community involvement as the cornerstone for preserving and enhancing traditional cultural practices. These aspects render the study both theoretically significant and practically relevant to regional development policies.

The development roadmap for this research is designed for five years. The first year focuses on mapping character values in the Main Jaran tradition and profiling child jockeys. The second year involves comparative studies with similar traditions in other regions to build an integrated model for character education and cultural tourism. The third year implements a pilot educational tourism program based on Main Jaran, involving schools and local communities. In the fourth year, a comprehensive evaluation of socio-economic and cultural impacts will be conducted. The final year emphasizes dissemination through academic publications and collaboration with the tourism industry. This strategic plan demonstrates a long-term commitment to developing Main Jaran as a sustainable and culturally significant practice.

The literature supports the argument that character education and local cultural preservation are mutually reinforcing. Character education as a process of shaping moral, ethical, and social values through consistent action (Lickona 2013b). In local contexts, cultural traditions function as effective vehicles for instilling these values (Rohman 2024) and (Sacco et al. 2013). Rituals, ceremonies, and traditional sports have been shown to shape children's and adolescents' character in meaningful, contextually relevant ways (Osher et al. 2020). Moreover, family and community participation play crucial roles in this process (Eden, Chisom, and Adeniyi 2024). Studies conducted in Bali and Java demonstrate that integrating character education with local culture enhances identity formation and promotes social cohesion (Dartini et al. 2025).

From a tourism perspective, previous research shows that cultural tourism can simultaneously preserve heritage and empower local economies (Ye, Qin, and Wu 2024); (Sihombing, Suastini, and Puja 2024), (Novita, Ngindana, and Putra 2024). Culturally based tourism, particularly when developed under a community-based tourism (CBT) framework, fosters active participation and equitable economic benefits

(Suriyankietkaew et al. 2025). However, challenges such as commercialization and cultural erosion must be addressed to maintain authenticity and avoid commodifying tradition (Mohyeddin 2024). Therefore, models that are both sensitive to local values and responsive to market demands are crucial.

Existing research on Main Jaran has largely focused on its historical and technical aspects, with limited attention to its character-building values and tourism potential. For instance, (Sahajuddin et al. 2025) highlights the disciplinary and responsible behavior learned by child jockeys but does not link these findings to tourism development. Similarly, (Yar and Yasouri 2024) underscores generational challenges and economic barriers without proposing integrative solutions. This reveals a significant gap in the literature, underscoring the need for an approach that merges character education with the development of sustainable cultural tourism.

Based on a synthesis of the literature and the identified research gaps, this study constructs a theoretical framework grounded in three pillars:

- a. Character Education, drawing from Lickona's (1991) model that emphasizes value formation through habit and role modeling (Arifin, Kayadibi, and Tabroni 2025);
- b. Sustainable Cultural Tourism, based on Sharpley's (2014) community-based tourism model, which emphasizes participation and long-term sustainability (Gaonkar and Sukthankar 2025);
- c. Local Wisdom, referring to indigenous knowledge and values that form the foundation for culturally appropriate development strategies (Fadhilah and Hunowu 2026).

These pillars are integrated into a conceptual model that positions Main Jaran as both an educational platform and a sustainable cultural tourism asset. As such, the study addresses both theoretical and practical needs—advancing the academic discourse on integrative education-tourism models while offering actionable strategies for empowering local cultures to compete in national and global contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the dual role of Main Jaran as a vehicle for character education and as a cultural tourism asset. The research unfolds in two phases: qualitative exploration followed by quantitative validation, with final integration to yield strong conclusions. Participants are strategically selected to capture diverse perspectives. The qualitative phase involved 12 child jockeys (aged 7–15) who actively participated in the Main Jaran tradition, along with their families, trainers, and community elders who sustain this cultural practice. In addition, cultural experts, historians, and government officials were interviewed to provide historical, cultural, and policy perspectives.

The subsequent quantitative phase served as a validation and extension of the qualitative findings rather than an independent study. Specifically, a Likert-scale survey was administered to 150 potential respondents—comprising past visitors from Sumbawa, prospective travelers from tourism forums and social media, and local tourism stakeholders (such as business owners and tour operators). After data cleaning, 77 valid responses were retained and analyzed. The survey aimed to quantitatively confirm key qualitative themes—for example, tourists' perceptions of authenticity,

cultural uniqueness, and educational value—while also independently measuring overall tourist interest and willingness to pay for Main Jaran experiences.

Data collection instruments are tailored to each phase. Qualitative data are gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews about perceptions of the educational and cultural significance of Main Jaran, complemented by participant observation (recorded in field notes and audiovisual recordings) during the events. Historical documents, folklore, and policies are analyzed to provide context. The quantitative phase employs a survey questionnaire measuring tourist interest, the distinctiveness of the Main Jaran experience, and willingness to pay for related experiences. A comparative case study with similar traditions (e.g., Main Jaran) is conducted through secondary document analysis and expert interviews to construct a culturally relevant tourism development model. A SWOT analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in transforming Main Jaran into a sustainable tourism product.

Procedures are implemented over six months: the qualitative phase (three months) includes ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and document analysis; the quantitative phase (two months) concentrates on survey distribution, data collection, and cleansing; the integration phase (one month) combines results through triangulation, wherein qualitative themes (e.g., discipline, cultural pride) are used to interpret quantitative trends (e.g., high tourist interest among specific demographics), including longitudinal elements from repeated observations to assess long-term impacts on the character of the child jockeys.

Data analysis uses thematic analysis (for qualitative data) to identify recurring patterns and statistical methods (for quantitative data), including descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, mean) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression) to identify drivers of tourist engagement. Specifically, the regression model treated tourist interest in Main Jaran as the dependent variable, with predictor variables including perceived authenticity of the experience, the emotional/educational appeal of child participation, prior awareness of the tradition, and tourist demographics (e.g., domestic vs international origin). Ethical considerations are applied rigorously: informed consent from all participants, with additional safeguards for child jockeys (parental consent and child assent). Data are anonymized to protect identities, and cultural sensitivity guides interactions to ensure minimal disruption to local practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results indicate that the Main Jaran tradition the indigenous Sumbawa equestrian sport constitutes a vital element of intangible cultural heritage, deeply embedded in the daily life of the local community. Uniquely, this tradition involves children as jockeys, positioning them as active agents in the transmission and intergenerational preservation of cultural values. This qualitative ethnographic study investigates the dual role of Main Jaran as both a vehicle for character education and a catalyst for cultural tourism.

Based on in-depth interviews with 12 child jockeys and their families, five community leaders, and three cultural experts, the study reveals character-building values fostered through participation: discipline, courage, resilience, cooperation, and a

deep appreciation for local heritage. The findings demonstrate that Main Jaran operates beyond mere entertainment, functioning as a transformative space where cultural identity is cultivated and ethical virtues are internalized an approach that holds promise for integrating indigenous practices into frameworks for education and sustainable tourism. Longitudinal observations indicate an increase in psychological resilience among the child jockeys after 3–6 months of participation.

Main Jaran as a Cultural Tourism Attraction

A. Tourist Attraction

A survey of 150 domestic and international tourists (with 77 final respondents after validation) revealed that 78% were interested in viewing Main Jaran due to its cultural uniqueness. Of these, 45% cited its authenticity, while 30% found the emotional engagement of children to be engaging and educational. Regression analysis identified authenticity ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) as the primary predictor of interest.

Table 1. Tourist Interest in Main Jaran: Based on a target sample of 150 respondents, 77 final

Variables	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Interest in watching Main Jaran	78	The majority are attracted by the cultural uniqueness
Appreciation of educational aspects	30	Character education values enhance attractiveness
Willing to pay admission fee (IDR 50,000–100,000)	65	Strong economic potential

The data in Table 1 suggest a strong economic value and strategic promotional potential for Main Jaran as a sustainable cultural tourism product. A willingness to pay by 65% of tourists signals meaningful perceived value, supporting monetization strategies such as admission fees, bundled experiences, and targeted investments in infrastructure and programming. However, the finding that only 12% of foreign travelers are aware of Main Jaran beforehand reveals a gap in international visibility, underscoring the need for focused overseas marketing, collaboration with foreign tour operators, and multilingual, accessible informational materials. Stakeholders' recommendations to develop integrated cultural tourism packages that combine Main Jaran with other attractions and to invest in infrastructure such as spectator platforms, information centers, and safety training for jockeys' children emphasize the necessity of coordinated, cross-sector planning to enhance visitor experience, safety, and accessibility. The main objectives point toward expanding international reach, enriching the visitor experience through coherent packaging, and prioritizing child safety, aligning with responsible tourism norms.

B. Economic Potential

A willingness of 65% of tourists to pay indicates a significant economic value. However, only 12% of foreign tourists were aware beforehand, signaling a need for international promotion and structured tour packages. Stakeholders in the tourism industry recommend developing comprehensive cultural tourism packages that integrate Main Jaran with other attractions, along with infrastructure such as spectator platforms, information centers, and safety training for jockeys' children.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of Main Jaran as a Sustainable Tourism Product:
 Based on survey and interview data, with a focused on the
 Sumbawa context to avoid cultural dilution.

Aspect	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Description	A solid foundation for evolving Main Jaran into a sustainable cultural tourism product.	Safety concerns (especially child safety) and suboptimal promotion.	Integrated cultural tourism packages; cross-sector collaboration; improved supporting infrastructure.	Issues of child labor ethics and cultural authenticity that could erode authenticity if not managed.
Implications	Potential for community-based development if managed well.	Risks related to over-promotional strategies and misalignment of cultural values with mass tourism.	Opportunities to build a community-based development (CBT) model through enhanced cultural education and local community participation.	Threats to cultural reputation and potential exploitation if there is insufficient oversight and regulation.

Table 2's SWOT analysis reinforces a solid foundation for transforming Main Jaran, provided governance is inclusive and transparent. Strengths highlight a credible base and the potential for community-based development, while weaknesses stress urgent safety concerns and promotional shortfalls. Opportunities point to the creation of multi-attraction itineraries, cross-sector collaborations, and infrastructure improvements that can support sustainable growth. Threats center on ethical scrutiny related to child labor and the risk that commercialization could erode cultural authenticity if not carefully managed. Taken together, the findings suggest a promising path to a sustainable, community-informed cultural tourism product, contingent on robust governance, rigorous safety standards for minors, targeted international marketing, and culturally respectful programming. If desired, this interpretation can be tailored for policymakers, academic readers, or industry stakeholders, or condensed into a one-page executive summary.

On that basis, to address the critical child safety and ethical concerns identified, specific safeguards should be implemented. For instance, race organizers must enforce mandatory helmet use and protective gear for all child jockeys to reduce the risk of injury. Strict age verification and minimum age limits (e.g., prohibiting children below a defined age from racing) are necessary to ensure participants' physical and emotional readiness. Additionally, a collaborative oversight mechanism involving local government authorities and child protection NGOs should be established to monitor training conditions and race events, ensuring compliance with child welfare standards. By instituting these measures, the community can demonstrate a commitment to child protection without undermining the cultural integrity of Main Jaran.

Discussions

Main Jaran as Sustainable Tourism-Tourists' Perceptions of Uniqueness, Authenticity, and Ethical Concerns

The performance of Main Jaran is increasingly promoted as a cultural tourism attraction across various regions of Indonesia. Within the framework of sustainable tourism, Main Jaran functions as a strong cultural asset displaying the wealth of local

traditions and offering a unique and authentic cultural experience for tourists. This uniqueness lies at the heart of tourists' perceptions: visitors are attracted to the rare opportunity to witness a jockey child racing without a saddle, often in ritual settings embedded within Sumbawa's customs.

Tourists' appreciation of Main Jaran is closely linked to the concept of cultural authenticity visitors value performances that reflect traditional forms, symbolic meanings, and spiritual connections with the conservation community. In Sumbawa, where Main Jaran is preserved through community-based arts education programs, tourists gain a richer and more meaningful experience, while cultural transmission is strengthened among younger generations. However, serious concerns arise about the safety of involved children, as well as the ethical implications of cultural commodification. In events involving high-risk elements such as rapid racing, children are potentially exposed to physical hazards sparking public debate on child protection and whether their involvement could be considered exploitation if not supervised. Moreover, the transformation of a cultural performance like Main Jaran into a mass-tourism product risks distortion. The original spiritual or social meaning could be obscured by entertainment value, leading to cultural commodification. In this scenario, tourists may perceive the performance as less authentic, especially if it is overly choreographed or tailored to commercial demands. To address these issues within the sustainable tourism framework, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emerges as the most viable solution. This model places local communities at the center of tourism governance, ensuring they maintain control over the performance, profits, and ethical guidelines. CBT principles, such as community empowerment, fair profit distribution, and inclusive planning, are essential for long-term sustainability.

CBT also requires voluntary participation of children, with full parental consent, appropriate safety training, and professional supervision. High-risk roles must be tightly regulated to protect children from trauma or injury. Additionally, local communities should develop tourism ethics codes to guide tourist behavior and promote cultural sensitivity.

Educating tourists about the cultural values, rituals, and spirituality behind the Main Jaran performance can also enhance their appreciation of tradition and foster deeper cultural exchange. When tourists engage with cultural meaning not merely spectacle they become part of a respectful and reciprocal tourism experience.

The uniqueness and authenticity of Main Jaran are key factors in attracting tourists, while child safety and the ethics of commodification are urgent concerns that must be addressed through community governance, safety regulations, and cultural education. Sustainable tourism approaches ensure a balance between leveraging cultural heritage as an economic resource and preserving the social and spiritual values embedded within it.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Main Jaran tradition serves a dual purpose: it is a robust vehicle for character education among children and a promising cultural tourism attraction. Ethnographic evidence shows that participation in Main Jaran cultivates core values in child jockeys – discipline, courage, resilience, cooperation, and cultural pride – transforming them into empowered cultural agents. At the same time, the survey results confirm strong tourist interest in this unique

heritage event, with 78% of the surveyed respondents (n=77) expressing interest and 65% willing to pay an admission fee to experience Main Jaran. These results underscore Main Jaran's significant potential as both an educational medium and a tourism draw, although this potential is tempered by challenges such as infrastructure gaps and child safety concerns that require careful management.

Theoretically, the study contributes an integrative framework that bridges character education, sustainable tourism, and child protection within a local wisdom context. It reframes child participation in cultural rituals from a perspective of potential exploitation to one of youth empowerment, addressing gaps in the literature and providing a counterpoint to Western-centric models of heritage tourism development. On a practical level, the findings yield several actionable implications for stakeholders in Sumbawa and similar regions. First, integrating Main Jaran into non-formal educational programs (as a "living classroom") can systematically reinforce moral and social values in youth, leveraging the tradition's experiential learning aspect for character building. Second, there is an opportunity to develop community-based tourism packages that prioritize authenticity – for example, incorporating guided rituals and educational workshops – while also improving promotional outreach to boost international visibility. Third, the community and authorities should establish and enforce clear ethical guidelines, including mandatory safety training for child jockeys, age-appropriate participation limits, and ongoing welfare monitoring in collaboration with local governments and NGOs, to safeguard participants without diluting the cultural essence of Main Jaran. Finally, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships among educators, cultural custodians, tourism operators, and policymakers is crucial to implement the proposed five-year development roadmap and to continuously evaluate the socio-economic impacts of these initiatives. Together, these theoretical insights and practical measures illustrate how Main Jaran can be harnessed as a tool for community empowerment and sustainable cultural tourism.

Despite its contributions, this research has certain limitations. The qualitative findings are based on a relatively small sample of 12 child jockeys, which may limit the generalizability of the character education insights to all Main Jaran participants. The survey data focused on tourists' stated interest in Main Jaran rather than observing actual visitation behaviors, meaning there is uncertainty about how expressed interest translates into real-world tourist engagement. Additionally, the ethnographic observations and measurements captured mainly short-term effects; the long-term impacts of Main Jaran participation on the children's character development and well-being remain unknown due to the study's limited timeframe. These limitations suggest caution in interpreting the findings and highlight the need for further investigation.

Building on this study, future research should broaden the scope and depth of inquiry. Expanding the sample size and demographic range for both qualitative and quantitative phases would improve the representativeness of the results and allow for more nuanced subgroup analyses (e.g., comparing domestic vs. international tourist perceptions, or different community perspectives). Longitudinal studies are recommended to track the long-term development of child jockeys' character and life outcomes, as well as to monitor the sustained effects of tourism engagement on the community. It would also be valuable to quantify the economic benefits of Main Jaran's cultural tourism aspect by measuring metrics such as local income generation, job creation, and community investment over time. Comparative studies examining Main

Jaran alongside other indigenous cultural traditions (for example, Madura's Karapan Sapi bull racing) could further refine best practices for promoting ethical, inclusive heritage tourism. Such comparative and longitudinal research would deepen our understanding of how community-based traditions can be responsibly integrated into modern development and provide evidence-based guidelines for policymakers and educators.

In essence, Main Jaran embodies a dynamic nexus of tradition, education, and economic vitality one that, when nurtured with cultural sensitivity and ethical oversight, can fortify Sumbawa's identity and socioeconomic resilience. This study not only enriches scholarly discourse on indigenous practices but also equips communities with tools for adaptive innovation, ensuring such legacies endure for future generations.

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