



The Description of Nias Traditional Houses as Cultural Heritage for Youth at Museum Pusaka Nias

Putri Senati Lase*, Adieli Laoli, Hidayati Daeli, Afore Tahir Harefa

Program studi pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, fakultas keguruan dan ilmu pendidikan, Universitas Nias

*laseputri2@gmail.com, laoliadieli65@gmail.com, daelihiidayati@gmail.com, aforetahirharefa@unias.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to describe the characteristics of Nias traditional houses as an important cultural heritage that should be recognized, understood, and preserved by the younger generation of Nias. It also identifies the challenges faced by Nias youth in recognizing the diversity of traditional houses and explores strategies to strengthen cultural preservation. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through direct observations at the Museum Pusaka Nias and across the five administrative regions of Nias Island, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, cultural experts, local communities, and youth representatives, as well as documentation studies from relevant literature and archival sources. The findings reveal that Nias traditional houses possess distinctive architectural characteristics that vary by region, including differences in building structure, construction materials, roof design, ornamentation, spatial arrangement, social functions, and philosophical meanings. Built without the use of nails and designed to withstand earthquakes, these houses demonstrate remarkable indigenous engineering and reflect the local wisdom, social values, and cultural identity of the Nias people. Nevertheless, many young people experience difficulties in identifying and distinguishing the various types of traditional houses due to economic constraints, modernization, urbanization, changing lifestyles, and the limited integration of local culture into educational programs. The study concludes that Nias traditional houses are not merely physical dwellings but enduring symbols of cultural identity and historical heritage. Therefore, collaborative preservation efforts involving government institutions, educational sectors, cultural organizations, local communities, and the younger generation are essential to ensure the sustainability of this valuable cultural legacy.

Keyword: Nias Traditional House, Cultural Heritage, Youth, Architectural Characteristics, Museum Pusaka Nias.

1. Introduction

Nias Island, located off the western coast of Sumatra in North Sumatra Province, is well known for its rich cultural heritage and unique traditions. The island consists of five administrative regions: Nias Regency, West Nias, North Nias, South Nias, and Gunungsitoli City. The people of Nias, known as Ono Niha, share a common language (Li Niha) and preserve a wide range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Their cultural heritage includes traditional houses (Omo Hada and Omo Sebua), megalithic monuments, traditional dances, clothing, oral traditions, ceremonies, local cuisine, and the famous stone-jumping tradition (Fahombo). These cultural assets form an important part of the identity of the Nias community and require continuous preservation for future generations.

Cultural heritage refers to the tangible and intangible values, traditions, customs, and identities inherited from previous generations and maintained by communities (Ashworth & Page, 2019; Dallen, 2020). UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that Nias cultural heritage reflects the identity and resilience of the local community through both physical heritage, such as traditional architecture and megalithic structures, and intangible heritage, including oral traditions, dances, rituals, and indigenous knowledge. In Indonesia, cultural preservation is further supported by Peraturan Presiden Nomor 115 Tahun 2024 on the National Cultural Advancement Master Plan (2025–2045) and Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 1 Tahun 2022, which emphasize the protection, development, and sustainable utilization of cultural heritage to strengthen national identity and community welfare.

Among the cultural heritage of Nias, the traditional house (Omo Hada or Omo Sebua) is one of the most significant symbols of local identity. Built entirely of wood without nails, it demonstrates remarkable indigenous architectural knowledge, environmental adaptation, and earthquake-resistant construction. Beyond its function as a residence, Omo Hada represents the social, spiritual, and cultural values of the Nias people, including unity,

cooperation, and respect for tradition (Sagir, 2019; Mahardika, 2018). It also serves as an important medium for transmitting cultural values to younger generations and inspiring innovation by integrating traditional wisdom with modern design (Mahardika, 2020; Lase, 2024).

However, the rapid influence of modernization has reduced young people's interest in traditional culture. Many youths are unfamiliar with Omo Hada and have limited opportunities to experience or learn about their cultural heritage directly (Simbolon, 2019). This situation highlights the importance of cultural education and heritage preservation initiatives that can strengthen cultural awareness among the younger generation.

One institution that plays a significant role in preserving and promoting Nias culture is Museum Pusaka Nias in Gunungsitoli. As the only museum in the Nias Archipelago, it houses more than 6,000 cultural collections, including traditional houses, historical artifacts, and ethnographic objects. The museum functions not only as a preservation center but also as an educational institution that introduces visitors, especially young people, to the history, traditions, and cultural values of Nias (Saragih, 2020; Simbolon, 2020). Therefore, this study is entitled "The Description of Nias Traditional Houses as Cultural Heritage for Youth at Museum Pusaka Nias" and aims to describe how the traditional houses preserved in the museum contribute to increasing youths' understanding and appreciation of Nias cultural heritage. This study aims to:

1. Describe the characteristics of Nias traditional houses based on regional divisions.
2. Explain the significance of traditional houses as cultural heritage for Nias youth.
3. Identify challenges and preservation strategies.

2. Research Method

2.1. Type of Research

This study employed a qualitative research design to describe Nias traditional houses as cultural heritage for youth at Museum Pusaka Nias. Qualitative research is appropriate because it enables researchers to understand how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences in natural settings (Creswell, 2022). Denzin and Lincoln (2021) also explain that qualitative research focuses on describing, explaining, and understanding social phenomena through data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The purpose of this research was to explore the characteristics, cultural values, and preservation of Nias traditional houses as represented in Museum Pusaka Nias. Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect factual and in-depth information directly from participants and the research setting. The research process followed three stages: (1) description, in which the researcher observed and documented the research object; (2) reduction, in which relevant information was selected and organized; and (3) selection, in which the researcher analyzed the findings to identify themes and draw conclusions.

2.2. Research Variable

Although qualitative research does not emphasize variables in the same way as quantitative research, the focus of this study was the description of Nias traditional houses as cultural heritage for youth. According to Indah (2023), research variables represent the characteristics or attributes examined in a study, while Kothari (2020) defines variables as measurable characteristics that may vary among research subjects. In this study, the research focused on the architectural characteristics, cultural values, and preservation of Nias traditional houses at Museum Pusaka Nias.

2.3. Source of Data

The study used two sources of data: primary and secondary data (Sugiyono, 2022). Primary data were obtained directly through interviews with traditional leaders, museum staff, and other knowledgeable informants. These participants provided information regarding the history, functions, architectural characteristics, and cultural values of Nias traditional houses.

Secondary data were collected from books, scientific journals, previous studies, museum documents, photographs, official reports, and other relevant references that supported the analysis of the research findings.

2.4. Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by an interview guide, observation notes, and documentation sheets. According to Creswell and Poth (2020), qualitative research commonly employs interviews, observations, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive information. The interview guide ensured consistency during interviews, while observation and documentation were used to strengthen and verify the collected data.

2.5. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through three techniques. Observation was conducted at Museum Pusaka Nias to examine the physical characteristics, architectural elements, and cultural significance of the traditional houses. Bungin (2024) states that observation enables researchers to understand social phenomena in their natural context.

Interviews were carried out with selected informants to obtain detailed information about the history, functions, meanings, and preservation of Nias traditional houses. According to Sugiyono (2020), interviews provide opportunities for researchers and participants to exchange information and develop a deeper understanding of the research topic.

Documentation included collecting photographs, museum archives, written records, and related documents to support and validate the research findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2022) emphasize that documentation strengthens data triangulation and increases the credibility of qualitative research.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis. Flick (2023) explains that constant comparative analysis involves continuously comparing new data with previously collected data to identify recurring categories and themes. In addition, the researcher adopted the data analysis procedures proposed by Sugiyono (2020), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

During data reduction, the researcher selected and organized relevant information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. The reduced data were then presented systematically to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and themes related to the characteristics and cultural values of Nias traditional houses. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher compared information obtained from different sources and data collection techniques through triangulation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Research Findings

3.1.1. Description of Research Findings

The findings of this study were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation conducted at Museum Pusaka Nias. The research aimed to describe the characteristics of Nias traditional houses based on their regional origins and to identify the difficulties experienced by Nias youth in recognizing these traditional houses as part of their cultural heritage.

3.1.2. Observation Findings

Observation was conducted using a non-participant observation technique at Museum Pusaka Nias on January 20 and 22, 2025. The observation showed that Nias traditional houses share several common characteristics despite regional differences. Generally, the houses are built on stilts to protect residents from floods, wild animals, and earthquakes. The main construction materials include hardwood, bamboo, thatched leaves, and natural stones, all of which are locally available and environmentally sustainable.

The observation also revealed that traditional houses serve not only as residences but also as places for customary meetings, traditional ceremonies, and community gatherings. In addition, the houses contain various

carvings and ornaments representing local beliefs, social status, harmony, courage, and respect for ancestors. The observation further confirmed that many young people have difficulty recognizing the differences among traditional houses from different regions of Nias, supporting the interview findings.

3.1.3. Interview Findings

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with expert informants on January 24 and 26, 2025, to obtain information about the characteristics of Nias traditional houses and the challenges faced by Nias youth in understanding and preserving this cultural heritage.

The interviews revealed that traditional houses are important cultural symbols representing the history, identity, social values, and ancestral beliefs of the Nias people. However, many young people are unable to distinguish traditional houses from different regions because they lack knowledge about their architectural forms, building materials, structures, and symbolic meanings. Most respondents stated that young people are generally familiar only with the traditional houses found in their own region.

Another important finding is the limited availability of educational resources introducing Nias traditional houses and local wisdom. The informants explained that the absence of attractive learning materials has reduced young people's opportunities to understand the diversity of Nias traditional architecture. Consequently, many youths experience difficulties in interpreting the philosophical values represented by traditional houses and applying these values in everyday life.

The interview also indicated that traditional houses should not only be recognized as historical buildings but also understood as symbols of cultural identity that must be preserved across generations. According to the informants, integrating local wisdom into educational activities can increase students' cultural awareness, strengthen their sense of identity, and encourage active participation in preserving Nias cultural heritage. Traditional houses may also become educational resources and cultural tourism attractions that promote appreciation of local culture among younger generations.

Overall, the interview findings indicate three major challenges experienced by Nias youth: (1) difficulty distinguishing traditional houses according to regional characteristics; (2) limited understanding of the symbolic meanings and cultural values embedded in traditional houses; and (3) inadequate educational resources supporting the learning of local wisdom and cultural preservation.

3.1.4. Documentation Findings

Documentation was used to support and validate the observation and interview findings. Photographs of traditional houses collected during the research at Museum Pusaka Nias provide visual evidence of the architectural characteristics of traditional houses from different regions of Nias.

The documentation confirms differences in building forms, roof designs, construction techniques, ornaments, carvings, and structural materials while also demonstrating their shared function as symbols of Nias cultural identity. These visual data strengthen the credibility of the research findings and support the conclusion that introducing regional characteristics of traditional houses through educational media can help young people better recognize and appreciate Nias cultural heritage.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The Description and Interpretation of the Research Results

The discussion is based on the findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation conducted at Museum Pusaka Nias. These findings address the two research objectives: (1) describing the types and characteristics of Nias traditional houses based on their regional origins, and (2) explaining the importance of introducing Nias traditional houses to young people as an effort to preserve cultural heritage.

3.2.2. Types and Characteristics of Nias Traditional Houses as Cultural Heritage

The findings indicate that Nias traditional houses represent an important cultural heritage reflecting the identity, beliefs, social values, and environmental adaptation of the Nias people. Although each region has distinctive architectural characteristics, all traditional houses share common features. These construction techniques make the houses resistant to earthquakes and floods while demonstrating the indigenous knowledge of the Nias community in utilizing natural resources sustainably.

3.2.3. Traditional house of Nias Regency



Figure 1. Nias traditional house

The Nias Regency traditional house is generally rectangular with a symmetrical layout. It is constructed from hardwood, bamboo, thatched roofing, and stone foundations. The house reflects harmony, peace, and respect for ancestors through symbolic carvings and colors representing courage, spirituality, and social status. Traditional construction follows customary rules and is preceded by ceremonial rituals, illustrating the close relationship between architecture and cultural beliefs.

3.2.4. Traditional house of West Nias Regency

The West Nias traditional house is distinguished by its rectangular shape, elevated floor, and pointed roof that symbolizes strength and firmness. Hardwood, rattan, stone, and thatched leaves are the main construction materials. Decorative carvings inspired by plants and animals symbolize harmony between humans and nature, while the construction process emphasizes mutual cooperation and customary rituals involving the community.



Figure 2. West Nias traditional house

3.2.5. Traditional house of North Nias Regency



Figure. 3 North Nias traditional house

The North Nias traditional house has an oval or elongated form with a high curved roof supported by strong wooden pillars. Besides protecting residents from natural hazards, the architectural design reflects traditional beliefs and community identity. The house consists of functional spaces such as the front veranda, main hall, bedrooms, kitchen, and storage area beneath the house, demonstrating the social organization and customary life of North Nias society.

3.2.6. Traditional house of South Nias Regency

The South Nias traditional house is recognized for its massive wooden structure and earthquake-resistant construction system using wooden joints instead of nails. Built from ironwood, meranti, resin wood, bamboo, stone, and thatched roofing, the house symbolizes honor, harmony with nature, and respect for ancestors. Decorative carvings depicting animals, plants, geometric patterns, and celestial symbols represent courage, protection, balance, and life. The construction process also follows customary regulations and traditional rituals before building begins.



Figure 4. South Nias traditional house

3.2.7. Traditional house of Gunungsitoli City

The traditional house of Gunungsitoli City combines rectangular and oval architectural forms and reflects resilience, social hierarchy, and local wisdom. Constructed from hardwood, bamboo, rattan, natural stone, and thatched roofing, it contains symbolic carvings believed to provide spiritual protection. Functional spaces such as the front terrace, living room, kitchen, underfloor area, entrance stairs, and supporting pillars illustrate the integration of social, cultural, and environmental values within traditional architecture.



Figure 5. Gunungsitoli city traditional house

Although these houses differ in architectural details, construction techniques, and symbolic ornaments, they all function not only as residences but also as centers of customary meetings, ceremonial activities, and community interaction. Their architectural forms represent local wisdom emphasizing harmony with nature, mutual cooperation, respect for ancestors, social solidarity, and spiritual beliefs that have been preserved across generations.

However, the interviews revealed that many Nias youths still experience difficulties in distinguishing traditional houses according to their regional characteristics. Most respondents recognized only the traditional house from their own district and had limited knowledge regarding architectural forms, building materials, symbolic carvings, and cultural meanings found in other regions. These findings suggest that greater efforts are needed to introduce the diversity of Nias traditional houses through educational and cultural preservation programs.

3.2.8. Nias Traditional Houses as Cultural Heritage for Youth

The findings also demonstrate that introducing Nias traditional houses to younger generations is essential for preserving local cultural heritage. Interview participants explained that limited knowledge, insufficient educational resources, and the lack of integration of local wisdom into learning activities have contributed to the low level of cultural understanding among Nias youth.

Understanding Nias traditional houses enables young people to maintain their **cultural identity** by recognizing the unique traditions inherited from their ancestors. Traditional houses function as cultural symbols that strengthen the sense of belonging and prevent younger generations from losing their cultural roots.

Knowledge of traditional houses also encourages youth to **appreciate their ancestral heritage**. As traditional houses represent the history, customs, and philosophy of the Nias people, understanding their meanings helps young people recognize the importance of preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

Furthermore, introducing traditional houses can **increase awareness and concern for cultural preservation**. By understanding the architectural uniqueness and symbolic values of traditional houses, young people become more aware of the importance of protecting local culture from the influence of modernization and globalization.

The findings also indicate that cultural knowledge encourages young people to **keep traditions alive** through active participation in cultural festivals, preservation activities, and community programs related to traditional houses. Such participation strengthens social solidarity while ensuring the continuity of local traditions.

Another important finding is that learning about traditional houses helps **increase cultural pride**. Understanding the uniqueness of Nias architecture encourages young people to value their own culture and promotes confidence in introducing Nias cultural heritage to wider communities, including visitors and tourists.

In addition, cultural education contributes to **improving the ability to preserve culture**. Young people who possess adequate knowledge of traditional houses are better prepared to protect their cultural heritage and are less likely to abandon local traditions due to external cultural influences.

The findings further show that understanding traditional houses **increases awareness of cultural preservation** by encouraging young people to participate in conservation activities organized by schools, museums, local communities, and government institutions.

Finally, traditional houses serve as valuable **historical learning resources**. Besides functioning as residences, they document the history, architectural knowledge, customary systems, and cultural development of Nias society. Through museum visits and educational activities, young people can understand not only the physical structures of traditional houses but also the historical and philosophical values embedded within them.

Overall, this study demonstrates that preserving Nias traditional houses requires more than conserving physical buildings. Sustainable preservation depends on continuous cultural education involving schools, museums, local communities, and government institutions. Integrating local wisdom into educational programs will enable younger generations to recognize the diversity of Nias traditional houses, understand their historical and cultural significance, strengthen their cultural identity, and actively participate in preserving this important cultural heritage for future generations.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Nias traditional houses possess diverse characteristics in terms of history, architecture, construction materials, carvings, symbols, and cultural functions across different regions. As an important cultural heritage, these houses represent the identity and local wisdom of the Nias people. Understanding their historical and cultural significance enables Nias youth to develop greater appreciation, pride, and responsibility toward preserving their ancestral heritage. Traditional houses are not merely physical structures but also embody the values of togetherness, social hierarchy, and community life. Therefore, strengthening cultural awareness among the younger generation is essential to ensure the continuity and preservation of Nias traditional houses for future generations.

Reference

1. Abdulghani, T. Bambang Plasma Sati. (2019). "Pengenalan rumah adat Indonesia Menggunakan teknologi Augment Reality dengan metode Marker Based Tracking mediapembelajaran." *Media Jurnal Informatika* , 43-50.
2. Andi, M. A., & Wahyudi, T. (2017). *Nias Traditional Architecture and Earthquake Resistance*. Journal of Indonesian Cultural Studies, 8(2), 45-58.
3. Ashworth, G.J., & Page, S.J. (2019). *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: Planning, Impacts, and Management*. Routledge.
4. Cameron, C., & Rössler, M. (2013). "Many Voices, One Vision: The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention". Farnham: Ashgate
5. Creswell, J. W. (2013). "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches"* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
6. Creswell, J. W. (2016). "30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher". SAGE Publications.
7. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches" (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
8. Denzin, Norman K., Yvonna S.L. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitatif Research*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
9. Fachrudin, I. (2008). *Rumah Adat Nias: Kajian Arsitektur Tradisional*. Universitas Sumatera Utara Press.
10. Fauzi, I. (2010). *Tradisi Lompat Batu di Nias: Studi Simbolik*
11. Feldman, J. (1999). "Nias Tribal Treasures: Cosmic Reflections in Stone, Wood, and Gold". Editions Didier Millet
12. Gulo, Folo'o (ama Ima Gulo), Rumah Adat Nias Barat, Lahomi, Hiliadulo, Rabu 25 Januari 2025
13. Harita, Agustinus (ama Ikhlhas Harita), Rumah Adat Nias Selatan, Fanayama, Bawo Mataluo, Senin 3 Februari
14. Hulu, Yamolo'o (ama Arni Hulu), Rumah Adat Nias Utara, Tugala Oyo, Ononazara, Jumat 29 Januari 2025
15. Johanes, P. M. Hammerle OFM.Cap. (1990). *Omo sebua*. 86-90
16. Kurniawan, L. A., & Fruends (2021). *Writing the Purpose Statements in Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Research*. Holistic Journal, 13(2), 52-63.
17. Kusuma, H. (2014). *Tari Tradisional Nias: Antara Ritual dan Hiburan*. Jurnal Seni Budaya, 11(2), 112-123.
18. Lase, E. (2024). *Innovation and Tradition: Nias Youth's Role in Sustainable Architecture and Cultural Preservation*. Journal of Cultural and Environmental Sustainability, 12(1), 55-70.
19. Lase, Fangehao (ama Ati Lase), Rumah Adat Nias, Botomuzoi, Talafu, Senin 20 Januari 2025
20. Lowenthal, D. (1998). "The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History". Cambridge University Press.
21. Mahardika, I. (2020). *Cultural Identity and Youth Engagement in Nias Traditional Houses*. Journal of Indonesian Cultural Studies, 6(1), 45-61.
22. Museum Pusaka Nias. (n.d.). *About the Museum*. Retrieved from Museum Pusaka Nias Website(<https://www.museumpusakanais.com/about>).
23. Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. "Representations", 26, 7-24.
24. Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2017). *Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice*. Wolters Kluwer Health.

25. Putra, R. (2015). *The Cultural Heritage of Nias: A Preservation Challenge*. Heritage Conservation Journal, 10(3), 123-136.
26. Rouhi, J. (2017). definition of culture Heritage Properties and their valuesby the past. *Asian Journal of Science and technology* , 08 (12), 7109-7114.
27. Silalahi, B. S. (2019). *Educating the Youth on Cultural Heritage: The Case of Nias*. Indonesian Journal of Cultural Education, 6(1), 67-79.
28. Tato, Syahrir. (2009). "arsitektur Tradisional Sulawesi Selatan Pusaka Warisan Budaya Indonesia" . Makassar: El Shaddai.
29. Timothy, D.J. (2020). *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: An Introduction*. Channel View Publications.
30. Schröter, S. (2010). "Christianization and Religious Community in Indonesia: The Case of Nias". In L. T. van der Laan (Ed.), "Sharing the Earth, Dividing the Land: Land and Territory in the Austronesian World". ANU Press.
31. Sihite, Agustina C B & friends (2022). " etnomatematika: eksplorasi rumah adat omo hada nias utara pada konsep geometri." SEPREN: Journal of Mathematics Education and Applied. (4)1.46-55.
32. Simbolon, A. (2020). *Digitalization and Cultural Engagement: The Case of Museum Pusaka Nias*. Indonesian Journal of Heritage Studies, 8(1), 75-92
33. Smith, Laurajane. (2006). "Uses of Heritage". Routledge.
34. UNESCO. (2003). "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage". Retrieved from [UNESCO website](<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>)
35. UNESCO. (2020). *Preserving Indigenous Architecture: Case Studies from Southeast Asia*. UNESCO Publishing.
36. Viaro, Alain M. 1980. "Urbanisme et architecture traditionnels du sud de L'île de Nias." Etablissements humains et en vironnment social-culture. UNESCO, Jilid 21.
37. Waterson, R. (1990). "The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia". Oxford University Press.
38. Waterton, E., & Smith, L. (2020). *Cultural Heritage and Environmental Sustainability*. International Journal of Heritage Studies, 26(4), 340-359.
39. Ziegler, A. C. (2013). *Hierarchy and Power in Nias Society*. Ethnology Journal, 52(1), 89-107.
40. Ziraluo, Merdina & Friends (2022). "filosofi dan makna omo sebua (rumah adat besar) di desa bawomataluo kecamatan fanayama kabupaten nias selatan." CURVE ELASTICITY: Jurnal Pendidikan Ekonomi. (3)2.