

Development of the Hutaraja Village hot springs tourist attraction as a sustainable tourism destination

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ABSTRACT

Hutaraja Hot Springs is a natural hot spring with crystal clear water originating from Mount Sorik Merapi. In addition to pure water, the water contains sulfur, which is beneficial for health. Surrounded by rice fields and community plantations, this tourist attraction is even more beautiful and charming than it already is. If managed properly, it will certainly be beneficial for improving the community's economy and increasing the original income of the Hutaraja village from the tourism sector. This study aims to determine the efforts to develop Hutaraja hot spring as a sustainable tourism destination. The research method used is qualitative with descriptive data. Data collection techniques included direct observation of the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction, accommodation to the location, supporting facilities around the tourist attraction, and direct involvement of stakeholders and the local community in the development of the Hutaraja hot spring, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted with the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office, Mandailing Natal Regency Bappeda Office, Panyabungan Sub-district Head, Head of South Hutaraja Village, local community, food vendors/stalls, and visitors. The study results show that efforts to develop the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction as a sustainable tourism destination were carried out by considering five aspects, namely Attraction, Accessibility, Accommodation, Amenities, and Ancillary services (the 5A tourism concept). The conclusion is that development efforts that consider the 5A tourism concept have proven effective in increasing visitor numbers, as evidenced by the thousands of visitors to the tourist attraction each year and the relatively stable upward trend in visitor numbers.

Keywords: Hutaraja Hot Springs, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Destination Development, 5A Tourism.

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a booming sector has grown significantly over the last three years. This sector is projected to contribute to foreign exchange and local revenue every year (Luturlean et al., 2019) & (Hidayat & Djadjuli, 2020). One of the provinces that relies on the tourism sector to boost the regional economy and community welfare is North Sumatra. This is inseparable from the topography of North Sumatra Province, which consists of mountains, lakes, and volcanoes that are tourist attractions that appeal to tourists (Sianturi, 2023).

One of North Sumatra Province's leading natural attractions, well known both nationally and internationally, is Lake Toba, a caldera formed from the eruption of Mount Toba, which has also been designated a global geopark. and Bukit Lawang with its well-preserved river and forest ecosystems, as well as several emerging tourist attractions such as Mount Sibayak and Sinabung in Karo Regency, the Aek Sijorni tourist attraction in South Tapanuli Regency, and the Mount Sorik Marapi tourist attraction in Mandailing Natal Regency (Tanjung, 2025).

However, several tourist attractions in North Sumatra Province have the potential to be developed to help the local economy and increase local revenue from the tourism sector. One tourist attraction with development potential is the Hutaraja Hot Springs, located in Hutaraja Village, South Penyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra.

Hutaraja Hot Springs is a natural hot spring located about 35 kilometers south of Penyabungan. The hot water flowing in the Hutaraja hot springs comes from the foot of Mount Sorik (Redaksi, 2022). The atmosphere of the Hutaraja Hot Springs is relatively pristine and beautiful because the water in these springs is very clear and is surrounded by green rice fields, rows of hills, and river rocks, which add to the beauty of the Hutaraja hot springs. This beauty can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. panorama of the Hutaraja hot springs

Source: Jadesta (2023)

Unfortunately, the beauty of the Hutaraja Hot Springs panorama is inversely proportional to the low level of public awareness regarding the importance of maintaining and promoting these hot springs as a tourist attraction that supports the local economy of the area. This is because some members of the community still use the Hutaraja Hot Springs to wash dirty clothes, causing the spring water to become contaminated with washing water. Additionally, hygiene issues around the springs are a major problem that undoubtedly causes discomfort for visitors.

However, if management is carried out optimally, these obstacles can be controlled, and the potential of this tourism can be optimized as sustainable tourism, which will certainly affect the welfare of the surrounding community. Moreover, there is currently a shift in the concept of tourists, according to the results of research conducted (Desiana et al., 2021). Tourists today are not always looking for high-class tourist attractions but also seek low-class attractions, such as the beauty of a region's scenery and

culture. Therefore, every tourist destination today needs to pay attention to the characteristics that are highlighted as branding to attract tourists.

Based on the results of this study, the researcher is interested in conducting research on the development of the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction as a sustainable tourism destination, because every tourism destination can grow and develop in accordance with its brand.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourism Development

Tourism development refers to efforts made to introduce, develop, and promote tourist attractions to make them known to tourists. The researcher's opinion is supported by (Paturusi, 2001) & (Asriani & Suprpta, 2021) which states that tourism development is a strategy used to promote, improve, and enhance the tourism conditions of a tourist attraction so that it can be visited by tourists and provide benefits to the community around the tourist attraction and to the government.

One of the efforts that can be made to develop tourism is through the role and participation of the local community, because good tourism development and management will impact the welfare of the local community. The researcher's statement is supported by the results of research conducted by Komariah et al. (2018) & Hidayati & Muhammad Rizqi (2021) which states that the exploration of village potential and the optimal and continuous involvement of the village community can have a maximum impact on the welfare of the village community.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in Sulistyadi et al. (2021) in the effort to develop sustainable tourism, there are several indicators that need attention, including economic aspects, which mean that tourism can empower the community's economy. In addition, tourism is believed to encourage the growth and development of new jobs, sources of income for the community, and tourism industry services that can increase the growth and development of economic activities in surrounding areas that are underdeveloped and untouched by development.

The environmental aspect is defined as the ability of tourism development to identify and understand the potential attractions of tourism objects, the carrying capacity of the natural environment, and the disturbances that may affect key ecological processes. The social aspect is defined as the ability of tourism development to understand the social and cultural situation of the local community, and aspects (Indhawati & Widiyarta, 2022).

As material for consideration in understanding the development of tourist attractions, researchers use five indicators identified by Gunn, who argues that the tourism system is functional. As a functional system, Gunn identifies five indicators, namely (1) Attraction, which is defined as the appeal of a tourist attraction that motivates tourists to visit, (2) Accessibility, defined as the ease of reaching the tourist location, (3) Information, (3) Accommodation, defined as the lodging facilities available in the tourist location area, (4) Amenities, defined as other supporting facilities available around the tourist attraction, and (5) Ancillary services, defined as the involvement of stakeholders and the local community in tourism development efforts (Gunn dalam Azzahra et al., 2018) .

2.2 Hutaraja Hot Spring

Hutaraja Hot Springs is one of the tourist attractions included in the 500 nominations for the Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI) in 2023 (Jadesta, 2023). The inclusion of Hutaraja Hot Springs in the 500 nominations is inseparable from the exoticism and beauty offered by this tourist attraction, which is a natural hot spring sourced from the foot of Mount Sorik.

The beauty and charm of the Hutaraja hot springs are made even more exotic by the fact that this tourist attraction is surrounded by rice fields and plantations owned by local residents. In addition, the cool air around the tourist attraction further increases the enthusiasm of tourists to visit it (Isa, 2020). This is evidenced by the increasing number of tourists visiting the tourist attraction. Based on data obtained by

researchers from the Mandailing Natal Tourism Office from 2021 to 2023, the number of tourists continues to increase, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Visitors to Hutaraja Hot Springs Year by Year

No	Years	Number of Visitors
1	2020	2.134
2	2021	1.431
3	2022	5.170
4	2023	5.546

Source: Mandailing Natal Tourism Office

The increase in visitor numbers, as shown in the table above, is inseparable from the word-of-mouth promotion carried out by the people of Hutaraja Village, especially since the potential of the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction has also been included in the tourism development plans of the Mandailing Natal Culture and Tourism Office.

3. METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The use of qualitative methods was considered because this method can describe in depth the phenomena that occur in the field through the views of the research subjects, particularly in the aspect of developing the Hutaraja Village hot spring tourist attraction as a sustainable tourism destination. This is consistent with the statement made by (Creswell, 2021) which states that qualitative methods enable researchers to explore the meaning, understanding, and perceptions of research subjects in depth. In line with this (Miles et al., 2014), stating similarly that qualitative methods are effective in

exploring the social processes and meanings constructed by individuals in specific contexts.

The research approach used in this study was descriptive. The descriptive approach helps researchers explain the development of sustainable tourism using the 5A concept. This statement is supported (Neuman, 2002) who states that the descriptive approach is capable of presenting a detailed and accurate description of the research object, establishing categorization and classification, and explaining the background and context of a situation.

3.1 Data Collection Techniques

In this study, three data collection techniques were used: (1) direct observation. Based on the assumption (Arikunto, 2018). Direct observation is conducted by observing the research location directly using the senses. In other words, the research team directly observes all activities related to the object being studied. In this study, direct observation was carried out by looking at the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction, accommodation to the location, supporting facilities around the tourist attraction location, and observing the direct involvement of stakeholders and the local community in the development of the Hutaraja hot spring. (2) In-depth interviews are defined as a data collection technique involving face-to-face interviews between the interviewer and interviewee. According to Hennink et al. (2011), the use of direct interviews can provide insight into specific issues. The researchers interviewed representatives from the Mandailing Natal Tourism Office, Mandailing Natal Regional Revenue Agency, Head of the South Penyabungan Subdistrict, Head of Hutaraja Village, community members, food vendors around tourist attractions, and visitors to tourist attractions. (3) Documentation studies in this research were conducted by collecting written data related to the research issues, namely, in the form of a decree on the development

of the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction, data on the number of visitors, cooperation between institutions, the construction and development of the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction, village work reports on the development of the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction, and documents on the composition of the community around the tourist attraction.

3.2 Informant Selection

Research informants are defined as individuals who are competent to provide information about the data desired by researchers for the purpose of answering the research questions (Moleong, 2013). In qualitative research, informants are generally determined in two ways: purposive and snowball sampling. In this study, the researcher determined the informants using the purposive technique, in other words, the researcher determined the informants based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement with the issue being studied. Referring to this opinion, the researcher determined the informants in this study to be at three levels, namely key informants consisting of the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office, main informants consisting of the Mandailing Natal Regency Bappeda Office, the Panyabungan Sub-district Head, and the Head of Hutaraja Selatan Village. Additional informants included the local community, food vendors/stalls, and visitors to the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction. These informants were selected based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the research issues.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study was conducted using a model (Miles et al., 2014), which includes (1) Data Collection, conducted by observing the research location directly, conducting in-depth interviews with predetermined research informants using a purposive method, and conducting a documentation study by collecting various types of written data related to the research problem, which aims to comprehensively describe the development of the Hutaraja village hot spring tourist attraction as a sustainable tourism destination. (2) Data Reduction was carried out by summarizing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation studies, and then grouping each research indicator into the following themes: attraction (tourism uniqueness, authenticity, natural beauty, cultural richness, and available tourism activities), accessibility (ease of transportation, availability of transportation, quality of infrastructure, information, and directions), accommodation (availability of accommodation), amenities (food and beverage facilities, supporting facilities, additional recreational facilities), and ancillary services (professional tour guide services, promotional and information materials, availability of tour operators, trade services, and other supporting services).

Data validity testing is conducted using source triangulation, which is a triangulation technique that compares information obtained from different informants or sources (Sugiyono, 2018). From this study, the process of triangulation of sources can be seen through information obtained from key informants, primary informants, and supporting informants, all of whom have different levels of experience, perspectives, and structural positions, thereby enriching the context and preventing bias.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the potential and challenges of developing the Hutaraja hot springs as a sustainable tourist attraction that can increase the income of the local community while also boosting regional revenue through the tourism sector. The researchers consider the Hutaraja hot springs to be a unique tourist attraction, featuring a flowing hot spring whose water source originates from Mount Sorik, surrounded by beautiful natural scenery, namely hills and rice fields around this tourist attraction.

In addition to the beautiful panorama it offers, the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction is also health beneficial. This can be seen from the composition of the hot water, which contains sulfur that is beneficial for the body to relieve itching, soften the skin, and relax. Therefore, it is not surprising that this

tourist attraction continues to experience an increase in visitors every year, both from within the region (visitors from nearby villages) and from outside.

The large number of visitors to this tourist attraction is inseparable from the maintained security conditions and the comfortable and natural atmosphere that is still preserved in the area. Additionally, other amenities such as parking areas, food stalls, restrooms, and accessibility to the location are also key factors in optimizing this tourist attraction as a sustainable tourism destination. The future plan from the Hutaraja village government, which will be implemented, involves utilizing the local community to maintain security and serve visitors by conducting training programs for them.

However, the development of Hutaraja hot springs as a sustainable tourism destination faces various obstacles, namely (1) limited regional revenue budget obtained by the Mandailing Natal district tourism office, (2) lack of professional personnel, and (3) the large number of human resources with high educational backgrounds, resulting in low public awareness of the economic value of this tourist attraction. Another problem outside the tourist attraction is that promotion has been inadequate, relying only on word of mouth and waiting for certain events, which means that this tourist attraction is only known in a few neighboring areas. In addition, the lack of additional tourist attractions is a problem that hinders the development of this tourist destination.

From several negative aspects of the development of the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction, the research team formulated several recommendations for the development of the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction that is oriented towards sustainability. These recommendations can be implemented by improving and adding infrastructure facilities, expanding road access and paving, providing directions to the location, increasing the number of trash bins, and expanding the parking lot. Other efforts include providing tourism training to the Hutaraja village youth organization, organizing food and souvenir stalls, and maximizing the role of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) to support financing and tourism product innovation.

The overall results of the study confirm that the Hutaraja Village Hot Springs have great potential to develop into a sustainable tourism destination if managed in an integrated manner by the community, government, and private sector. Development that considers ecological, social, and economic aspects will open up opportunities to improve the welfare of the local community while supporting the achievement of environmentally friendly and competitive tourism development.

4.1 Efforts to Develop Tourism The Hutaraja Hot Springs

Quoting Gunn's opinion in [Azzahra et al. \(2018\)](#), there are five indicators that can be used as a reference in understanding the development of tourist attractions, considering that the tourism system is a functional system. Therefore, several factors must be considered in its development.

4.1.1 Attraction

Attraction is defined as a tourist attraction that motivates tourists to visit the destination. In relation to this study, the appeal of the Hutaraja hot springs is reflected in the natural hot springs sourced from Mount Sorik in Mandailing Natal, which form a natural hot spring river, as shown in Figure 1. This is a unique feature of the Hutaraja Hot Springs, especially since the hot water that flows into the Hutaraja Hot Springs contains sulfur, which is believed to treat skin diseases, alleviate joint and muscle pain, detoxify the body, and boost metabolism. This uniqueness attracts many visitors from outside the region, such as Padang, Sidempuan, and several areas bordering Mandailing Natal, making this hot spring a must-visit tourist destination when visiting Mandailing Natal.

In addition to offering uniqueness through its natural hot springs, the Hutaraja hot springs are surrounded by community plantations, rice fields, and large rocks that add to the beauty and charm of these hot springs. Visitors not only enjoy the health benefits of the hot springs but are also treated to the natural beauty that surrounds the Hutaraja hot springs. Unfortunately, cultural richness has not been reflected in the buildings and cultural symbols around tourist attractions. In addition, tourist activities are

still limited to the Hutaraja hot spring baths alone. In other words, there are no additional tourist activities that support the existence of the Hutaraja Hot Spring Baths.

4.1.2 Accessibility

Accessibility is defined as the ease of reaching a tourist location. In this study, accessibility to the Hutaraja Hot Springs is considered adequate, as evidenced by the many directional signs that make it easy for visitors to directly visit the tourist location. Furthermore, the availability of signposts leading to the tourist location makes it even easier for tourists to find the location, as shown in the image. Signpost to the tourist location. See Figure 2.



Figure 2. Gateway Signposting Tourist Attractions

Source: Researcher Documentation

For tourists coming from outside the Mandailing Natal City area, it takes approximately 20 minutes to reach the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction from Mandailing Natal City, or approximately 19.8 km from the center of Mandailing Natal Regency. To visit this tourist attraction, tourists can use cars or motorcycles to reach the destination. Along the way, tourists are treated to views of vast rice fields accompanied by neatly arranged rows of hills, adding to the beauty of the journey to the tourist attractions. The researcher presents this image in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Natural Beauty Leading to Tourist Attractions

Source: Researcher Documentation

However, visitors must also exert extra energy to reach the site, as they must descend a flight of stairs to reach the Hutaraja Natural Hot Spring. Another factor is that not all roads leading to tourist

attractions are paved, as some sections of the roads leading to tourist attractions are still potholed and have not been paved. This is due to the limited local government budgets.

4.1.3 Accommodation and Amenities

The relationship between accommodation and amenities in the development of tourist attractions is defined as the level of readiness and adequacy of lodging facilities that can be used by tourists, referring to several aspects, such as the number of accommodations available, the type and quality of accommodations that can be seen from the tourist market segment, accessibility related to easy access to accommodations, and service facilities related to tourist comfort. In relation to this study, the accommodation available around the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction is still very limited, consisting of three prayer rooms, four bathrooms, three gazebos, and five lopo (places of business). The limited accommodation around the Hutaraja hot spring tourist attraction is inseparable from the fact that local tourists, such as those from Pasaman, Panti, Bukit Tinggi, Sidempuan, and several other areas in West Sumatra, dominate the visitor numbers as they do not need a long time to reach the location.

Other accommodation limitations are also caused by the lack of other supporting tourist attractions around the tourist site that make tourists feel comfortable visiting and deciding to stay overnight. However, the idea of creating additional tourist attractions around the tourist site has been discussed further with the local community and village-owned enterprises, with plans to create additional attractions such as a swimming pool, children's playground, flying fox, selfie spot, and a water fountain. It is hoped that the presence of these additional tourist attractions will pamper visitors and provide more comfort so that tourists will want to visit again and decide to stay overnight in the area.

4.1.4 Ancillary Services

Ancillary services in tourism are defined as additional services that meet the needs of tourists, thereby providing a more comfortable, safe, and satisfying travel experience. From the research conducted by the researcher, ancillary services are only available in the form of places of worship, additional gazebo facilities as places for tourists to rest and store their belongings, and stalls where local people sell food and souvenirs for tourists.

Another effort made to attract visitors is the collaboration between tourist attraction management and the Mandailing Natal Regency government. In this case, collaboration is carried out by utilizing events held by the Mandailing Natal Regency government to introduce the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction. Additionally, management is discussing further efforts to create tour packages and promote them through several local media outlets.

5. CONCLUSION

Efforts to develop the Hutaraja Village hot spring as a sustainable tourism destination are carried out by considering five aspects, namely attraction by maintaining the cleanliness and beauty of the hot spring stream surrounded by rice fields and plantations belonging to residents around the tourist attraction. Accessibility is ensured by providing directions to the tourist attraction and constructing a gate as the main landmark to the location, as well as providing tourist access to the location that can be reached by public transportation, motorcycles, or private cars. Accommodation and amenities are available in the form of three prayer rooms, four bathrooms, three gazebos, and five lopo (stalls). Further discussions are underway regarding additional efforts to create additional tourist attractions around the main tourist attraction, such as the construction of a swimming pool, children's playground, flying fox, selfie spot, and water fountain. Ancillary services are provided by utilizing events organized by the Mandailing Natal Regency Government to introduce the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction, create tour packages, and utilize several local media outlets as promotional tools. The 5A approach to the development of Hutaraja hot spring tourism has been able to directly improved the community's economy. This can be seen from the increase in the number of tourists visiting this tourist attraction, which has led to the growth of business opportunities

for the local community, the opening of new jobs, and an increase in the village's original income from the tourism sector. The recommendations provided by the researchers from the results of this study and for further research are to look at tourism management and environmental management training conducted by the village government with the local community, as well as to strive to create additional tourist attractions as soon as possible to support the main tourist attractions.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

RA contributed to the development of research concepts and methodological designs (determining qualitative-descriptive approaches, observation techniques, interviews, and documentation). Leading field data analysis using the 5A concept (Attraction, Accessibility, Accommodation, Amenities, and Ancillary Services). Writing and editing abstracts, introductions, and conclusions. Coordinating communication with all research members and relevant agencies. Responsible for scientific manuscript correspondence and research document completeness. MHY contributed to compiling the results and discussion sections, particularly the analysis of tourist attractions and accessibility. Managing visual documentation (location photos, signboards, and public facilities) used in the research report. IM contributed to the provision of academic assistance and theoretical validation, especially in the literature review and reference sections. Another contribution of IM was to conduct an analysis related to public policies implemented by the local government in an effort to promote these tourist attractions and to edit the final draft to improve it before publication. Another researcher with the initials HR contributed to this study by selecting the research methods and approaches used and grouping the interview responses into 5A themes to facilitate answering the research questions. HR's other role was to collect secondary data that was important to this study, such as tables showing the number of visitors to tourist attractions. Meanwhile, AW contributed to this research by editing it, improving the layout of images and text. Another contribution made by AW was to provide recommendations in the form of developing creative media-based tourism in accordance with his field of expertise. Finally, AW was responsible for publishing the research article.

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. The entire research was conducted with the aim of ensuring that the journal article produced by the research team would have an impact, particularly on the management of sustainable tourism, with the goal of increasing local revenue from the tourism sector and improving the welfare of the surrounding community.

Data Availability Statement

The primary data in this study is sourced from the direct results of the research, while the secondary data is sourced from several research publications. If any researcher wishes to conduct further research on the same topic, the researcher is willing to share the data if necessary.

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Notes on Contributors

Rezki Aulia

Rezki Aulia is a lecturer and student who is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in communication at the University of North Sumatra. She frequently writes and conducts research on tourism communication, particularly in the North Sumatra region. Her concern over the poor management of tourist attractions in North Sumatra has led her to explore this topic in her writing, aiming to draw the attention of government stakeholders. If managed properly, the Hutaraja Hot Springs tourist attraction has the potential to increase local revenue from the tourism sector while also improving the welfare of the communities surrounding the tourist site.

Muhammad Hafif Yadi

Muhammad Hafif Yadi is a lecturer at the Creative Media Polytechnic who has expertise in the tourism sector. In this study, he played a role in determining the indicators used in analyzing tourism development with the 5A concept as the basis for assessing sustainable tourism.

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Indra Muda is a lecturer at Medan Area University with the title of Senior Lecturer specializing in public policy. In this study, he analyzed the policies implemented by stakeholders in the Mandailing Natal regional government to promote the Hutaraja village hot spring tourist attraction.

Hadi Rudiya

Hadi Rudiya is a lecturer at the Creative Media Polytechnic 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 data validity techniques used in this research.

Agus Wiranto

Agus Wiranto is a lecturer at the State Polytechnic of Creative Media who has expertise in the field of digital media. In this study, he analyzed tourism promotion content using digital media, particularly in terms of branding, in an effort to promote tourism at the Hutraja hot springs. His contribution to this study was in the form of recommendations for developing creative media-based tourism facilities as tourist attractions.

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