



Unlocking Nature's Bounty: Exploring the Ecotourism Potential of Batu Jongjong in Bahorok District, Langkat District

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ABSTRACT

The research on community-based ecotourism in Batu Jongjong Village, Langkat Regency, explores its potential, inspired by rich natural and cultural resources. Located in Gunung Leuser National Park, the village benefits from biodiversity. Aimed at enhancing local welfare through sustainable ecotourism, the study stresses community participation and collaboration among stakeholders. Sustainability concepts, including resource protection, are crucial for long-term contributions. The unique aspect lies in empowering locals and ensuring shared responsibility for resource preservation. Batu Jong Jong Village, despite its potential, requires improvements in accessibility, management, and services for competitiveness. Challenges necessitate collaborative efforts, while opportunities lie in sustainable development, emphasizing economic, social, and environmental benefits. Designated as a tourist village, Batu Jong Jong holds promise for eco-tourism, utilizing its natural resources. Despite obstacles, the village's fertile soil and community involvement present a foundation for sustainable tourism, contributing to its long-term success.

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INTRODUCTION

The background to this research was inspired by efforts to understand and develop the potential of community-based ecotourism in Batu Jongjong Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency. Batu Jongjong was chosen as a research location because this village has abundant natural and cultural riches, including its geographical potential in the Gunung Leuser National Park area, which is famous for its high biodiversity. The people in this village have long lived side by side with nature, creating a unique balance between humans and the environment.

This research is essential because the development of community-based ecotourism can be a sustainable solution to increase the income and welfare of local communities. Exploring village potential is hoped to open up new opportunities to increase community participation in the management and sustainable use of natural resources. Community-based ecotourism development requires cooperation and collaboration between tourism actors, the government, local communities, the private sector or other parties interested in it. In the development process, it is essential to pay attention to aspects and concepts of sustainability, including considering community participation and resource protection. This is important to do to increase tourism development's optimal contribution to the natural and human environment, not at a momentary moment. However, it contributes sustainably over a long period. The uniqueness of this research lies in its focus, namely on community-based aspects, which means involving community participation in the development and operationalization of ecotourism. By involving the community, this research does not only aim to identify the potential of Batu Jonjong Village. However, it seeks to build local capacity and increase shared responsibility for preserving resources for the sustainability of future generations (Scheyvens, 2011).

This research contributes significantly to the previous literature by providing in-depth insight into the potential for developing community-based ecotourism in rural areas, especially in Langkat Regency. Some previous research may have identified the potential of natural tourism. However, this research focuses on collaborative efforts by paying attention to the involvement of local communities to achieve sustainable development goals. Thus, this research can become a basis for developing ecotourism management policies and practices at the local level and inspire similar research in other places. This research aims to identify potential that can be utilized to support ecotourism development in Batu Jonjong Village. In addition, this research aims to analyze the involvement of the Batu Jongjong Village community in the management and development of ecotourism in the area. By focusing on two main aspects, this research aims to provide a comprehensive potential for ecotourism and community participation in ensuring the sustainability and success of tourism development in Batu Jonjong Village.

METHODS

The research was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods. Research is designed to collect and compile data systematically, factually and carefully to collect information about the current situation. According to Moleong (2009), there is no need to look for or explain interrelationships and test hypotheses in descriptive research. The data collected is qualitative data originating from social variables, which are collected in the form of words and images. This type of research can be used as an appropriate tool/method and is expected to provide new meaning to explain actual conditions regarding existence and determine the frequency of occurrence of something by categorizing existing information (Danim, 2002); in this research, there is a descriptive quantitative approach that where its use is used in calculating scores and weights of variables and indicators that influence the priority assessment of ecotourism development potential with descriptive explanations based on the results of field observations.

On the other hand, qualitative research emphasizes using the researcher's self as an instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Moleong (2009) argue that in a qualitative approach, researchers should use themselves as instruments because non-human instruments are difficult to use flexibly to capture the various realities and interactions that occur. A qualitative approach was used in this research to obtain data regarding biophysical characteristics and characteristics

of how the Batu Jongjong Village community is involved in managing and developing ecotourism in the village.

The main instruments used in this research were an interview guide and an audio recorder. The interview guide functions in carrying out the interview process by opening up the possibility of new data emerging due to intense interaction between researchers and informants. To avoid subjective views, this qualitative research also uses other instruments, namely observation checklists and visual recording devices. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observation and documentation studies, with primary data obtained from sources such as informants and secondary data collected through document studies from various sources.

The data analysis technique used is triangulation, which involves comparing data from observations, interviews and documents. Analysis is done by reducing data, focusing on important things, and arranging data according to research objectives. Researchers also used the Guidelines for Analysis of Operational Areas of Natural Tourism Objects and Attractions (ADO-ODTWA) to score/weight the observation results. In this assessment, researchers involve informants/resources to provide assessments with scoring/weighting related to certain conditions. The analysis results are then used to classify the development potential of Batu Jongjong Village based on the weight value of each assessment, referring to the intervals of high potential, medium potential and low potential.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Batu Jong Jong Village, Bahorok District, Langkat Regency is a village located at the western tip of Langkat Regency which borders directly on the Aceh Special Region province. This village is also separated from the forest area of Gunung Leuser National Park. Batu Jong Jong Village people are known for their way of life, living side by side with the area, namely the Gunung Leuser National Park Forest Area (TNGL). This area is a protected forest area located in 2 provinces, namely Aceh and North Sumatra. This area is formed from hills and valleys. Batu Jong Jong Village is a village that has beautiful natural charm and rich tourism. Using a private vehicle takes around 3 hours to go from Medan to Batu Jong Jong Village.

Batu Jong Jong Village has a variety of natural riches, starting from beautiful mountains, clear rivers, hundreds of caves under the rocks, as well as diverse flora and fauna. Endemic animals that can be found in the Batu Jong Jong Village area are Sumatran orangutans, Sumatran tigers, Gibon and many other animals. Flora that is no less interesting is the main attraction of the Batu Jong Jong Tourism Village, namely the presence of various types of *Amorphopalus* and *Rafflesia* flowers.

Batu Jong Jong Village, Bahorok District, has an area of around 300.16 km² with a sub-district area percentage of 27.24%. Langkat Regency is one of the regions in North Sumatra. Geographically, Langkat Regency is located at 3o 14' 00" - 4o 13' 00" North Latitude, 97o 52' 00" - 98o 45' 00" East Longitude and 4 - 105 m above sea level. Langkat Regency occupies an area of +- 6,263.29 Km² (626,329 Ha) consisting of 23 sub-districts and 240 villages and 37 definitive sub-districts. The Langkat Regency area to the north borders Aceh Province and the Malacca Strait, to the south it borders Karo Regency, to the west it borders Aceh Province, and to the east it borders Deli Serdang Regency and Binjai City. Based on the area by sub-district in Langkat Regency, the largest area is Bahorok District with an area of 1,101.83 Km² or 17.59

percent, followed by Batang Panggang District with an area of 899.38 Km² or 14.36 percent. Meanwhile, the smallest area is Binjai District with an area of 42.05 Km² or 0.67 percent of the total area of Langkat Regency. Batu Jong Jong Village is located in Bahorok District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra. Most of the people in this village earn their living as farmers. Apart from that, the majority of people work in the tourism sector, namely as tour guides.

Observation of the tourism potential of Batu Jongjong Village was carried out by direct observation in Batu Jong Jong Village. Bahoro District, Langkat Regency. The tourism potential of Batu Jong Jong Village was assessed by direct observation in the Batu Jong Jong Village area after identifying objects that were considered to have potential and were recorded. The components assessed for the potential of Batu Jong Jong Village include tourist attraction, social, environmental and economic conditions, accessibility, management and services, accommodation, facilities and infrastructure, and availability of clean water.

Batu Jong Jong Village is one of the villages designated and formed as a tourist village in Langkat Regency, and where Batu Jongjong Village is included in the top 300 ADWI 2023 in the Pioneer Tourism Village category. Moreover, as is known, Batu Jong Jong Village has a variety of natural riches, including pristine mountains, clear rivers, hundreds of caves under the rocky mountains, and diverse flora and fauna. Endemic animals found in the Batu Jong Jong Village area are Sumatran orangutans, Sumatran tigers, Gibon, and. Flora, which is no less interesting, makes the main attraction of Batu Jong Jong Tourism Village the presence of various types of *Amorphopalus* and *Rafflesia* flowers. It can be developed with the potential natural wealth possessed by Batu Jongjong Village. Many natural riches can be developed into ecotourism destinations, providing economic benefits, social, and environmental while promoting conservation and sustainability.

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Accessibility is an indication that states whether an object is easy to reach. Accessibility is an inseparable factor in driving market potential. The elements assessed in accessibility are the condition of the road distance from the city center, road type and travel time from the provincial

capital. The condition and distance of the land road from the city center where Batu Jongjong is located in Langkat Regency is such that the distance from the nearest city center to Batu Jongjong Village is around 78.2 km and takes 2-3 hours. The type of main road to Batu Jongjong Village is quite good; it is paved and approximately < 3m wide, but the roads around the village area are still rocky and not well-paved. The distance from the provincial city center takes 3-4 hours from Medan to Batu Jongjong.

Environmental, social and economic conditions are very important in managing tourism potential. This is because these three factors are interrelated and significantly impact the development and sustainability of tourist destinations. The assessment elements of environmental, social and economic condition indicators include the spatial planning of the object area, land status, population livelihoods, education, soil fertility level and natural resources.

The condition of the spatial layout of the object area, where Batu Jongjong village is a village that has just started carrying out tourism activities in its village, which has just become a tourist village with a pioneering category registered with the Ministry of Tourism so that the spatial planning of the object area is still in the process of preparing the plan to spatial planning of tourist attraction areas.

Land status conditions where the land status in Batu Jongjong village is privately owned land, and the obstacle is the egoism of each community regarding local tourism management, including the need for integrated management of the Frog Rock tourist attraction, which is controlled by each community based on the position of the river flow in their area. Condition of livelihood of the population, based on observations and interviews with the Head of Batu Jongjong Village, most of the village community are farmers. The educational condition of the population in Batu Jongjong Village: Most of the village community only has elementary school graduates, considering that the availability of schools is still limited and requires quite a long distance from the village. The soil fertility level in Batu Jongjong Village is potentially fertile because it is located in the Gunung Leuser Park area, which has a fertile soil structure and high levels of rainfall.

Natural resource conditions, in this case, the natural conditions in Batu Jongjong, have great potential. Batu Jongjong village has excellent biodiversity, including three main levels: genetic diversity, species diversity, and ecosystem diversity, including clear and abundant river flows. There are rocks; there are 8 karst caves; there are corpse flowers (*Amorphophallus titanum*), which are easy to find; there are rafflesia flowers (*Rafflesia amanuensis*) in the TNGL area; there are various types of wild animals, such as Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*), gibbons or gibbons (*Hylobates syndactylus*), sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*) and Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrensis*).

CONCLUSION

With the Batu Jongjong Village tourism potential index of 65.34% in the medium category, this village has good potential to develop as an ecotourism destination. This potential includes natural attractions, culture, and other attractive tourist resources. However, efforts need to be made to improve several aspects such as accessibility, management, service and security in order to increase its competitiveness as an attractive tourist destination. Challenges such as low accessibility, management and services that need to be improved, and security must be addressed

with concrete steps that involve collaboration between the government, local communities and other stakeholders. Despite the challenges, the existing potential offers sustainable and inclusive ecotourism development opportunities. With the right efforts to improve the necessary aspects, Batu Jonjong Village can become an attractive tourist destination for local and international tourists.

Community participation in planning, implementing and monitoring ecotourism in Batu Jonjong Village has positively contributed to developing sustainable and inclusive tourism. However, efforts are needed to strengthen and expand community participation to ensure that ecotourism management considers and realizes local interests and aspirations. Community participation is important for the success of ecotourism programs, building strong relationships between the tourism industry and local communities, and promoting environmental sustainability and social justice.

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