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Community-based tourism development in Baluran National Park as a sustainable tourism destination

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ABSTRACT

Baluran National Park is a conservation area that plays a significant role as a contributor to the country's foreign exchange earnings from the tourism sector, attracting a large number of visitors. However, a major issue is that many residents of the buffer zone villages directly bordering the eastern and western edges of the park still face economic constraints. In line with this, there is a need to develop tourist attractions to continue increasing tourist visits and to have a greater impact on the local economy. This study aims to formulate a strategy for developing tourist attractions in Baluran National Park. The research methods used in this study are qualitative and quantitative approaches with a descriptive approach. Data collection techniques in this study were conducted through direct observation to assess the potential of natural resources and existing supporting facilities around the tourist sites. In-depth interviews were conducted by directly interviewing the Head of the Tourism Division of Baluran National Park, as well as the Chairperson and members of the Community Groups. A questionnaire survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to visitors of Baluran National Park. Documentary research in this study was conducted by collecting written data related to the study, specifically regarding visitor numbers, data on empowered community groups, and development plans for Baluran National Park's tourist attractions. The results of the study yielded two strategic recommendations for community-based tourism attraction development in Baluran National Park: educational tourism and local cultural tourism. Educational tourism can be developed in line with conservation programs to maintain the sustainability of the area's natural resources. Furthermore, cultural development programs can utilize events through partnerships with park management to introduce local culture.

Keywords: tourism attraction development; community-based tourism; sustainable tourism

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a sector that has experienced significant growth in recent years following the COVID-19 pandemic. The tourism sector is projected to be a major contributor to the country's foreign exchange earnings annually (Luturlean et al., 2019). Baluran National Park is one of the key contributors to the country's foreign exchange earnings within the tourism sector in the conservation area. This presents an opportunity to improve the economic conditions of the communities in the buffer zones surrounding the park.

Many residents of the surrounding villages directly bordering the eastern and western edges of Baluran National Park—namely Wonorejo Village and Sumberwaru Village—still face economic hardships. This situation is evident from data on residents who received food aid and direct cash assistance (BLT) from the government. As of April 19, 2022, food aid and BLT were received by 459 individuals/households out of 2,093 households in Wonorejo Village and 902 individuals/households out of 2,872 households in Sumberwaru Village (DP3AP2KB, 2022; Supriyatno, 2022). The percentage of families with economic limitations, as indicated by those receiving social assistance and BLT in Wonorejo Village, was 21.93%, and in Sumberwaru Village, 31.40%, while the 2022 data on the poor population in Situbondo Regency stood at 11.78% or approximately 700,000 people. This situation is relevant and can be addressed through the development of tourist attractions that involve the community, leveraging the opportunity presented by the high number of tourist visits to Baluran National Park.

The number of visitors to Baluran National Park has continued to increase every year. Visitor numbers have shown consistent growth in recent years following the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the final year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the park received 30,672 visitors; in 2022, 151,424 visitors; and in 2023, 170,154 visitors (Rizal, 2025). This presents significant potential to boost the economy of surrounding villages through the development of community-based tourism.

The steady increase in tourist visits must be balanced with the development of tourist attractions to further boost visitor numbers and have a greater positive impact on the local economy. Based on data, the average expenditure per tourist per visit within the Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park tourist area was Rp. 197,978.00, accounting for 42.91% of total expenditure. These expenditures include food and beverage costs, souvenir purchases, parking fees, photography services, motorcycle taxi rentals, and other expenses (Asnawi, 2020). The local community can capitalize on this opportunity by actively and productively participating in tourism activities within Baluran National Park. Paturusi (2001) states that tourism development is a strategy used to advance and improve the tourism conditions of a destination and its attractions so that they can be visited by tourists and provide benefits to the communities surrounding the destination and attractions as well as to the government.

One approach to tourism development involves the active role and participation of the local community. This is because effective tourism development and management can significantly improve the well-being of the local community. According to research conducted by (Komariah et al., 2018), the optimal and sustainable harnessing of a village's potential and the active involvement of its residents can have a significant positive impact on the well-being of the village community.

Community-based tourism development needs to be implemented in Baluran National Park. Village communities can leverage the potential of their natural and cultural resources to support the development of tourist attractions. Moreover, there is currently a shift in tourists' preferences; according to research findings (Desiana et al., 2021), tourists today do not always seek high-class tourist attractions but also look for low-class beauties such as the unique beauty and culture of a region. Therefore, every tourism destination today needs to highlight its distinctive characteristics, such as the unique culture of the local community, as branding strategy to attract tourists.

Based on the results of this study, the researcher became interested in conducting research on the development of community-based tourism attractions in Baluran National Park as a sustainable tourism destination, as tourism destinations can continue to grow when the local community in the surrounding area enjoys economic prosperity.

2. METHOD

The research methods used in this study are qualitative and quantitative approaches with a descriptive focus. The qualitative method was chosen because it is capable of providing an in-depth description of phenomena observed in the field through the perspectives of research subjects, particularly regarding the development of community-based tourism in Baluran National Park as a sustainable tourism destination. This aligns with (Creswell, 2021), who states that qualitative methods allow researchers to explore the meanings, understandings, and perceptions of research subjects in depth. In line with this, (Miles et al., 2014) states that qualitative methods can be effective in exploring social processes and meanings constructed by individuals within specific contexts.

The quantitative method was used to measure visitor preferences in order to describe the desired development of tourist attractions from the tourists' perspective. The research approach used in this study is a descriptive approach; the purpose of using a descriptive approach is for the researcher to provide a narrative describing data on natural resource potential, validated questionnaire results, and data from interviews with local residents and area managers. This statement is supported by (Neuman, 2002), who states that the descriptive approach is capable of presenting a detailed and accurate picture of the research object by establishing categorization and classification, and explaining the background and context of a situation.

Research informants are defined as individuals who are qualified to provide information regarding the data sought by the researcher, with the aim of addressing the research problem (Moleong, 2013). The researcher identified research informants using purposive and snowball sampling techniques; in other words, the researcher selected informants based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the research problem. Based on this definition, the researcher categorized informants in this study into three levels: key informants, consisting of the Head of the Tourism Division at Baluran National Park; the Chairperson and members of community groups in two villages established by the Baluran National Park management, serving as primary informants; and additional informants, comprising local residents, food vendors/stall owners, and visitors to Baluran National Park's tourist sites. The selection of these informants was based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the research.

2.1. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques used in this study were (1) direct observation. According to (Arikunto, 2018), direct observation is a data collection technique conducted by directly observing the research subject using the five senses; in this study, direct observation was conducted while examining the potential of the village's resources and Baluran National Park, as well as the supporting facilities located around the tourist site. (2) In-depth interviews: in-depth interviews are defined as a data collection technique involving face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. According to (Hennink et al., 2011), the use of in-depth interviews can provide insights into specific issues. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the Head of the Tourism Division of Baluran National Park, as well as the Chairperson and members of the Community Groups in the two villages established by the Baluran National Park management. (3) Questionnaires: In this study, questionnaires were distributed to visitors of Baluran National Park to collect data on visitor preferences regarding the development of community-based tourism sites within Baluran National Park. (4) The documentary study in this research was conducted by collecting written data related to the research, namely data on visitor numbers, data on empowered community groups, and development plans for tourist attractions in Baluran National Park.

2.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study was conducted using the model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which includes (1) Data Collection, carried out through direct observation at the research site, in-depth interviews with research informants selected using a purposive sampling method, and the distribution of questionnaires to visitors, and a documentary study conducted by collecting various types

of written data related to the research aimed at comprehensively describing the potential supporting the development of community-based tourism attractions in Baluran National Park as a sustainable tourism destination, (2) Data Reduction, carried out by summarizing the results of observations, interviews, questionnaires, and the documentary study to describe the current condition of Baluran National Park as a tourism destination.

Data validity was tested using source triangulation, a technique that involves comparing information obtained from various informants or sources (Sugiyono, 2018). In this study, the source triangulation process can be observed through the information obtained from key informants, primary informants, and supporting informants, all of whom possess different levels of experience, perspectives, and structural positions, thereby enriching the context and preventing individual bias.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Result

Baluran National Park and the surrounding villages possess abundant natural resources that the community can utilize to support the development of community-based tourism attractions within the park. Baluran National Park is home to 511 species of flora, 267 of which are medicinal plants, and 7 of which are protected species. The park's fauna comprises 778 species, 69 of which are protected. Baluran National Park also features natural attractions that draw tourists, such as the Bekol savanna, Bama Beach, Bilik Beach, Sijile Beach, and Mount Baluran. Meanwhile, the natural resources utilized by the community in Baluran National Park include: candlenuts, tamarind, gebang leaves, honey, grass, firewood, fish, gadung seeds, acacia seeds, termite larvae, and rattan (Dewi, 2016; Lydiasari, 2016). The resources utilized by the community are primarily materials for food preparation. Candlenuts and tamarind are typically used as cooking spices, while firewood in Sumberwaru Village is used as fuel for making red bricks.

Wonorejo Village and Sumberwaru Village also possess abundant resources from the agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and plantation sectors that can be processed into high-value products (BPS, 2022). Both villages are coastal communities that produce a large quantity of marine fish. Their livestock operations produce cow's milk, which the residents of Wonorejo Village use to make yogurt, in addition to meat that is processed into food. Their plantations also produce fruits with many health benefits, such as coconuts and pomegranates. If the potential within these buffer villages is properly harnessed, it can help address social issues and solve problems in the community, particularly by boosting their economy (Anwar, 2020).

The communities of Wonorejo Village and Sumberwaru Village also have distinctive cultures. Wonorejo Village is known as a "village of national unity" because its residents live in harmony despite the religious diversity within the village (Suradikara, 2020). The people of Wonorejo Village demonstrate a high level of interfaith tolerance. This is evidenced by the presence of a cemetery at the edge of the village where graves are intermingled, despite the fact that the villagers belong to different religious faiths. Both villages are coastal communities with a tradition of "petik laut." This tradition is observed by fishermen during the month of Muharram or Syro each year.

Based on the researchers' analysis, the community is ready to actively participate in the development of tourist attractions in Baluran National Park. The community supports the development of attractions related to local cuisine, local pastries and snacks, local souvenirs, local dances, local beverages, as well as the cultivation of local animals and plants. The community believes that, in particular, the development of local souvenirs and local honey products will sustainably boost the local economy. This aligns with the plans of Baluran National Park management, which aims for the community to derive maximum benefits and profits without damaging the park's natural resources, ensuring that these benefits are sustainable and felt by the community.

This is relevant because cuisine is an integral part of tourists' travel objectives; it is one of humanity's basic needs and can even serve as a unique draw when someone decides to visit a tourist destination (Zahrulianingdyah, 2018). In line with the research findings (Ekawati et al., 2020), community empowerment through honey collection institutions is an effective empowerment program for buffer zone

communities in conservation areas. Meanwhile, research findings (Noviana et al., 2018) indicate that unique souvenirs represent an opportunity that can be leveraged to increase visitor numbers, which directly impacts the revenue of tourism areas and local residents. The results of the study regarding visitor preferences are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Visitor Preferences Regarding the Development of Tourist Attractions

No	Statement	Average
1	Tourists desire the development of special wildlife observation attractions	4.24
2	Tourists want the development of special forest exploration attractions in Baluran National Park	4.18
3	Tourists want the development of snorkeling tourism attractions.	4.27
4	Tourists want the development of fishing attractions	3.91
5	Tourists want the development of educational attractions about the endemic animals and plants of Baluran National Park	4.43
6	Tourists want the development of educational tourism attractions related to natural phenomena and the history of Baluran National Park.	4.43
7	Tourists want souvenirs or local handicrafts	4.40
8	Tourists want local cuisine and snacks	4.43
9	Tourists want the development of local vehicle rental services	4.21
10	Tourists want the development of photographer rental services.	3.89
Average score		4.23

Visitors' preferences regarding the development of tourist attractions in Baluran National Park received an average score of 4.23, indicating "strongly agree." This suggests that Baluran National Park needs to develop its existing attractions and facilities to meet visitors' needs and ensure their satisfaction. The highest preference scores from visitors averaged 4.43, indicating strong agreement, for statements 5, 6, and 8 regarding the development of educational attractions focused on Baluran National Park's endemic flora and fauna, natural phenomena and the park's history, and the development of local cuisine and snacks. This shows that visitors to Baluran National Park also seek new knowledge about the park's history from their visit, in addition to enjoying the natural beauty and local cuisine there.

The lowest preference score among visitors was an average of 3.89, indicating agreement with statement number 10 regarding the development of photographer rental services. This is because, on average, visitors now own smartphones capable of taking high-quality photos, which they have prepared for their trips. According to (Pardiana dan Nugroho 2016), photography services are needed to capture tourists moments that can serve as souvenirs or mementos of their visit, thus, during typical travel trips, most tourists do not require this service.

The results of the analysis based on interviews with the Head of the Tourism Division at Baluran National Park indicate that management is currently focusing on developing special-interest and educational tourism attractions. Management plans to implement visitor limits based on the area's carrying capacity for tourists in Baluran National Park. Future development of tourism attractions will focus on educational tourism, eco-friendly vehicles, e-tickets, and supporting facilities that make it easier for tourists. This aligns with the preferences of the majority of visitor respondents regarding the future development of tourist attractions in Baluran National Park, as visitors agree that community involvement in tourism activities within the park is beneficial, since the local community significantly assists visitors in their tourism activities there. However, visitor respondents noted that the merchandise offered by the local community still does not sufficiently meet the tourism needs of some visitors. This aligns with the findings of a study (Fajrin et al., 2021) indicating that facilities have a positive and significant impact on visitor satisfaction, and that satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on the intention to visit.

3.3 Discussion

Based on the research results, several strategies for developing community-based tourism attractions in Baluran National Park can be formulated. The following recommendations for development strategies are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Strategy for the Development of Community-Based Tourism Attraction

No	Tourism Attraction	Community Involvement	Community Empowerment
1	Educational Tourism	As a producer and supplier of products to meet visitor needs	Local culinary delights and snacks, local handicrafts and souvenirs, packaging and selling processed products (target: housewives and entrepreneurs)
		As a service provider to support the development of tourist attractions	Local eco-friendly transportation (target: horse drawn carriage drivers), Packaging and selling a service product (target: Guides and Transportation Drivers)
2	Local Cultural Tourism	As a supporter of tourism attraction development	Local arts (target: cultural experts)

The results of the researchers' analysis led to two recommendations for developing community-based tourism attractions in Baluran National Park: educational tourism and local cultural tourism. Educational tourism can be developed in tandem with conservation programs to ensure the sustainability of the area's natural resources. The challenge is that the community cannot capitalize on these opportunities unless they are first empowered. Therefore, empowerment initiatives that park management can implement to support educational tourism include handicrafts that reflect local culture and the history of Baluran National Park, as well as innovative and eco-friendly transportation options such as electric vehicles or traditional horse-drawn carriages (*delman or dokar*). The presentation of processed products and services significantly influences visitor interest, so effective management is essential to attracting visitors.

Local residents can productively make snacks and handicrafts without having to be physically present at the tourist site to sell them themselves. It is hoped that those capable of such production will partner with site managers so that the marketed products are trusted and attract visitors' attention, while also ensuring the area's sustainability is maintained. This aligns with research ([Noviana et al., 2018](#)) stating that souvenirs and local specialties present an opportunity to increase visitor numbers, which directly impacts revenue for tourism area managers and nearby residents, thereby addressing the economic challenges faced by economically disadvantaged communities through this solution. The utilization of natural and socio-cultural resources of the communities in buffer zones is necessary to support tourism, thereby enhancing regional development and the local economy, as well as preserving the conservation area's sustainability ([Rusiani, 2018](#); [Tuharea et al., 2017](#)).

In line with the formulated strategic recommendations, ([Ekawati et al., 2020](#)) state in their research findings that community empowerment focused on efforts to utilize ecosystem services has proven successful in boosting the local economy and preserving forest sustainability. This aligns with the findings of ([Rusiani, 2018](#)), who notes that natural resources must be preserved; if these resources are degraded, tourism activities will not be sustainable, and community empowerment efforts will also come to a halt.

Cultural development programs can leverage events through partnerships with organizers to introduce local culture. This aligns with the statement by ([Siswanto, 2010](#)) that strategies for the success of tourism development programs must include the involvement and participation of the local community in their implementation.

Furthermore, strengthening cultural identity through tourism-based community empowerment can also encourage the preservation of local wisdom and traditional values. When local communities are actively involved in cultural tourism activities, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility toward protecting their cultural heritage. This is important because culture is not only a

tourism attraction but also a representation of community identity that differentiates one destination from another. In this context, collaboration between local governments, tourism stakeholders, and community groups becomes essential to ensure that cultural promotion efforts are carried out sustainably and inclusively.

The integration of environmental conservation and cultural preservation within tourism development programs can create long-term economic opportunities for local communities. Sustainable tourism activities provide alternative sources of income through small businesses, handicrafts, culinary products, and cultural performances managed directly by local residents. Such conditions can reduce dependence on activities that potentially damage natural resources, while simultaneously improving community welfare. Therefore, community empowerment should not only focus on economic aspects but also emphasize capacity building, education, and awareness regarding the importance of environmental and cultural sustainability.

The implementation of participatory approaches in tourism governance also plays a significant role in ensuring the effectiveness of development programs. Local communities possess valuable knowledge regarding the characteristics of their environment, traditions, and social conditions, making their involvement crucial in decision-making processes. By involving communities in planning, implementation, and evaluation, tourism development programs are more likely to align with local needs and conditions. This supports the argument that sustainable tourism cannot be achieved solely through government intervention, but requires cooperation among all stakeholders, particularly local communities as the primary actors within tourism destinations.

Utilization of digital platforms and social media can further support cultural development and tourism promotion. Through digital campaigns, local cultural events and tourism attractions can reach broader audiences, increasing tourist interest and visitation rates. At the same time, digital technology provides opportunities for local communities to market their products independently and expand their economic networks. However, tourism promotion efforts should still prioritize the principles of sustainability to prevent excessive exploitation of natural and cultural resources. Therefore, balanced tourism management that combines economic development, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation is necessary to ensure the continuity of tourism activities and community empowerment programs in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted, the strategy for developing community-based tourism attractions in Baluran National Park formulates two strategic recommendations: educational tourism and local cultural tourism. Educational tourism can be developed in tandem with conservation programs to ensure the sustainability of the area's natural resources. Empowerment initiatives that can support educational tourism include handicrafts that reflect the local culture and the history of Baluran National Park, as well as innovative and eco-friendly transportation options such as electric vehicles or traditional horse-drawn carriages (delman or dokar). The packaging of processed products and services significantly influences visitor interest, so effective management is essential to attract visitors. Furthermore, cultural development programs can leverage events through partnerships with park management to introduce local culture.

In addition, the success of community-based tourism development in Baluran National Park highly depends on the active participation of local communities in every stage of tourism management. Community involvement not only strengthens the sense of ownership toward tourism activities but also encourages local people to actively preserve the natural and cultural resources that become the main attractions of the destination. Through participatory approaches, local communities can contribute ideas, local knowledge, and traditional practices that support sustainable tourism management. This participatory model is important to ensure that tourism development provides direct social and economic benefits for surrounding communities while minimizing potential environmental degradation.

Capacity-building programs are also necessary to improve the readiness of local communities in managing tourism-related businesses and services. Training in entrepreneurship, hospitality, marketing, waste management, and digital promotion can help local residents compete in the tourism sector more effectively. The utilization of digital platforms and social media may support the promotion of local products, tourism attractions, and cultural events to wider audiences. By increasing digital literacy among local communities, tourism promotion can become more efficient and capable of attracting both domestic and international visitors.

Collaboration among stakeholders is essential to support the sustainability of tourism development programs. Partnerships involving local governments, park management authorities, tourism businesses, academics, and community organizations can create integrated tourism planning and management systems. Such cooperation can facilitate infrastructure development, funding opportunities, tourism promotion, and conservation programs that align with sustainable tourism principles. The existence of collaborative partnerships also enables the sharing of knowledge and resources needed to improve tourism quality and community welfare.

Environmental sustainability should remain a central principle in the implementation of tourism development strategies in Baluran National Park. Tourism activities must be managed carefully to prevent excessive exploitation of natural resources and disturbances to wildlife habitats. Therefore, conservation-oriented regulations and visitor management systems are necessary to maintain ecological balance within the national park area. Through the integration of educational tourism, cultural tourism, community empowerment, and environmental conservation, Baluran National Park can develop as a sustainable tourism destination that provides long-term benefits for both local communities and environmental preservation.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

MHY contributed to conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft preparation, writing – review and editing, project administration, and correspondence. RA contributed to formal analysis, investigation, and data visualization. HR contributed to validation and theoretical framework. AW contributed to writing – review and editing, visualization, and conceptual recommendations.

Disclosure statement

Throughout the research process and writing of this journal article, the research team affirms that none of the researchers had any personal interests in the research, data collection, data analysis, or publication. All research was conducted with the aim of ensuring that the journal article produced by the research team would have an impact, particularly on community-based sustainable tourism management, with the aim of increasing local income from the tourism sector and improving the welfare of the surrounding community.

Data Availability Statement

The primary data in this study was sourced directly from the research results, while the secondary data was sourced from several research publications. If any researchers wish to conduct further research on the same topic, the researchers are willing to share the data if necessary.

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Notes on Contributors

Muhammad Hafif Yadi

Muhammad Hafif Yadi is a lecturer at the Politeknik Media Kreatif who specializes in the tourism sector. He often writes and conducts research on tourism, particularly nature tourism. He is concerned that the local community has not fully benefited from local tourism activities. If managed properly, tourism in Baluran National Park has the potential to increase state revenue from the tourism sector while improving the welfare of the surrounding community.

Rezki Aulia

Rezki Aulia is a lecturer at the Politeknik Media Kreatif who specializes in the field of communications. He often writes and conducts research on tourism communications, particularly in North Sumatra.

Hadi Rudiya

Hadi Rudiya is a lecturer at the Politeknik Media Kreatif who teaches Research Methodology. His involvement in this research resulted in a research design that included input on the selection of informants, analysis and interpretation of field research results, and determination of the data validity techniques used in this research.

Agus Wiranto

Agus Wiranto is a lecturer at the Politeknik Media Kreatif who specializes in digital media. In this study, he analyzes the development of tourist attractions using digital media. His contribution to this study is in the form of recommendations for developing creative media-based tourism facilities.

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