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Cultural Objects and Traditions of *Negeri Soya* of Ambon as a Tourist Attraction¹

by

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Abstract

Ambon is one of the beautiful cities in Moluccas (Maluku) archipelago. Beside old forts and Portuguese and Dutch colonial heritage churches, the city has *negeris* and villages. A *negeri* is a unitary community of customary law. One of the *negeris* is named Soya (hereinafter referred to as *Negeri Soya*). It is one of the 22 *negeris* in Ambon that still maintains cultural traditions and customs handed down by their ancestors, both in tangible form (cultural objects) and intangible one (traditions and customs).

The data gathering technique of this study was carried out by in-depth interviews with Mr. and Mrs. *Raja* (kings of the *negeris*), some members of the *Negeri Soya's saniri* and the people of *Negeri Soya*. The author also visited the cultural objects.

The results of the study shows that *Negeri Soya's* culture and tradition riches have been preserved since ancient times when their ancestors arrived. The cultural objects include Teung Stones that are scattered in the territory of *Negeri Soya*. The stones are believed as the embodiment of the boat that brought the ancestors from their homeland on Seram Island. In addition there are Baileo, the King's house, Soya church, old Sirimau jars, and other cultural objects. One of the traditions that is still alive today is the *Negeri Washing* which is held on Friday of the second week of December. The cultural and traditional wealth needs to be managed better to become one of the Ambon's tourism attractions.

Keywords: traditional *negeri*, *Negeri Soya*, cultural objects, the richness of Indonesian traditions.

INTRODUCTION

Ambon is the largest city in Maluku Province and becomes the capital of the province. The city is located at Ambon Island having land area 359.45 km² and ocean area 17.55 km². According to the Government Regulation Nr. 13/1977 the administrative area of Ambon City covers 377 Km² or 2/5 (two fifth) of the Ambon Island. Geographically, the City is located at 3° 34' 8.40" – 3° 47' 42.00" South Latitude and 128° 1' 33.60" – 128° 18' 3.60" East Longitude with administrative boundaries as follows :

1. To the north, it is bordered by villages of Hitu, Hila and Kaitetu from the Leihitu sub-district of Central Maluku Regency.
2. To the south, it is bordered by the Banda sea.

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3. To the east, it is bordered by villages of Suli of Salahutu sub-district, Central Maluku Regency.
4. In the west, it is bordered by villages of Hatu of West Leihitu sub-district, Central Maluku Regency.

Ambon City includes 5 (five) sub-districts consisting of 30 (thirty) *negeris* and 20 (twenty) urban villages⁴.

The city of Ambon or Ambong, locally pronounced as [ʔambo:ŋ]⁵, originated from the construction of a Portuguese fort in 1575 under the government of the Governor Gazapar de Mello. The fort was named Nossa Senhora da Annunciada which means that this is where Our Lady was built⁶. In 1605 the City and the fort were captured by the Dutch under the leadership of Captain Steven van Derhagen. He then changed the name of the fort into Fort Victoria which means victory⁷. For the time being the fort is used as the Pattimura Military Command Headquarters.

Ambon city has a variety of historical relics ranging from the megalithic period to the Japanese colonial era and they are still well preserved. The megalithic relics in the form of artifacts both in museums and those that are stored by the community. The Portuguese and the Dutch colonialization left many forts that are well preserved until today. In addition, there are relics in the form of old churches and old mosques built at the time of the Portuguese colonialization. In some places there are Japanese caves that became hiding places during the war against Japan.

One of the *negeris* which is geographically located in the center of Ambon City is *Negeri Soya*. *Negeri Soya*'s territory starts from the top of Mount Sirimau to the central area of Ambon City, even the Ambon's government center building is in the territory of the *negeri*. *Negeri Soya* is a *negeri* that still strongly maintains its traditions and cultural objects. The tradition that is still routinely carried out is the *Negeri Washing*. The tradition is held every year on the second week of December. When the tradition takes place the members of *Negeri Soya* who do not live in the *negeri* will return to take part celebrating it. In addition, there are various cultural objects that are still being guarded by the people of *Negeri Soya*. These traditions and cultural objects need to be promoted as tourism attractions in order to attract both domestic and foreign tourists to visit *Negeri Soya* and Ambon in general.

PROBLEMS

⁴ Ambon City Government website, <https://ambon.go.id/keadaan-geografis/>, accessed on July 4, 2022.

⁵ Takaria, C. Pieter, 1998, *Kamus Bahasa Melayu Ambon - Indonesia*, Jakarta: Ministry of Education and Culture p. 6.

⁶ Mezak Wakim, 2014, *Sejarah Benteng Victoria: Cikal Bakal Kota Ambon*, Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya Ambon, <https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/bpnbmaluku/2014/08/13/sejarah-benteng-victoria-cikal-bakal-kota-ambon/>, accessed July 4, 2022.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Based on the description of the background above the problems studied in this paper are as follows:

1. What traditions and cultural and traditional objects that attract tourists to visit *Negeri Soya*
- 2.. What efforts should be made in order to attract tourists visiting *Negeri Soya*?

METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were in the form of primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained by conducting in-depth interviews with community leaders of *Negeri Soya*, namely: Mr. and Mrs. *Raja* (kings), *Negeri Soya*'s Saniri and the people of *Negeri Soya*. Interviews and direct visits to the cultural objects were conducted in the period of September 2021 to December 2021.

DISCUSSION

1. *Negeri Soya*'s Tourism Potential

Creative economy is a process of developing economic capability and increasing people's income by managing the potential and new ideas in a particular area. One of the economic fields that has the potential to be developed by creative economy is tourism. Currently the Government is encouraging the progress of the creative economy by increasing the tourism potential of the smallest community by promoting the formation of tourist villages. Hary Hermawan defines a tourist village as an area of rural environment that has a tourist attraction based on its local wisdom such as customs, culture, and natural wealth that has uniqueness and authenticity of rural atmosphere characteristics. The rural areas that are managed as tourist villages usually have more than one or a combination of agrotourism, cultural tourism, and ecotourism in a particular area⁸. Along with the Government's efforts to promote the people's welfare by promoting the creative economy, many regions are improving and encouraging to develop tourist villages⁹.

As a *negeri Soya* has some points of attraction that can be developed as a tourist destinations. Moreover the visiting tourists can also enjoy other beauty of Ambon Island which has many Portuguese and Dutch heritage forts, old churches with their architectural beauty spreading over several areas in Ambon Island beside Wapauwe mosque which as the oldest mosque in Maluku built in 1414. Ambon also offers natural tourism with its beautiful white sandy beaches. Culinary tours of fresh sea fish are available in many parts of

⁸ Hary Hermawan, "Dampak Pengembangan Desa Wisata Nglanggeran terhadap Ekonomi Masyarakat Lokal" *Jurnal Pariwisata*, Vol. III No. 2 September 2016, ISSN: 2355-6587, e-ISSN: 2528-2220, <http://ejournal/index.php/jp>, p. 107.

⁹ In general the word *desa* is used to refer a certain region or territory although some areas use other terms such as *nagari* in West Sumatera and *negeri* in Maluku referring a traditional village.

the island as well as seawater pearl crafts which are the superior products in the Maluku islands and white iron craft which is a typical product of Maluku and of course the very famous eucalyptus oil.

2. History of *Negeri Soya*

The land of Soya (formerly known as Zoja) is one of the oldest *negeri* in Leitimor Peninsula. *Negeri Soya* was formerly a kingdom in Ambon island which was formed around the 13th century¹⁰. Based on narratives and stories from traditional elders the ancestors who inhabited *Negeri Soya* came from Nusa Ina (Seram Island), among others, from North Seram, more or less near Sawai, an area called "Soya", and from West Seram (Marga Soplanit comes from around the Tala area)¹¹.

The ancestors of the Soya people came in waves and settled in a *negeri* now called Soya. The naming "*Negeri Soya*" took the same name as the country where they used to live in Seram Island. They formed a new clan with the same name as their clan in their home *negeri*. The same naming was intended as a remembrance of their home *negeri*¹². *Negeri Soya* then developed and became a kingdom led by the first king named Latu Selemau¹³ and his consort Pera Ina. The kingdom is the oldest kingdom in Leitimor Peninsula having nine small countries ruled by King Soya.

Negeri Soya is located right on the edge of Ambon City and it is often referred to as the forerunner of Ambon City. Soya is the oldest *negeri* in Ambon having Mount Sirimau peak as its icon, The *negeri* is located at an altitude of 464 M above sea level and the air temperature range is generally 20--30 C. Visitors can reach *Negeri Soya* by any type of vehicle along winding but smooth road conditions and it is approximately 4 km from the center of Ambon City.

Administratively *Negeri Soya* is bordered by several *negeris*. In the east it is bordered by *negeris* of Hutumuri and Laehari. In the west it is bordered by Urimesing *negeri*. To the south it is bordered by *negeris* of Hatalae, Naku, Refinery, and Ema. To the north, it is bordered by *negeris* of Halong and Passo. The total area of Soya is 6000 hectares and it is dominated by community plantations, and settlements¹⁴.

3. Cultural Wealth and Traditions of *Negeri Soya*

¹⁰ https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negeri_Soya, accessed on September 1, 2021. This statement was confirmed by a resource person from *Saniri Negeri* of Soya in a focus group discussion held on September 17, 2021.

¹¹ Based on the narrative of Mr. Martin Huwa and the focus group discussion held on September 17 at Soya.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The word "Latu" means "King" and "Selemau" or often called Salemang comes from the word Soleman, that is a king coming from the Java. Latu Selemau is often also called Latu Putih. Latu Selemau used to be a muslim. Source: *ibid.*

¹⁴ https://repository.uksw.edu/bitstream/123456789/17552/4/T1_352013015_BAB%20IV.pdf

Soya is one of the *negeris* having highly cultural valued past relics beside customs that have been preserved from generation to generation. The cultural wealth and customs are to be attractions for tourists to visit *Negeri Soya* and Ambon in general. The cultural wealth and customs include:

a. Baileo Samasuru

Almost every traditional *negeri* in Ambon has a baileo. A baileo or a hall, in general, has the meaning of a traditional house. Baileo serves as a place for deliberations of citizens as well as a place to carry out traditional ceremonies. Although it is often referred to as a “traditional house” baileo is not always in the form of a house. Baileo of *Negeri Soya* is in the form of flat land or an open space and was named "Baileo Samasuru". It is marked by an inscription stating that in that place is located Baileo Samasuru. In a baileo there are priority values of the people of a *negeri*, namely kinship, harmony, deliberation and consensus. Therefore, Baileo Samasuru is used when there are important events for the *negeri*, such as king's inauguration, *negeri* washing ceremony and so on. The Baileo will usually be cleaned before the *negeri* washing ceremony which is held on Friday of the second week of December.



Figure 1: Baileo Samasuru Site (September 2021)

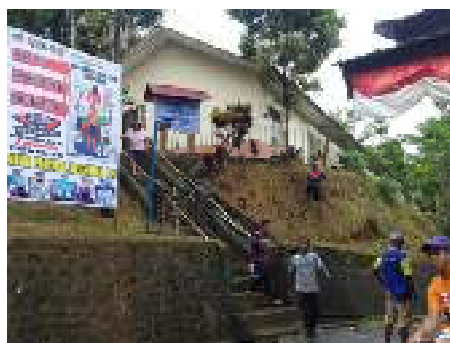


Figure 2: Soya citizens carry out a *Pica Negeri* ceremony that is to clean the environment around Baileo Samasuru before *negeri* washing ceremony 2021.

b. Teong Stone

Based on the narratives and stories from traditional elders the ancestors who inhabited the *Negeri Soya* came from Nusa Ina (Seram Island), among others, from North Seram, more or less near Sawai that was an area called "Soya", and from West Seram (Soplanit clan coming from around the Tala area)¹⁵. The ancestors of the Soya people came in waves, and then settled in a *negeri* now called Soya. The naming *Negeri Soya* took the name from the *negeri* where they used to live on Seram Island. They formed a new clan with the same name as their clan before. The same naming is intended as a remembrance of their home *negeri*¹⁶.

What is the relationship between the ancestral migration of *Negeri Soya* and teong stone? Teong stone is believed to be a stone brought from their ancestral *negeri* in Nusa Ina. The stone is believed to always connect between the people of *Negeri Soya* and their ancestors.

Currently there are 13 teong stones found in *Negeri Soya* scattering throughout the village to the top of mount Sirimau. The teong stone is owned by the *mata rumah (rumah tau)* who remains living in *Negeri Soya*. The 13 teong stones are:

1. Teong Samurele for *rumah tau* of Rehatta
2. Teong Soupele for *rumah tau* of Huwaa
3. Teong Paisina for *rumah tau* of Pesulima
4. Teong Souhitsu for *rumah tau* of Tamtelahittu
5. Teong Rulimena for *rumah tau* of Soplanit
6. Teong Pelatiti for *rumah tau* of Latumallea
7. Teong Hauari for *rumah tau* of Latumaweney
8. Teong Soulana for *rumah tau* of de Wana
9. Teong Soukori for *rumah tau* of Salakory
10. Teong Soumulu for *rumah tau* of Ririmasse
11. Teong Romanian for *rumah tau* of Hahuri
12. Teong Neurumanguang for *rumah tau* of Latupatty and
13. Teong Tonisou¹⁷.

Lucas Wattimena¹⁸ says that the *teong stone* has two functions, namely:

- 1) As a site marker meaning an evidence that certain human/community activities were carried out at the location. The site is named after the groups of human migration.

¹⁵ Based on the narrative of Mr. Martin Huwa and the focus group discussion held on September 17 at Soya.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Interview with Mr. King John Lodewijk Rehatta on September 21, 20221. An article states that there are 14 *teong stones* in *Negeri Soya* but one is missing, not found.

¹⁸ Lucas Wattimena, "Batu Teong di Pegunungan Kota Ambon, Kepulauan Ambon Lease", *Kapata Arkeologi*, Vol 12, No. 2. p. 215.

2) As the identity of the origin of the *mata rumah*/clan¹⁹.

In addition to these two functions, based on in-depth interview with Mr. Elkyopas, teong stone has another function of uniting the descendants of *rumah tau*'s members. The teong stone's name is even mentioned when people hold traditional ceremonies, including in a marriage proposal.

These teong stones are treated and given special markers so that the *negeri*'s members know what the teong stones are called and which *rumah tau* they belong to. The teong stones are not given special offerings such as flowers or certain foods or incense or certain fragrances as is often found on the island of Java. One of the teong stones is Samurele teong stone belonging to Rehatta's *rumah tau*.



Picture 3: Samurele teong stone belonging to Rehatta's *rumah tau*

c. Sirimau Old Crock

Another relic that is very meaningful for the people of the *Negeri Soya* is an old crock which is located at the top of mount Sirimau. The crock is believed to be a sacred and lucky object. It never runs out of water even in the dry season and the water is believed to have medicinal properties. Many people came to visit the crock and to ask for healing from various diseases.

Even though the people of *Negeri Soya* believe that the water never runs dry if they visit the crock insincerely or with unclean heart they will find that the crock dry, no water in it. This belief makes the Sirimau old crock become one of the tourist attractions of *Negeri Soya*.

¹⁹ The people of *Negeri Soya* use the term of *rumah tau*.



Picture 4: Sirimau Old Crock
Source: Primary data, September 2021.

Beside the old crock, at the same site, there are stones which are believed as the seats of the King and the knights guarding the King.

d. Soya Church

Another cultural heritage worth visiting when exploring *Negeri Soya* is the Soya church. The church is located at the foot of mount Sirimau, not far from Baileo Samasuru. The church becomes one of the icons in *Negeri Soya* because of its beautiful shape and structure. The uniqueness of Soya church is the fact that it was built in European-style architecture. The church was estimated to have been built around 1546. In 2002 the church was burned down but was soon rebuilt with the same shape and structure.



Figure 5: Soya Gereja Church

e. King Soya's House

King Soya's house is located right beside the Soya church. Tourists visiting the Soya church can at the same time visit the King Soya's house. The house was also burned at the same time with the church but it has been restored and built with the same structure and shape as the original one. King Soya's house has a typical of Maluku original house, namely

there are decorations in the form of two pairs of wooden tables and chairs as well as two ancient cannons in front of the house. The house is still sometimes used as the king's resting place.



Figure 6: King John Lodewijk Rehatta's family home (2021)

Source: Personal documents, September 2021.

f. Negeri Washing Ceremony

Negeri Soya is a *negeri* that consistently carry out the traditional washing ceremony until now. This traditional ceremony is held once a year, namely on the second Friday of December. The *negeri* washing ceremony is led by Upulatu (King). According to the beliefs of the elders on the second Friday of December the west wind has begun to blow. This west wind is believed to bring fortune of life, garden and fruits produces and so on.

The *negeri* washing ceremony is carried out together with a series of other traditional events such as²⁰:

(1) The *Negeri Pica* Ceremony: all members of the *negeri*, young and old, male and female, go down together to clean Samasuru Baileo, Soya's church and the surrounding environment. The activities are held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays of the week.

(2) The ceremony to clean old/custom wells. Soa Pera headed for Wai Werhalouw and Soa Erang headed for Unuwei.

(3) The ceremony of climbing mount Sirimau which is held on Thursday evening. This ceremony is attended only by men, members of four Soa Parenta clans, namely Rehatta, Pesulima, Huwaa, and Tamtelahittu. The ceremony of climbing the top of Sirimau commemorates what was done by their ancestral youths who climbed to the top of Sirimau

²⁰ 1 GD conducted at *Negeri Soya* in September 2021.

and were swallowed by a dragon for five days but at the end they came back to Samasuru Baileo.

(4) The climax of the *negeri* washing ceremony occurred on Friday. A unique part of the *negeri* washing ceremony is what is called Gandong Cloth Entrance Ceremony.. The gandong cloth used in this ceremony is a white cloth of one piece of wood length (one skein of cloth). The gandong entrance ceremony is intended to bind all citizens of *Negeri Soya*, including the native Soya citizens and the immigrant clans who are treated as “siblings”.

The *negeri* washing ceremony contains a very high philosophical value. Apart from being intended to cleanse the *negeri* (literally) it is also meant to purify oneself from the feelings of enmity, envy, mutual suspicion that can always arise in social life. This is symbolized by washing hands, feet and faces conducted by the citizens in Wai Werlahouw and Unuwei water. The philosophical value brought by gandong entrance ceremony is about brother recognition (acceptance as brothers) between the native and the immigrant clans. They live in harmony and peace. Another attraction of the *negeri* washing ceremony is the presentation of a typical Soya’s dish which is only prepared for the ceremony in which the cooking is done together by Mama Ina.

4. Efforts to Attract Tourists to Visit *Negeri Soya*

Efforts to attract tourists to visit a tourist destination can be done by providing adequate facilities and infrastructure. Ghani says that tourism facilities are all that complements and aim to facilitate the process of tourism activities in order to run smoothly²¹.

Yoeti states that tourism facilities are divided into three groups, namely: (1) main tourism superstructure, (2) supplementing tourism superstructure, and (3) supporting tourism superstructure²².

The main tourism superstructure are companies that live and their lives are very dependent on the arrival of people travelling. Included in this group are: a. travel agents b. tour operators c. tourist transportation; d. Restaurants, e. Accommodation, f. tourist destinations, and g. tourist attractions²³.

Supplementing tourism superstructure are companies or places providing facilities for recreation whose function is not only to complement the basic tourism facilities but to make the tourists stay longer. Included in this group are: a. sports facilities b. secondary tourism facilities, and other amusements²⁴.

¹ Ghani, Y., 2015. *Pariwisata*, Vol. II No. 2 September 2015, II(2), p. 98–110.

²² Yoeti, A. Yoeka. (2012). *Pengantar Ilmu Pariwisata*. Bandung: Angkasa.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Supporting tourism superstructure aims not only to make tourists stay longer but has another function, namely to make tourists spend more their money during their visit²⁵.

In addition to facilities the development of tourist destinations also requires the availability of tourism infrastructure. Citing the views of Warpani (2007) those included the infrastructure are:

a) Accessibility, namely zones connectivity in the form of roads and transportation networks. Accessibility is an important factor in a travel process, the level of ease of reaching a tourist area is seen from accessibility in the form of road conditions, the availability of transportation modes. Improved accessibility means reduced travel time and costs.

b) Utilities includes: a. electricity. The availability of electrical energy sources is a prerequisite for the tourism industry development but but its use must be taken into account. Not all tourist areas require electricity or only require a small amount of electrical energy. b. clean water c. drinking water supply, d. Toilets, and e. worship place.

c) Service network includes: a. health services in the form of health posts and first aid supplies b. Security in the form of a security posts along with security personnel or unscrupulous officers in order to avoid criminal acts while in tourist areas²⁶.

In line with Yoeti and Wardani's view that providing tourism facilities does not only rely on the community of tourist destinations but it needs supports from various parties such as: the government, tour agents/bureaus, other service providers, as well as the availability of tourism supporting infrastructure. The tourists will probably not only focus on one *negeri* (c.q. Soya) but will see other *negeris*. That's why all tourism stakeholders, including Ambon Government, should support each other to develop tourist destinations around *Negeri Soya* and Ambon in general. This is important to consider that Ambon Island offers a variety of beautiful tourist destinations. *Negeri Soya* itself, as a matter of fact, has supporting facilities and infrastructure to be developed as a tourist destination.

Efforts to develop *Negeri Soya's* tourism need to be supported by tourism promotion and today's advanced technology is very supportive of tourism promotion. The tourism promotions that can be done include:

a. Developing Soya's local potential as a tourist attraction, such as developing traditional culinary and local handicrafts

b. Using social media or blogs as means of promotion. This can be easily done by anyone, tourism stakeholders and even individuals. A blog about *Negeri Soya's* profile will introduce potential, natural beauty, historical heritage, and customs of *Negeri Soya* that are

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Warpani as quoted by Yosef Abdul Ghani, 2017, "Development of Cultural-Based Tourism Destination Infrastructure in West Java", *Tourism Journal*, Vol. IV Nr. 1, April 2017. P. 25.

still well preserved today. Instagram, Facebook or other social media networks done by those who have visited *Negeri Soya* will be an indirect promotion.

c. Promoting *Negeri Soya* through television networks so that the *negeri* will be broadly known the travellers both from Indonesia and abroad.

d. Promoting *Negeri Soya* through printed media or other travel offers by advertising in printed media or through tour agents/bureaus.

Efforts of promoting tourism destinations need to be carried out continuously, tirelessly and relentlessly. The progress of tourism will certainly have a positive impact on the community's welfare and to drive their economy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description above, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. *Negeri Soya* has many and various cultural heritage and customs that can be developed as a tourist attractions.
2. To develop *Negeri Soya* as a tourist destination supports from the Ambon Government as well as the State and other stakeholders are really necessary, especially in providing facilities and infrastructure of tourism. It is necessary to develop every local potentials as an effort to increase tourist attractions beside continuous promotion through social media, blogs, vlogs and so on.

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Samurele teong stone belonging to Rehatta's rumah tauc. Sirimau Old CrockAnoth...

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Hary Hermawan, "Dampak Pengembangan Desa Wisata Nglanggeran terhadap Ek...

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Beside the old crock, at the same site, there are stones which are believed as the s...

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King Soya's house is located right beside the Soya church. Tourists visiting the So...

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King John Lodewijk Rehatta's family home (2021)Source: Personal documents, Se...

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f. Negeri Washing CeremonyNegeri Soya is a negeri that consistently carry out the ...

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In general the word desa is used to refer a certain region or territory although som...

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1) The Negeri Pica Ceremony: all members of the negeri, young and old, male andf...

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and were swallowed by a dragon for five days but at the end they came back to Sa...

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4. Efforts to Attract Tourists to Visit Negeri SoyaEfforts to attract tourists to visit a...

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Supporting tourism superstructure aims not only to make tourists stay longer but ...

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a matter of fact, has supporting facilitiesand infrastructure to be developed as a to...

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still well preserved today. Instagram, Facebook or other social media networks do...

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