



# HISTORICAL WALKING TOUR IN LASEM: A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract.** This paper intends to describe one village in Lasem, named Babagan, through the lens of the local tour guide. This study used ethnohistory to describe past events. It means the locals are positioned as a subject of knowledge producers. This work focuses on Babagan, as part of the Lasem District and located in Central Java. Babagan has a long and captivating history, shaped by its vibrant trade connections, architectural treasures, and diverse cultural influences. The tour takes participants on a journey through the town's significant landmarks, weaving together stories of the past and present to provide a holistic understanding of Lasem's cultural tapestry. Led by knowledgeable local guides, the tour ensures an authentic and engaging experience. Visitors will witness the Chinese architectural marvels. They will also explore the Chinese temples and the batik-art galleries. Throughout the tour, participants will encounter local artisans, historians, and residents, who will share their personal stories, anecdotes, and insights into the town's heritage. This intimate interaction fosters a deeper appreciation for Lasem's history, customs, and traditions. Visitors will also have the opportunity to taste the local cuisine, witness vibrant cultural performances, and explore local markets, where they can engage with the bustling community and discover unique souvenirs. By showcasing Lasem through a local lens, the Tour offers a more nuanced understanding of the town's heritage, going beyond surface-level attractions. It encourages cultural exchange, promotes sustainable tourism practices, and supports the preservation of Lasem's historical legacy.

**Keywords:** Babagan history, Chinese architecture, Lasem, walking tour

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism is a tourism activity that is packaged by visiting meaningful and historical places. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourist visits to heritage objects have experienced significant growth since 2005. Tourists choose to experience travel in places that have historical character [1]. Many countries have exploited their historical destinations and introduced the heritage trail concept [2]–[4]. The tour guides package the historical destinations in a series of

interesting stories. Usually, tour guides invite tourists to go through historic destinations on foot or what is commonly called a walking tour.

Many Indonesian cosmopolitan cities, including Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and Ternate, have historical stories which are interesting if it is used as tourist attractions. Some historical communities utilize historical potential to organize historical trips. Instead of those big cities, sub-district cities also have historical stories that can be packaged into heritage trails and be visited on foot. One of them is Lasem District, one of the sub-districts in Rembang Regency. Handinoto [5] points out that Lasem developed earlier than Rembang. Lasem had become a prominent port city from the Majapahit period to the arrival of the Dutch colonial. However, after 1750, the district capital was moved to Rembang, and Lasem's existence was lowered to become a district town.

Lasem took part in important historical events, such as the Chinese War against the Dutch 1740-1743. At that time, many Chinese in Batavia fled to avoid the Dutch and chose Lasem to rescue their life. In Lasem, the locals welcomed the Chinese and allied against the Dutch. Lasem seems to be the safest place for the Chinese during the war. More Chinese came to and settled in Lasem [6]. According to Pratiwo [7]; Handinoto [5]; and Unjiya [8], the number of Chinese who came and formed the Chinese settlements may have occurred since the Majapahit period and increased during the Sino-Dutch War also known as the Yellow War.

We could find the historical traces of the Chinese settlements including the Chinese houses, established from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Chinese have mingled with the locals. One of the villages that has many Chinese settlements is Babagan Village. Most of the Chinese in Babagan who live in ancient houses have ancient batik businesses that have been run for generations. In addition, in Babagan Village there is a temple, namely the Gong Bio Temple, in which one of the rooms honours the Yellow War hero of Javanese descent, Raden Panji Margono.

Tour guides who can build historical narratives with good persuasive stories can connect tourists who come with the places they visit. This can touch visitors' emotions [9]. In line, [10] explains that tour guides and tourists need to work together to jointly build story narratives. The historical traces in Babagan Village are used by residents, namely Pokdarwis (a tourism awareness group) as a historical tourist attraction in the village. Pokdarwis collaborates with the Swarga Lasem community and the Kesengsem Lasem community to package the historical traces in Babagan Village under the tagline of "Kisah Lampah Mbagan (Babagan Story)" walking tour. Mbagan is the short name of Babagan. The collaboration between Pokdarwis and Swarga Lasem has created an interpretive heritage tour in Babagan Village. They make a series of visits from one destination to another related and have an interesting story. This paper will describe historical tourism that is packaged by residents in a walking tour in Babagan.

## 2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study used an ethnohistorical method with a qualitative approach. Creswell [11] explains that ethnographic research is not only the study of culture but also the study of the social behaviour of identifiable groups of people (one community of local tour

guides). This article examines the behaviour of local people who are aware of the potential of the surrounding environment to become something that has added value. The Pokdarwis of Babagan Village in collaboration with Swarga Lasem and Kesengsem Lasem packed heritage sites in the village into a heritage trail tour which was carried out on foot. This research involved three tourism organizing communities, namely Pokdarwis Babagan Village, Swarga Lasem Community, and Kesengsem Lasem Community. Apart from that, researchers were also involved in planning the walking tour activities. The researcher discussed with the chairman of Pokdarwis Babagan, the chairman of the Swarga Lasem Community, as well as members of Kesengsem Lasem about organizing a walking tour. The chairman of Pokdarwis proposed his village as a walking tour destination. Therefore, this study was conducted in Babagan Village, Lasem District, Rembang Regency. Babagan Village is one of the villages which is a heritage area by Regent Regulation No. 47 of 2019.

The data were obtained by participatory observation and documentation. The researchers observed by following activity planning, implementation, and promotion. In addition, observations were made to obtain a general description of Babagan Tourism Village, identification of heritage tourism potential, and heritage tourism packaging strategies. Primary data sources were obtained from facts in the field during two-week observations and documentation.

### **3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Heritage Tourism Potential in Babagan Village, Lasem District, Rembang Regency**

Babagan Village is one of the villages in Lasem District which administratively borders the area to the north of Gedongmulyo Village, to the south of Karasgede Village, to the east of Karangturi Village, and to the west of Dorokandang Village. Babagan Village is located 2 km from the sub-district government center and 13 km from the district capital—the existence of Babagan Village according to history, used to be an anchorage or a ship berth. During the Majapahit Kingdom, this area became the main port which included Kaeringan (kiringan), Segoro Sawah, Pohlandak and Bonang. According to Babad Tanah Jawi, Raden Patah's eldest son Surowiyoto became Adipati Babagan Lasem under the rule of the Demak Kingdom (Mandaka & Mustika, 2021). The Chinese War of 1740-1743 increased the number of Chinese refugees from Batavia to Lasem. Since the Chinese defeat, the Chinese settlements in rural Lasem were moved to the west of the Lasem River, called Babagan. Then the Dutch built a Lasem native affairs office in Babagan.

We could find the historical relics in Babagan Village today. It would be better if these historical sites were developed as heritage tourism attractions. These historical buildings include: places of worship for the Confucian religion, namely: (1) the Gyong Bio Temple which has an interesting story about the construction of the place of worship; (2) Chinese settlements whose original buildings are still maintained today. The Chinese who lived in ancient houses used the house as a home industry. The Chinese

run the batik home industries. However, some are pursuing other industries, such as processing soy sauce. In addition, several ancient Chinese architecture houses in Babagan are only used as residences. (3) The grave of Han We Sing, who was the First Chinese Kapitan when he landed in Lasem is in Babagan Village. The myth about the curse of Han We Sing for his offspring is still believed today. (4) Hoo Hap Building, a meeting hall for the Chinese in Lasem. (5) A lemonade factory that has existed since the 1950s. (6) Batik home industry occupied by the Javanese. Babagan Village is also a batik tourism village sponsored by BNI (Bank Negara Indonesia or Indonesian National Bank). (6) Former source of electricity and housing for electricity workers in Babagan Village. (7) KAI employee's house and a former railroad track whose station is in Dorokandang Village. (8) Babagan River, which in Mas Lasem became a port city for the Majapahit Kingdom, the river became a place for merchants to hold ships or boats.

### **3.2 Historical Walking Tour: The Heritage Tourism Packaging in Babagan Village**

The local community has tried to package the potential of historical sites in their area into attractive tourist attractions. The heads of the Pokdarwis of Babagan Village, the Swarga Lasem Community, and the Kesengsem Lasem Community make tour packages of historical sites by inviting tourists to walk along the historical trails there. He has long been pursuing historical preservation activities through his Instagram social media platform @pusakalase. He actively introduces the potential for historical tourism in Lasem in general and Babagan Village in particular. He is also active as the manager of the Nyah Lasem Museum which is located in Karangturi Village, Lasem District. Swarga Lasem is a local community of Lasem residents who are active in promoting tourism potential, local wisdom, and local culinary, and cultural activities in Lasem. This community uses the Instagram social media platform to introduce Lasem to the wider community. The community leader explained that he is working with other media to expand promotion. According to him, media partners are an important element in the promotion of tourist destinations so that they are more quickly recognized by potential tourists. The media partner who works with the community is Instagram social media which raises news about Rembang Regency, such as @rembangupdate; @explorerembang; @explorelasem; @kesengsemilasem; and @info\_rembang. This statement is by [12]–[14] who explain social media as a mega trend that has a significant influence on the tourism system. Social media influences tourists in making decisions.

The Chairperson of the Pokdarwis of Babagan Village and Swarga Lasem make an effort to attract tourists to Lasem. They make a tour package for historical walks in the village. Besides aiming at attracting tourists, this activity also introduces the potential of local history for the local Lasem community. The packaging of historical tour packages in Babagan Village consists of the following aspects:

### 3.2.1 Branding

The branding that is by the historical walking activities in Babagan Village is the Lampah Mbagan Story. The branding means that tourists are invited to go beyond (travel) historical stories in Babagan Village. Through this branding, tourists are invited to remember the heroic events that took place in the village, the maritime glory of Babagan Village as a boat/ship berth, as well as the development of the batik and culinary home industry which is still being continued to this day. In addition to learning history, through this tour, tourists and local people are expected to have awareness to protect the ancient buildings they have. It is also hoped that this can move the village government to have awareness of supporting the maintenance of ancient buildings in the village. The branding of Lambah Mbagan Stories was proposed by one of the members of the Kesengsem Lasem Community.

The Lampah Story Mbagan Tour is an invitation to tourists to take a trip down memory lane and reminisce about the glorious past of the village when Lasem was a famous city town. According to Tan & Teoh [15], cultural heritage tourism's strengths lie in presenting nostalgia, authenticity, and the diaspora of the people who currently live in the region. Babagan Village still has Peranakan Chinese residents who migrated from China and settled in Babagan. They live in ancient houses and continue their businesses passed down from generation to generation, such as Batik Lasem.

### 3.2.2 The Route of Kisah Lampah Mbagan Historical Walking Tour

The historical walking tour of the *Kisah Lampah Mbagan* begins at Gie Yong Bio Temple and ends at the Hoo Hap Building. The activity starts at 08:00-11:00 AM. This journey invites tourists to explore historical sites in the village on foot. The activity is attended by 15 people from various regions. The tourists come from Rembang, Kediri, and Malang, among others. The route for the historical walking tour activity is described as follows:

#### 3.2.2.1 Meeting Point and First Stop: Gie Yong Bio Temple

The meeting point for the Lampah Mbagan Story is agreed to be at Gie Yong Bio Temple. This place was chosen as the meeting point because it has a spacious parking area, allowing visitors to park their vehicles directly at the temple's parking lot. Moreover, this location is easily recognizable by tourists from both within and outside the Lasem area, as the temple is well-known among the local community. The first stop of the tour also takes place at this temple.

At the beginning of the activity, the tour guide invites the tourists to introduce themselves. Then, the activity proceeds with the tour guide recounting the origin of the name Babagan Village. Here is the story shared by the tour guide:

The name of Babagan Village itself is derived from the name of the Babagan River, which was used as a docking place for merchant ships. However, it is unfortunate that the river is currently poorly maintained, so during the rainy season, the river tends to overflow into the riverbanks, which are now densely populated with residential houses.

Additionally, there is a lot of scattered trash in the river. Despite its historical value, the river has not been revitalized by the local government to enhance its usefulness. In Babagan, there is a significant heroic story that deserves to be remembered and serves as an example for the local younger generation residing in the village”.

One of the regents of Lasem, named Wironegoro, married Nyai Ageng Maloka, and from their marriage, a daughter named Putri Solekah was born. Putri Solekah married Raden Patah (the first king of the Demak Kingdom) and had a son named Pangeran Surowiyoto. Pangeran Surowiyoto was entrusted as the regent of Babagan. When Raden Patah passed away, the Demak Kingdom should have been led by Pangeran Surowiyoto, considering he was the eldest son of Raden Patah. However, due to palace intrigues, a power struggle for the Demak throne occurred, leading to a tragic event where Pangeran Surowiyoto was murdered in the Babagan River to prevent him from becoming the Sultan of Demak. This incident is estimated to have taken place around the 1500-1600s. This story marks the beginning of the existence of Babagan Village.

In the 1700s, when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) began colonizing parts of Indonesia, they also entered the Lasem area. From 1740 to 1743, a war broke out between the Chinese-Javanese alliance and the Dutch, starting in Batavia. The war began with the massacre of ethnic Chinese in Batavia. Many Chinese managed to escape and seek refuge in Lasem because, at that time, the regent of Lasem (Pangeran Wedyoningrat) had Chinese ancestry. The war spread to Lasem. The locals refer to this period as the Lasem War or the Yellow War. The Yellow War in Lasem brought together the Chinese, Javanese, and Islamic religious leaders, including their students, to collectively fight against the Dutch. Although the war ultimately resulted in the defeat of the people of Lasem, a monument was erected in front of Gie Yong Bio Temple as a tribute to the heroes of Lasem. During the VOC's control of Rembang, the residents dared not mention that the monument commemorated the fallen heroes of the Yellow War.

Interestingly, during the 1700s, there was a movement among the Chinese called the "Pintu Merah" (Red Door). The members of this movement displayed statues of the Chinese God of War. Until now, the majority of Chinese households in Babagan Village display the God of War (Kwan Kong), including in this temple where the worshipped deity is the God of War. One day, a Chinese family manuscript belonging to the "Pintu Merah" (Red Door) movement was discovered. They had direct connections with people from China. The association made donations and established businesses such as Batik to support the struggle of the people of Lasem because the Chinese community never compromised with the Dutch. In this place, there is also a statue of a Javanese person named Panji Margono, who was supposed to be the regent of Lasem. He voluntarily stepped down from his position and chose to live as an ordinary person. He handed over his position to his friend, a Muslim Chinese resident named Oei Ing Kiat, also known as Pangeran Wedyoningrat. Raden Panji Margono and Pangeran Wedyoningrat united to fight against the VOC during the Lasem War. Therefore, the Chinese community in Lasem, especially in Babagan, greatly respects them. The statue of Raden Panji Margono is also considered one of the deities of the Chinese community. The respect for him is placed in one of the rooms in Gie Yong Bio Temple.

Another unique aspect is that during that time, the Chinese residents in Lasem were more inclined to embrace Islam. This is mentioned in Diponegoro's notes, stating, "Wong-wong Cina di Lasem wes akeh sing masuk agama Rasul" (Many Chinese people in Lasem have converted to the religion of the Prophet). Diponegoro himself felt that he fell from grace because of his attraction to a Chinese woman from Lasem. He was a leader who acknowledged his mistake in this regard.

### **3.2.2.2 The second stop: Nyo Wat Cai Batik House**

On the second stop of this trip, the tour guide takes the tourists to visit the Nyo Wat Cai Batik House. Currently, the batik house is no longer in operation. The batik industry was established around the 1950s. The tour guide shares that during a cultural heritage building survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture, they managed to enter the house and found family records of the previous residents. In those records, it was mentioned that the batik was marketed to Bali.

The tour guide explains the main entrance to the batik house. The main characteristic of old Chinese houses is that the main house is in the centre, with buildings on the left and right sides. The roofs of Chinese houses have symbolic meanings related to the social status of the residents. If the roof resembles a horse saddle, it indicates that the residents are ordinary citizens, while a roof shaped like a wallet's tail signifies that the residents are government officials. These Chinese houses have maintained their authenticity, with traditional gladak houses made of thick teak wood. The tour guide invites us to explore the house. However, caution must be exercised while walking around the house due to the uneven and damaged condition of the path.

### **3.2.2.3 The third stop: Han Wee Sing's Tomb**

The journey continues to Han Wee Sing's Tomb. According to folklore, Han Wee Sing had several children, but they were not filial, so when he passed away, his children couldn't bury him. It was raining heavily, and the next morning, his children found that their father's body had been buried on its own. In the folk story, it is told that when Han Wee Sing died, his children sought donations to bury him, but the money was used for gambling. However, according to Claudine Salmon's research, Han Wee Sing was a wealthy family. He was a Muslim Chinese man who married the daughter of the Rajekwesi regent, which is now part of Bojonegoro Regency. Many of his children became important figures in government and business. Some of Han Wee Sing's children were even fluent in foreign languages. Due to the competition between Han Wee Sing's business and the Dutch government, his business operations were prohibited.

At this point, the tourists are only taken to the signpost pointing towards Han Wee Sing's tomb. This is because the path leading to the tomb is muddy from overnight rain, and the road to the tomb has not been paved and is still made of soil.

#### **3.2.2.4 The fourth stop: Rumah Dua Putri (Oma Lena)**

The journey continues to Rumah Dua Putri. In the past, this house had a batik business. Some of the vintage batiks made in this house were unfinished in the dyeing process, so they were only coloured red. The house's batik production ceased in the 1970s. When stopping at Rumah Dua Putri, the tour guide invites tourists to buy traditional herbal drinks that are sold around the area. In addition to strolling through the village, the tour guide also encourages tourists to shop for local snacks and treats in the village.

#### **3.2.2.5 The fifth stop: Former Railway Track (Rel Cinta)**

Continuing to another destination, we arrived at the site of the former railway track that connected Lasem Station in Dorokandang Village to Rembang Station. The tour guide explains that during the Dutch colonial period until the New Order era, Lasem had a railway line. However, in the 1980s during the New Order era, the Lasem railway line was discontinued. During the crisis in 1998, residents looted the railway track's iron and sold it, resulting in the loss of many tracks. Only two rows of tracks remain along the roadside, as the village head pleaded with the residents not to take away these two tracks as a remembrance that there used to be a railway line in Lasem. In the past, this railway track area was filled with houses. Records mention that the batik trade and even the tile trade were transported through the railway. The railway track remains are located on the side of the road leading to Sungai Bagan. The journey continues to Sungai Bagan.

#### **3.2.2.6 The sixth stop: Sungai Babagan**

At the sixth stop, tourists are invited to see the remains of the river that used to serve as a docking place for ships or boats. The tour guide explains the following:

"This is Sungai Babagan, as mentioned earlier, it used to be the anchorage for boats of traders in Lasem. If the river overflowed, the floodwaters reached the riverbanks and even entered the houses of residents. As a result, some houses were relocated to higher ground due to the flooding. There is a story that during the Japanese occupation, Japanese ships could navigate through the former course of Sungai Babagan."

While walking along the banks of Sungai Babagan, tourists are advised to be cautious as the path consists of clay soil that can become slippery when wet. Currently, the river's flow has been diverted to a different route. However, during heavy rain, water still accumulates in the basin of the former riverbed.

#### **3.2.2.7 The seventh stop: Former Power Plant**

In the 1980s, electricity was introduced to Babagan Village. The tour guide explains the history of the power plant in the village. Before the 1980s, there was a power plant in Babagan Village that supplied electricity to the entire Rembang Regency with a capacity of 110 V. The relocation of the power plant was due to the increased power



demand, which now uses 220 V, leading to the establishment of new production facilities.

Accessibility to the former power plant can be considered poor as the road is not paved, and the path is overgrown with wild grass that is not well-maintained. Access to the site can only be done on foot or using two-wheeled vehicles such as bicycles or motorcycles. Without a local tour guide, it would be difficult for tourists to find the place. Currently, the area surrounding the site is filled with trees and wild plants. If the power plant holds historical value, the residents together with the local government should take care of the building. The structure of the former power plant still exists, but it has been abandoned and neglected for a long time.

### **3.2.2.8 The eighth stop: Railway Employees Housing**

Approximately 1 km from the former Lasem Station, some houses used to belong to railway employees. The tour guide explains that this place used to be a residential area for railway employees. One resident shared that many people here moved away due to the G30S/PKI turmoil and the discontinuation of train operations. Currently, only a few retired railway employees still occupy these houses. Access to the residential area can also be considered difficult to reach. Surrounding the housing area for retired railway employees, there are traditional Javanese houses with a joglo-style architecture, but with a more modern touch, as the walls are made of brick. Visitors can only reach the place on foot or by bicycle.

### **3.2.2.9 The ninth stop: Katrin Batik House**

The tour guide invites the tourists to visit a traditional batik-making place in Lasem that still preserves ancient techniques. In the Babagan Village, many batik houses uphold the traditional methods of batik making. One of them is Katrin Batik House. We are shown the dyeing process carried out by several female workers. The Batik house is managed by Bu Katrin, the owner, and it has been operating since the 1970s. They create typical Lasem motifs such as "sekar jagad," "tiga negeri," "lerek mbaganan," and other designs. The employees in the batik house are residents.

Around Katrin Batik House, there is a cluster of Chinese settlements with sturdy fences. The tall walls surrounding the houses are still intact. The tour guide explains that these Chinese settlements are part of the Chinatown area in Babagan. However, it is unfortunate that behind those high walls, many old houses have been demolished, either due to changes in ownership or the contents of the houses being sold to collectors. This poses a challenge for the local government to prevent the destruction of buildings and the sale of their contents if the area is designated as a cultural heritage site.

### **3.2.2.10 The tenth stop: Saeniki Home Industry of Lemon Drinks**

After the tourists have explored the historical sites in Babagan Village and feeling a bit tired, we are taken to a home industry that produces lemon drinks. We enjoy the refreshing taste of the lemon beverage mixed with ice cubes. This drink was popular in

the 1990s and was one of the products made in Lasem. The drink is made from fruit extracts mixed with soda. The current owner of the lemon drink production is the third generation of the family.

### 3.2.2.11 The eleventh Stop: The Hoo Hap Building

The Hoo Hap building is the final destination of the journey. It serves as a meeting place for the Chinese community in Lasem. The building is managed by a foundation established by the local Chinese residents. In front of the Hoo Hap Building, there are many old houses with a Chinese atmosphere, one of which is owned by a Chinese resident known as Uncle Jun. However, during the visit, the tour guide only takes us to see the house from the outside, as the owner is already quite elderly. The tour guide concludes the historical walking tour of Kisah Lampah Mbagan, and the tourists are free to return home or continue exploring the sights in Babagan on their own.

## 4 CONCLUSION

The effort to package the historical tourism of Babagan Village under the branding of "Kisah Lampah Mbagan" by the residents is an effort that deserves appreciation. This activity is expected to attract the interest of visitors to visit the Heritage City of Lasem. The historical walking tour of "Kisah Lampah Babagan" invites tourists to explore the historical tourist destinations of the village on foot. So far, the tour guide has taken tourists to explore 11 historical sites in Babagan. There are more historical sites in the village, but due to time constraints, the tour guide has created an itinerary with 11 places to visit. This also takes into consideration the conditions in Lasem, which is located on the northern coast of Java and can be scorching during the day. Therefore, the tour guide designs the trip to be completed before noon, before the sun gets too hot.

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