



## From Sacred Relic to Tourist Attraction: The Development of Kiskendo Cave in Kulon Progo Regency, 1964–2005

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the historical evolution of Kiskendo Cave in Kulon Progo Regency from 1964 to 2005, focusing on the role of the Tourism Awareness Group in managing and preserving the site. Employing a historical research methodology, the study follows five key stages: (1) topic selection; (2) heuristics; (3) source criticism; (4) interpretation; and (5) historiography. The findings indicate that between 1974 and 1978, the Level I Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta acquired approximately 5 hectares of land surrounding the cave. Subsequently, on July 26, 1987, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX officially inaugurated Kiskendo Cave as a public tourist attraction. Further developments took place in 2005 when the provincial government delegated the cave's management to the Kulon Progo Tourism Office, aiming to enhance regional revenue through tourism. The study underscores the transformation of Kiskendo Cave from a sacred site into a significant tourism destination, highlighting the crucial role of local governance and community involvement in its preservation. By examining this transformation, the research contributes to a broader understanding of historical site management and sustainable tourism development in Indonesia.

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### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is endowed with abundant natural resources, rich biodiversity, and a vast cultural heritage, all of which hold immense potential to drive economic growth if managed optimally in alignment with societal needs (Revida et al., 2020; Soebagyo, 2018). The tourism sector serves as a strategic avenue for harnessing these resources, not only contributing significantly to economic value but also fostering national pride, creativity, and individual productivity (Asriandy, 2016; Sapitri, 2021). The legal framework governing tourism development is outlined in Law No. 10 of 2009, which underscores the importance of planning tourism growth based on cultural and environmental diversity (Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism, 2009).

Tourism development is designed to generate positive impacts for communities, government entities, the private sector, and tourists alike. These benefits include foreign exchange earnings, job creation, business opportunities, and regional development (Pitana & Diarta, 2009; Suwanto, 2004). Effective tourism management relies on three primary pillars: the local community as the custodian of cultural resources, the private sector as the business operator, and the government as the policy regulator (Pitana & Gayatri, 2005).

Beyond its economic dimensions, tourism development also encompasses social, cultural, and environmental aspects (Suwardjoko & Indira, 2007). The sustainability of the tourism industry depends on a delicate balance between resource utilization and conservation. In this context, a community-based approach has emerged as a key strategy to ensure that the economic benefits generated from tourism directly contribute to local welfare without compromising cultural and ecological values (Firman, 2021; Robbin, 1996). Consequently, active community participation in tourism management, such as through the establishment of Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable destination management (Bungin, 2015).

In addition to sustainability, tourism serves as a means of strengthening regional cultural identity (Sentanu & Mahadiansar, 2020). The interaction between tourists and local communities encourages the preservation of traditions and raises awareness of the significance of cultural heritage. However, if not properly managed, rapid tourism expansion risks triggering profound social changes, including excessive commercialization of culture and the marginalization of



local communities (Surwiyanta, [2003](#)). Therefore, clear regulatory frameworks are essential to ensure that tourism not only generates economic gains but also reinforces local cultural and social values (Arjana, [2015](#)).

The role of government in the tourism sector extends beyond regulation; it also involves facilitation, promotion, and infrastructure development (Paturusi, [2001](#)). Adequate infrastructure—such as road access, public facilities, and digital connectivity—plays a pivotal role in enhancing the appeal of a tourist destination (Ginting et al., [2021](#)). Additionally, the government is responsible for providing education and training for tourism stakeholders to enable them to adapt to the rapidly evolving industry. In the digital era, technology-driven tourism promotion, including marketing through social media and digital platforms, has become a strategic approach to enhancing the global competitiveness of destinations (Sayekti, [2019](#)).

The private sector also plays a strategic role in tourism investment and destination management. Its involvement ranges from the development of accommodations and restaurants to the creation of attractions that cater to both domestic and international tourists (Julianto & Marta, [2019](#)). However, in maximizing economic returns, the private sector must adhere to principles of social and environmental responsibility. Sustainable tourism requires a synergy between business profitability and community interests, ensuring that the private sector not only pursues financial gains but also actively contributes to environmental conservation and cultural preservation (Amalyah et al., [2016](#)).

This collaborative tourism management model has been successfully implemented in various countries, yielding positive outcomes in enhancing community welfare without compromising environmental and cultural integrity (Simanjuntak et al., [2017](#)). Case studies on destination management, such as the development of Kiskendo Cave in Kulon Progo, illustrate how a tourism site can be developed while preserving its historical and ecological value (Agustiyar et al., [2022](#); Arfiani et al., [2023](#)). One of the fundamental challenges in tourism management lies in maintaining a balance between industry growth and the conservation of cultural and environmental heritage, ensuring long-term benefits for future generations (Kausar, [2013](#)).

The Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) stands as one of Indonesia's premier tourist destinations, offering a diverse range of attractions, from natural landscapes and cultural sites to culinary experiences. DIY comprises five administrative regions—Yogyakarta City, Sleman Regency, Kulon Progo Regency, Bantul Regency, and Gunungkidul Regency—each possessing unique tourism assets (Khasanah, [2015](#)). Kulon Progo Regency, for instance, boasts key tourist attractions such as Glagah Beach, Sermo Reservoir, and Kiskendo Cave, which remain relatively unspoiled and hold significant potential for ecotourism development (Khasanah, [2015](#)).

Among these, Kiskendo Cave, located in the Menoreh Mountains, stands out as a prominent tourist destination. Beyond its natural beauty, the cave holds historical significance and is deeply rooted in local legend, adding to its appeal. Before being developed as a tourist attraction, Kiskendo Cave served as a sacred retreat for those seeking spiritual solace (Khasanah, [2015](#)). Against this backdrop, this study seeks to address two key research questions: How did Kiskendo Cave evolve from 1964 to 2005, and what role did the Tourism Awareness Group play in its management and conservation?

## METHODS

This study employs a historiographical approach by implementing historical research methods. The primary objective is to reconstruct the development of Kiskendo Cave from 1964 to 2005 through five key stages: (1) topic selection, (2) heuristics, (3) source criticism, (4) interpretation, and (5) historiography (Kuntowijoyo, [2013](#)). During the topic selection stage, the research subject was chosen based on its academic relevance and the historical significance of Kiskendo Cave within the cultural and tourism context of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The subsequent heuristics stage involved gathering data from various primary and secondary sources, including government archives, historical books, scholarly journals, and interviews with site managers and local community figures who possess in-depth knowledge of the cave's development. The study employed a semi-structured interview technique, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of historical and social aspects related to Kiskendo Cave (Yin, [2018](#)).

In the source criticism stage, a rigorous verification process was conducted to assess the authenticity (external criticism) and credibility (internal criticism) of the collected sources, ensuring the reliability of the historical data utilized in this research (Gottschalk, [1986](#); Kartodirdjo, [2019](#)). Following this, the interpretation stage involved analyzing the

interconnections between various historical facts to construct a coherent and academically grounded narrative. A contextual analysis approach was applied to examine the relationship between the development of Kiskendo Cave and tourism policies in Kulon Progo during the study period. The final stage, historiography, entailed synthesizing the interpreted data into a systematic and analytical historical narrative, emphasizing how policy changes and community participation played a pivotal role in transforming Kiskendo Cave from a spiritual retreat into a prominent tourist destination (Burke, [2011](#)).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### An Overview of Kiskendo Cave (1964–2005)

Kiskendo Cave is a natural tourist attraction located in Jatimulyo Village, Girimulyo District, Kulon Progo Regency, bordering Purworejo Regency, Central Java. Situated within the Menoreh Mountains, the cave extends approximately 1.5 km with two major branching passages. The cool and pristine environment surrounding the cave makes it an appealing destination for tourists seeking an ecology- and culture-based travel experience (Wardana, [2023](#)). One of Kiskendo Cave's most distinctive features is its stalactite and stalagmite formations, along with intricate relief carvings adorning its cave walls. These carvings depict figures from Javanese wayang mythology, including Sugriwa, Subali, Mahesosuro, and Lembusuro, further enhancing the cave's aesthetic and historical value (Interview with Suisno, June 9, 2024).



**Figure 1. Relief Depicting Subali's Victory Over Mahesosuro and Lembusuro to Become King of Kiskendo**

Source: Personal Documentation, June 22, 2024

Kiskendo Cave is a natural tourist attraction located in Jatimulyo Village, Girimulyo District, Kulon Progo Regency, bordering Purworejo Regency, Central Java. Situated within the Menoreh Mountains, the cave extends approximately 1.5 km with two major branching passages. Its cool and pristine environment makes it an appealing destination for tourists seeking an ecology- and culture-based travel experience (Wardana, [2023](#)). One of its most distinctive features is the presence of intricate stalactite and stalagmite formations, along with carved reliefs adorning its cave walls. These reliefs depict figures from Javanese wayang mythology, including Sugriwa, Subali, Mahesosuro, and Lembusuro, further enhancing the cave's aesthetic and historical value (Interview with Suisno, June 9, 2024).

Kiskendo Cave was first introduced as a tourist attraction in 1964, with its management falling under the jurisdiction of the Yogyakarta Special Region Tourism Office in 1974. In 2005, the Kulon Progo Tourism Office assumed responsibility for its administration, with additional oversight provided by the Kiskendo Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis Kiskendo). Beyond its role as a tourist site, Kiskendo Cave holds significant geological importance. The cave exhibits stratigraphic unconformity (disconformity) between the Old Andesite Formation, dating back 23–15 million years, and the Jonggrangan Limestone Formation, aged 15–5 million years. This geological feature makes Kiskendo Cave a natural laboratory for understanding ancient volcanic activity and limestone rock formation processes.

## Demographic Overview

Girimulyo District is the fourth-largest administrative region in Kulon Progo Regency, following Kokap, Pengasih, and Girimulyo, covering a total area of 5,490.42 km<sup>2</sup>. The district is divided into four sub-villages (kelurahan): Jatimulyo (16.29 km<sup>2</sup>), Giripurwo (14.67 km<sup>2</sup>), Pendoworejo (10.28 km<sup>2</sup>), and Purwosari (13.65 km<sup>2</sup>). These areas collectively comprise 57 hamlets, 129 neighborhood units (RW), and 350 community units (RT) (BPS Kulon Progo Regency, 1999). In 1999, Girimulyo District had 5,739 households with a total population of 28,474 residents, consisting of 14,012 males and 14,462 females. That year, the male population experienced notable growth, with 200 male births and 52 male migrants, compared to 103 male deaths and 39 male departures. This trend resulted in an overall increase in the male population relative to females.

## Socioeconomic Conditions

In 1999, Kulon Progo Regency experienced a shift in rice field functions from irrigated systems to rainfed agriculture. The total rice field area dedicated to rice and secondary crops reached 10,918 hectares, an increase of 79 hectares (0.73%) compared to the previous year. However, this expansion was accompanied by a reduction of 75 hectares of irrigated rice fields, while rainfed rice fields increased by 154 hectares. Without optimal land management strategies, rainfed rice fields face potential degradation into drylands, which may eventually be converted for residential or infrastructure development. To mitigate these challenges, the local government implemented several policies, including the provision of Low-Interest Agricultural Business Credit (KUT), expansion of hybrid corn cultivation with balanced fertilization, development of horticultural agribusiness, and enhancement of agricultural machinery services for production and post-harvest efficiency. These initiatives aimed to maintain food security while preventing excessive land conversion.

## Socio-Cultural Conditions

The education system in Girimulyo District in 1999 indicated that the majority of the population had completed only elementary education. Among students enrolled, 2,522 attended elementary school (SD) across 26 institutions with 211 teachers, while 1,437 were in junior high school (SLTP), and 336 were in senior high school (SLTA). These figures reveal a decline in educational participation at higher levels, likely due to economic constraints, lack of awareness about education's importance, and limited educational facilities in the region.

In terms of religion, in 1999, the majority of Girimulyo's residents were Muslim, accounting for 25,971 out of 27,688 people. The district housed 72 mosques, 17 prayer halls (musala), one Christian worship house, one Catholic church, and two Buddhist viharas. Traditional performances such as reog, jatilán, incling, and angguk remained integral to community life. Additionally, various music and theater groups, including gejog lesung, Malay orchestras, campursari, hadroh, gamelan ensembles, ketoprak, and shadow puppet (wayang kulit) performances, played a role in preserving local cultural heritage.

## Political Landscape

The 1999 political landscape in Kulon Progo Regency was shaped by the 1998 General Elections, with seven dominant political parties. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) held the largest representation in the Kulon Progo Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) with 11 seats. Other parties, such as PNI Supeni, KAMI, PBB, and PKP, secured one seat each. Throughout 1999, the DPRD Kulon Progo conducted 268 legislative sessions, 152 field visits to monitor regional development programs, and issued 36 policy decisions. Administratively, Girimulyo District was led by a Panewu (district head), assisted by a Panewu Anom (deputy) and various department heads. The district comprised four villages managed by 105 administrative personnel, all of whom were non-civil servants.

## The Historical Development of Kiskendo Cave (1964–2005)

### Origins of Kiskendo Cave

The Kulon Progo region is home to five locations associated with Javanese wayang (shadow puppet) mythology, all of which align along the western part of the region. Tracing the route from the south, the first location is Mount Kelir, which serves as a symbolic backdrop for wayang performances, where the puppeteer (dalang) always uses a kelir (a

white screen) as the medium for storytelling. Moving further north is Batu Blencong, historically used as a light source during wayang kulit (shadow puppet) performances. Following this is Kiskendo Cave, initially known as Kikis Kedu, a name derived from its geographical position between Kedu, Purworejo, and Kulon Progo in Yogyakarta Special Region. To the north of Kiskendo Cave lies Sri Khayangan, an elongated cliff of historical and spiritual significance. Approximately three kilometers further north stands Puncak Suroloyo, a peak believed to be a spiritual focal point in Javanese culture (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).

Kiskendo Cave was first discovered in 1821 CE in its pristine and untouched state. The cave's discovery traces back to Ki Gondorio, a local villager who lost his chickens, an essential source of livelihood for the community at that time. One day, a resident noticed a civet cat stealing a chicken and followed its trail to an area dominated by two large trees. Between these trees, a hole was found, suspected to be the lair of the chicken thief. Aware of this, Ki Gondorio and several villagers returned to the site with more people and began excavating the hole. As they dug, the surrounding soil collapsed, revealing the cave entrance, which was covered by a large rock. After successfully dislodging the rock, the villagers explored the cave for 40 days. Upon emerging, they gathered their families and the broader community to recount their extraordinary findings inside Kiskendo Cave (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).

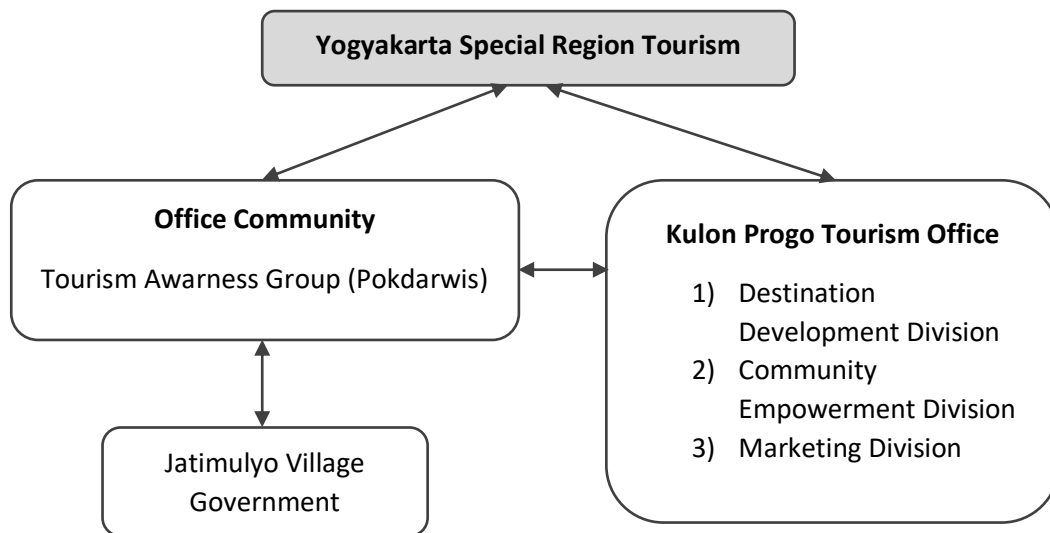
### **Kiskendo Cave as a Sacred Retreat**

Kiskendo Cave, formed through natural geological processes, has long been regarded as a site of profound spiritual significance. Since its discovery, the cave has frequently served as a place of meditation and ascetic retreat (petilasan) for several notable figures, including Prince Diponegoro, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono VIII, and Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX. Within the cave, there are nine distinct retreat chambers, each bearing unique functions and spiritual meanings.

1. **Pertapaan Tledak** – This chamber is believed to grant success in the arts, particularly in wayang and theatrical performances. Renowned dalangs such as Ki Suparman Cermo Wiyoto, Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno, Ki Manteb Soedharsono, and Ki Hadi Sugito have meditated here (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
2. **Pertapaan Kusuman** – A space for enhancing social status and career advancement, this chamber also served as a prayer site, as it faces west (towards the Qibla). The cave ceiling bears blackened marks from the torches used by past ascetics. Both Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono VIII and IX are known to have meditated here (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
3. **Pertapaan Padasan** – The dripping water in this chamber is considered sacred and was once used for ablution (wudu) before prayers in Pertapaan Kusuman. Legend has it that the stalactites here represent the tongues of Lembusuro and Mahesasuro, two mythical figures associated with Kiskendo Cave (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
4. **Pertapaan Santri Tani** – This retreat was a sacred space for farmers, believed to bring agricultural prosperity. It also served as a temporary dwelling for farmers in the vicinity of the cave (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
5. **Pertapaan Sumelong and Seterbang** – This chamber contains a hole that is said to lead to the cave's surface. According to folklore, the hole was formed when Subali broke through the cave ceiling to escape after Sugriwa sealed the cave entrance (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
6. **Pertapaan Lumbung Kampek** – According to wayang narratives, this chamber was once used to store valuable treasures belonging to the Kingdom of Kiskendo, including gold, jewelry, and weaponry (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
7. **Pertapaan Selumbang** – Formerly used as a granary, this chamber stored food supplies for the Kiskendo Kingdom (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).
8. **Pertapaan Sekandang** – This chamber was utilized by livestock herders who sought prosperity in animal husbandry. It was also the central residence of Lembusuro and Mahesasuro, where they lived before engaging in their climactic battle against Subali (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).

The symbolic journey through Kiskendo Cave is reflected in its winding tunnels and passages. The cave's descending, level, and ascending paths represent the ups and downs of human life, while the narrow corridors, which require visitors to bow their heads, symbolize humility before the Divine. Additionally, the intersecting pathways within the cave metaphorically illustrate the difficult choices humans must navigate in life. Historically, this cave served as a spiritual retreat for meditation, strengthening faith, and self-purification (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).





**Figure 2. Management Structure of Kiskendo Cave**  
Source: Kulon Progo Tourism Office

Between 1961 and 1965, several prominent dalangs, including Ki Suparman Cermo Wiyoto, Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno, Ki Manteb Soedharsono, and Ki Hadi Sugito, undertook five-day meditation retreats within the cave. At the time, the cave had minimal facilities, limited accessibility, and no lighting, requiring visitors to carry torches or flashlights. Prolonged torch use resulted in blackened cave ceilings due to soot accumulation (Interview with Slamet, June 8, 2024).

Prior to 1974, the land surrounding Kiskendo Cave remained under private ownership. The government had not yet assumed management responsibilities until between 1974 and 1978, when the Provincial Government of Yogyakarta Special Region acquired approximately 5 hectares of land and initiated the development of basic infrastructure. In 1987, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX officially inaugurated the cave as a public tourist destination. Subsequently, in 2005, management of Kiskendo Cave was transferred to the Kulon Progo Tourism Office, which later collaborated with local communities to oversee the site through the Kiskendo Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis Kiskendo). Since then, the local community has played an active role in preserving and enhancing the cave’s tourism potential (Interview with Nugroho, June 21, 2024).

The management structure of Kiskendo Cave is designed as an interconnected system, ensuring seamless coordination among stakeholders. The Yogyakarta Special Region Tourism Office, Kulon Progo Tourism Office, and local communities collaboratively oversee the cave’s development. The Kulon Progo Tourism Office operates across three sectors: Destination Development, Community Empowerment, and Tourism Marketing, while the local community actively manages the site in cooperation with Pokdarwis Kiskendo and the Jatimulyo Village Government. This structured governance model underscores the importance of collaborative management in maintaining the sustainability of Kiskendo Cave as a historical, cultural, and ecological asset, ensuring that its economic benefits are equitably shared while safeguarding its spiritual and environmental integrity.

### The Role of the Tourism Awareness Group in the Management and Conservation of Kiskendo Cave (1973–2005)

#### Understanding the Tourism Awareness Group

The development and expansion of the tourism sector require the active participation of all stakeholders involved in the industry. Community support in tourism destinations plays a crucial role in determining the success of tourism development and management. Thus, a local institution is needed to serve as a platform for community participation in managing and developing the tourism sector in their region. In this context, the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) acts as a community-based institution responsible for overseeing tourism management at the local level. Pokdarwis is empowered to regulate and implement various tourism development initiatives in accordance with applicable regulations (Yatmaja, 2019).

According to the Tourism Awareness Group Handbook, Pokdarwis is a community-based organization composed of individuals who are committed to and responsible for supporting tourism development. This institution plays a vital role in fostering a conducive environment for the growth of the tourism sector, promoting the Sapta Pesona principles, and contributing to regional development through the tourism industry to enhance the well-being of local communities.

Through Pokdarwis, tourism development and management are expected to go beyond mere economic profit and emphasize community empowerment. This aligns with the group's original mission, which is rooted in the principles of self-reliance and voluntary community initiatives. Pokdarwis is tasked with creating an environment conducive to sustainable tourism growth while maintaining a balance between environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

### **Objectives of the Tourism Awareness Group**

According to the Tourism Awareness Group Guidebook, the primary objectives of Pokdarwis include:

- 1) Enhancing the role of local communities as key actors in tourism development while fostering partnerships with other stakeholders to improve the quality and competitiveness of the tourism sector.
- 2) Instilling a positive mindset within the community towards welcoming tourists while reinforcing the Sapta Pesona values, which contribute to tourism growth and regional development.
- 3) Introducing, preserving, and managing local tourism attractions to ensure their long-term sustainability for the benefit of the community.

### **Functions of the Tourism Awareness Group**

Based on the Tourism Awareness Group Guidebook, Pokdarwis serves two primary functions:

- 1) As a key driver in the implementation of Tourism Awareness and Sapta Pesona values within tourism destinations.
- 2) As a strategic partner to local governments in ensuring sustainable tourism management and development.

### **Activities of the Tourism Awareness Group**

According to the Tourism Awareness Group Handbook, Pokdarwis carries out various programs and activities to fulfill its mission and objectives. The main activities include:

- 1) Capacity-building programs through training and education in tourism management.
- 2) Enhancing members' skills in tourism business operations and related sectors.
- 3) Raising public awareness on how to be hospitable hosts for visitors.
- 4) Environmental conservation and sustainable ecotourism management.
- 5) Providing tourism-related information to visitors and the local community.
- 6) Advising local governments on tourism development policies.

### **Tourism Awareness Group Jati Before Integration Under the Tourism Office**

In 1973, Kiskendo Cave was initially managed independently by the local community. At the time, the land surrounding the cave was still privately owned, and the government had not yet conducted land acquisition efforts. As Kiskendo Cave was the only tourist attraction in Jatimulyo Village, local residents had limited experience and knowledge in managing a tourism destination. Their understanding of tourism regulations, visitor service standards, and safety measures was still very basic.

Tourism facilities at Kiskendo Cave were also underdeveloped. Visitors relied solely on torches as their primary source of illumination, as no proper lighting system had been installed inside the cave. Additionally, the natural cave pathways remained unpaved, making them slippery and hazardous for tourists. This situation illustrates that, in 1973, tourism development in the area was still in its infancy, facing significant challenges related to infrastructure, safety, and regulatory frameworks (Interview with Suisno, June 9, 2024).



**Figure 3. Caving Activities by MAPALA SAPALA at Kiskendo Cave**  
Source: Instagram @Mapala Sapala, July 7, 2024

Between 1974 and 1978, the Provincial Government of Yogyakarta Special Region initiated a land acquisition process covering approximately 5 hectares around Kiskendo Cave to support tourism development. The government also began constructing essential facilities, which eventually led to the official inauguration of Kiskendo Cave as a public tourism site on July 26, 1987, by the Regional Government of Yogyakarta Special Region.

In the early 2000s, Kiskendo Cave started attracting student nature explorer organizations (MAPALA), such as MAPALA Arga Tirta from PGRI University Yogyakarta and MAPALA Sapala from IKIP PGRI Wates, who utilized the cave for exploration and research activities. With the increasing number of visitors, local residents began establishing businesses and small trade stalls around the tourism area. Over the following years, the cave drew a more diverse range of tourists, including those seeking religious tourism experiences as well as adventurers engaging in cave exploration and camping. Recognizing this growing potential, in 2005, the Provincial Government of Yogyakarta Special Region officially transferred the management of Kiskendo Cave to the Kulon Progo Tourism Office.

As part of this policy, the Tourism Awareness Group Wisata Jati was established to oversee the site in a more structured and professional manner. Pokdarwis became responsible for maintaining facilities, promoting the cave as a tourism destination, educating local communities, and managing the region's tourism revenue (Pendapatan Asli Daerah/PAD) for Kulon Progo Regency. Through the involvement of Pokdarwis, Kiskendo Cave's management became more community-driven, sustainable, and economically beneficial for the surrounding population (Interview with Suisno, June 9, 2024).





**Figure 4. Induction Ceremony of Sapala Members at Kiskendo Cave**  
Source: Instagram Mapala Sapala, July 7, 2024

### The Tourism Awareness Group Wisata Jati Under the Supervision of the Tourism Office

Entering 2005, following the official transfer of Kiskendo Cave under the jurisdiction of the Kulon Progo Tourism Office, the local community increasingly recognized the tourism potential of their region. This growing awareness motivated them to submit a Work Proposal (Surat Kerja, SK) to the Jatimulyo Village Administration, which was subsequently processed and formalized by the Kulon Progo Tourism Office and ultimately endorsed by the Governor of Yogyakarta Special Region. Through this process, the local tourism management group was officially established under the name Pokdarwis Wisata Jati.

The formation of Pokdarwis Wisata Jati was carried out through a "Bottom-Up" approach, where the initiative originated from the local community recognizing the tourism potential of their area and then formally applying for an SK to the village administration. For tourism destinations categorized as village-based tourism, endorsement at the regency level is generally sufficient. However, in the case of a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), the process required provincial-level recognition to secure broader governmental support. Pokdarwis Wisata Jati was entrusted not only with managing Kiskendo Cave but also overseeing the entire tourism sector in Jatimulyo Village (Interview with Zunarsih, June 21, 2024).

### Formation Process of Pokdarwis Wisata Jati

- 1) Recognition of Tourism Potential – In 2005, the local community around Kiskendo Cave began to acknowledge the significant potential of their region as a tourism destination. The area's natural beauty, historical significance, and economic opportunities associated with tourism management prompted them to organize a structured approach to tourism development.
- 2) Submission of a Work Proposal (SK) to the Village Administration – As an initial step, the community submitted an SK to the Jatimulyo Village Administration to obtain official authorization for managing and developing local tourism assets.
- 3) Endorsement by the Kulon Progo Tourism Office – Following the SK submission, the next step involved endorsement from the Kulon Progo Tourism Office, which provided formal support and technical guidance for tourism management.
- 4) Provincial-Level Endorsement by the Governor – Unlike village-based tourism initiatives that only require regency-level approval, a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) must undergo endorsement by the Governor of Yogyakarta Special Region to obtain official recognition and full governmental support at the provincial level.

- 5) Official Naming of the Group – Upon completing all administrative procedures, the tourism management team was officially designated as Pokdarwis Wisata Jati, tasked with overseeing not only Kiskendo Cave but also other tourism attractions in Jatimulyo Village.
- 6) Management Scope – Pokdarwis Wisata Jati holds responsibility for managing, developing, and promoting the entire tourism sector in Jatimulyo Village. Their role extends to environmental conservation, enhancing visitor experiences, and supporting local economic welfare through tourism initiatives.

The "Bottom-Up" approach applied in the formation of Pokdarwis Wisata Jati demonstrates that community-driven tourism development is more effective when it incorporates and prioritizes the aspirations and needs of the local population. This model fosters a sense of ownership among community members, ensuring that tourism remains sustainable and beneficial for long-term local development.

### **Human Resource Development and Tourism Diversification**

Following its integration under the Kulon Progo Tourism Office, Pokdarwis Wisata Jati undertook various capacity-building initiatives to enhance tourism management competencies among local stakeholders. These efforts were not only focused on infrastructure improvements but also on the development of human resources (HR). Several training programs were provided to the Jatimulyo community, including:

- 1) Tour guiding and visitor management training
- 2) Tourism destination management workshops
- 3) Village tourism management courses
- 4) Homestay development programs
- 5) Tourism awareness and sustainability education

With these enhanced skill sets, the Jatimulyo community gained greater autonomy in managing Kiskendo Cave and began offering diverse tourism packages, including:

- 1) Outbound Tourism Package – Visitors can engage in various outdoor adventure activities such as Rope Course, Flying Fox, Trekking, Survival Training, and environmental education programs around Kiskendo Cave.
- 2) Camping Ground Package – The surrounding area of Kiskendo Cave serves as a designated camping site. The management team provides tents, firewood, mattresses, and food supplies tailored to the needs of visitors.
- 3) Cave Exploration Package – Tourists can participate in a guided or self-guided cave exploration experience. For groups exceeding 15 people, the use of a tour guide is recommended to ensure safety and orderly exploration.

### **The Role of Pokdarwis in the Conservation of Kiskendo Cave**

As both a Cultural Heritage Site and a Geoheritage Landmark of Kulon Progo, Kiskendo Cave holds significant historical, cultural, and geological value, requiring strict conservation efforts. In this regard, Pokdarwis Wisata Jati plays several key roles in preserving and managing the cave, including:

- 1) Environmental Awareness and Sapta Pesona Advocacy – Pokdarwis actively promotes Sapta Pesona principles among both local residents and tourists. These principles emphasize safety, orderliness, cleanliness, coolness, beauty, hospitality, and memorable experiences to enhance visitor satisfaction.
- 2) Promotion of Historical and Cultural Tourism – Given its strong historical ties to Javanese mythology, Kiskendo Cave serves as an important educational and cultural tourism site. Pokdarwis facilitates historical interpretation programs, educating visitors about the cave's legends, mythology, and local traditions.
- 3) Tourism Infrastructure Development – In collaboration with the local government, Pokdarwis contributes to the maintenance and improvement of essential tourism facilities, including road access, public restrooms, and visitor rest areas, ensuring a comfortable and accessible experience for tourists.
- 4) Conservation of Stalactites and Stalagmites – Pokdarwis enforces strict visitor regulations to prevent damage to the cave's fragile geological formations. Educational programs are also conducted to raise awareness about the importance of preserving Kiskendo Cave's unique geological features.

Between 1987 and 2008, Kiskendo Cave experienced a golden era, with daily visitor numbers reaching thousands. However, between 2013 and 2015, new photogenic tourism destinations such as Kalibiru, Sungai Mudal,

Kembang Soka, and Kedung Pedut gained popularity, leading to a decline in visitor numbers at Kiskendo Cave (Interview with Astuti, June 22, 2024).

This shift in tourism trends reflects the dynamic nature of the industry, where emerging destinations offering unique experiential concepts can attract greater tourist attention. Such changes pose a challenge for Kiskendo Cave to remain relevant and competitive in the modern tourism landscape. Therefore, strategic innovation in promotion and heritage tourism management is essential to enhance the appeal of Kiskendo Cave as a premier tourism destination in Kulon Progo.

## CONCLUSION

Kiskendo Cave holds significant historical, cultural, and geological value, making it not only a tourism destination but also a cultural heritage site and an integral part of Kulon Progo's Geoheritage. Its management history exemplifies how a tourism site can evolve from a sacred retreat into a professionally managed public attraction, governed through a collaborative effort between the government and local communities. This transformation began as a community-driven initiative, which later transitioned into a more structured management system under Pokdarwis Wisata Jati, an organization that plays a pivotal role in the preservation, development, and promotion of the site.

Through a "Bottom-Up" approach, the local community actively participates in community-based tourism management, with support from the government in the form of training programs and capacity-building initiatives. Although historical and cultural tourism tends to develop at a slower pace compared to modern photo-centric tourism trends, the sustainable management and conservation of Kiskendo Cave remain essential to maintaining its appeal as an authentic historical and ecotourism site.

Further research is needed to explore optimal strategies for integrating cultural tourism and geotourism with emerging tourism trends, ensuring that Kiskendo Cave remains attractive to visitors across generations. Additionally, studies on the socioeconomic impact of community-based tourism management, as well as the effectiveness of the Pokdarwis model in heritage tourism and environmental conservation, are crucial for enhancing tourism governance. Furthermore, digital marketing strategies and tourism technology innovations present compelling areas of research to support the sustainability and competitiveness of Kiskendo Cave amidst the rapid evolution of global tourism trends.

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