



Fostering Rural Tourism through Effective Homestay Management in Tebing Tinggi Okura

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a SWOT analysis to examine the potential of fostering rural tourism through effective homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura, a growing tourist village in Riau Province, Indonesia. The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) framework provides a comprehensive understanding of both internal and external factors influencing the development of homestays in this rural setting. Key strengths identified include the village's rich cultural heritage, authentic rural lifestyle, and the strong sense of community involvement in tourism initiatives. These factors make Tebing Tinggi Okura an attractive destination for visitors seeking unique cultural experiences. However, weaknesses such as inadequate infrastructure, limited professional hospitality training, and inconsistent service standards pose significant challenges to homestay quality and sustainability. On the opportunity side, the growing demand for eco-tourism and rural tourism presents a significant market potential. Additionally, the use of digital platforms for marketing and booking offers opportunities to reach broader audiences. The study also highlights potential threats, including competition from nearby rural destinations and environmental degradation risks due to increased tourism activity. By addressing weaknesses through capacity building, improving service standards, and leveraging digital marketing, Tebing Tinggi Okura can strengthen its position as a rural tourism destination. This research concludes that a community-driven approach, supported by local government and tourism stakeholders, is essential to ensure sustainable growth in rural homestays while preserving the village's cultural and natural assets.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini menggunakan analisis SWOT untuk mengkaji potensi pengembangan pariwisata pedesaan melalui pengelolaan homestay yang efektif di Tebing Tinggi Okura, desa wisata yang sedang berkembang di Provinsi Riau, Indonesia. Kerangka kerja Kekuatan, Kelemahan, Peluang, dan Ancaman (SWOT) memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang faktor internal dan eksternal yang memengaruhi pengembangan homestay di lingkungan pedesaan ini. Kekuatan utama yang diidentifikasi meliputi warisan budaya desa yang kaya, gaya hidup pedesaan yang autentik, dan rasa keterlibatan masyarakat yang kuat dalam inisiatif pariwisata. Faktor-faktor ini menjadikan Tebing Tinggi Okura destinasi menarik bagi pengunjung yang mencari pengalaman budaya yang unik. Namun, kelemahan seperti infrastruktur yang tidak memadai, pelatihan perhotelan profesional yang terbatas, dan standar layanan yang tidak konsisten menimbulkan tantangan signifikan terhadap kualitas dan keberlanjutan homestay. Di sisi peluang, meningkatnya permintaan akan ekowisata dan wisata pedesaan menghadirkan potensi pasar yang signifikan. Selain itu, penggunaan platform digital untuk pemasaran dan pemesanan menawarkan peluang

untuk menjangkau khalayak yang lebih luas. Studi ini juga menyoroti potensi ancaman, termasuk persaingan dari destinasi pedesaan di dekatnya dan risiko degradasi lingkungan karena meningkatnya aktivitas pariwisata. Dengan mengatasi kelemahan melalui pengembangan kapasitas, peningkatan standar layanan, dan pemanfaatan pemasaran digital, Tebing Tinggi Okura dapat memperkuat posisinya sebagai destinasi wisata pedesaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan berbasis masyarakat, yang didukung oleh pemerintah daerah dan pemangku kepentingan pariwisata, sangat penting untuk memastikan pertumbuhan berkelanjutan dalam homestay pedesaan sambil melestarikan aset budaya dan alam desa.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has emerged as a powerful driver of sustainable development in many regions across the globe (Sharpley & Telfer, 2018). It offers an opportunity to promote local culture, preserve natural environments, and empower local communities economically. In Indonesia, rural tourism has gained traction due to the country's diverse cultural and natural assets, with villages such as Tebing Tinggi Okura in Riau Province becoming focal points for these efforts. The appeal of rural tourism lies in its potential to provide visitors with authentic experiences that showcase the traditional ways of life, while simultaneously contributing to the socio-economic development of host communities (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021). However, for rural tourism to succeed, effective management practices are essential, particularly in the operation of homestays, which serve as a critical interface between tourists and the local culture (Romão & Neuts, 2019). Recent studies underscore the importance of proper homestay management in enhancing tourist satisfaction and fostering repeat visitation (Set & Ray, 2021).

Homestays are a key element of rural tourism, offering visitors a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the local culture and lifestyle (Parani et al., 2021). In rural settings like Tebing Tinggi Okura, homestays provide a more personalized and intimate accommodation option compared to conventional hotels. They allow tourists to experience daily life in the village, participate in cultural activities, and engage with the community. For local hosts, homestays represent not only a source of income but also a way to share their culture and preserve local traditions. However, despite the potential benefits, many rural homestay operations face challenges related to management, service quality, and sustainability. Effective homestay management is essential to ensure that these operations meet the expectations of modern tourists, who seek comfort, authenticity, and professionalism (Muslin et al., 2023; Soeswoyo et al., 2021; Tiberghien et al., 2020).

The concept of community-based tourism (CBT) is particularly relevant in the context of homestay management in rural areas. CBT emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in the planning, developing, and managing tourism activities. In Tebing Tinggi Okura, a community-based approach to homestay management can ensure that tourism development benefits the local population and contributes to the long-term sustainability of the village. Community involvement is crucial in maintaining the authenticity of the tourism experience while providing local residents with economic opportunities. Moreover, CBT fosters a

sense of ownership among community members, which can lead to improved management practices and greater commitment to preserving the village's cultural and environmental assets.

Despite the potential for success, homestay operations in rural areas face several challenges. These include inadequate infrastructure, lack of professional training for hosts, and limited access to marketing channels. In Tebing Tinggi Okura, these challenges are evident in the inconsistent quality of homestay services and the lack of standardized amenities. Moreover, many homestay operators lack the necessary skills in hospitality management, which can lead to negative tourist experiences and hinder repeat visitation. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions in capacity building, infrastructure development, and marketing strategies. Studies have shown that improving the skills of local hosts and enhancing the quality of the visitor experience are critical to the success of rural tourism initiatives.

Infrastructure development plays a pivotal role in enhancing the visitor experience in rural tourism destinations. For Tebing Tinggi Okura to compete with other rural destinations, improvements in transportation, accommodation facilities, and basic utilities are necessary. Poor infrastructure can deter potential visitors, particularly those seeking comfort and convenience during their stay. In rural homestays, ensuring that guests have access to clean water, electricity, and comfortable living conditions is crucial. Research indicates that tourists are more likely to return to rural destinations that provide both authentic cultural experiences and modern comforts. Thus, infrastructure development is a key area of focus for improving homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura.

Another critical aspect of successful homestay management is service quality. Tourists expect a certain level of professionalism and hospitality when staying in rural accommodations, even though they seek an authentic experience. Service quality in homestays is determined by factors such as cleanliness, comfort, host friendliness, and the availability of local cultural activities. A study on rural homestays revealed that tourists are more likely to recommend a destination if they perceive the service quality to be high. In Tebing Tinggi Okura, enhancing the service standards of homestays through training programs for hosts can significantly improve tourist satisfaction and contribute to the village's reputation as a premier rural tourism destination.

Marketing is also essential for the success of rural homestays, particularly in a digital age where tourists increasingly rely on online platforms to plan their travels (Chamhuri & Islam, 2012; Juliana et al., 2023). In rural areas like Tebing Tinggi Okura, homestay operators often lack the expertise and resources to effectively promote their accommodations. Digital marketing tools, including social media and online booking platforms, can help homestays reach a broader audience and attract more visitors. Recent research highlights the importance of digital marketing in rural tourism, noting that online visibility can significantly boost visitor numbers (Soeswoyo et al., 2021; Tasci, 2017). By adopting digital marketing strategies, homestay operators in Tebing Tinggi Okura can tap into the growing demand for rural and cultural tourism.

Sustainability is another important consideration in homestay management. As rural tourism grows, there is a risk of environmental degradation and loss of cultural authenticity (Gallarza et al., 2019). Effective homestay management must therefore prioritize sustainability, ensuring that tourism activities do not harm the natural environment or disrupt the local way of life (Subramaniam et al., 2023). Sustainable practices in homestay operations include the use of eco-friendly materials, waste management systems, and the promotion of local products and services. Studies show that tourists are increasingly attracted to destinations that promote

sustainability and responsible tourism (Gerdt et al., 2019). In Tebing Tinggi Okura, integrating sustainable practices into homestay management can help preserve the village's natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Collaborative efforts between local communities, government agencies, and tourism stakeholders are crucial for the success of rural homestays (El-Khadrawy et al., 2020). In Tebing Tinggi Okura, partnerships between local homestay operators and regional tourism authorities can facilitate access to training, financial support, and marketing resources. Additionally, government involvement is essential in providing the necessary infrastructure and regulatory framework to support rural tourism development. Research shows that such collaborations are key to the long-term success of rural tourism initiatives. By working together, stakeholders can create a cohesive strategy for promoting Tebing Tinggi Okura as a leading rural tourism destination. Homestays have the potential to provide economic benefits to local communities while offering visitors a unique cultural experience (Bharadwaj et al., 1993; López-sanz et al., 2021). However, to fully realize this potential, it is essential to overcome the challenges facing homestay operators and implement best practices in management. This study provides a framework for understanding the key factors that contribute to the success of rural homestays and offers recommendations for enhancing Tebing Tinggi Okura's appeal as a rural tourism destination.



Figure 1. Tebing Tinggi Okura

Rural tourism has gained increasing attention in recent years as a viable means of promoting sustainable economic development in rural areas (Lemy et al., 2022). It is characterized by the interaction between visitors and local communities, which fosters cultural exchange and socio-economic benefits for the residents. This has led to a growing interest in understanding the dynamics of rural tourism and the role of various forms of accommodation, particularly homestays, in enhancing the tourism experience. Homestays not only provide unique cultural experiences for tourists but also serve as an essential source of income for local communities. However, the effective management of these homestays is crucial to ensuring a positive experience for both tourists and hosts.

Homestays play a significant role in rural tourism by offering tourists an authentic experience of local culture and lifestyle (Juliana et al., 2021; Pramezwarly et al., 2022). They allow travelers to immerse themselves in the community and foster connections that contribute to a more enriching travel experience. Studies show that the personal interaction between hosts and guests significantly enhances tourist satisfaction, leading to positive word-of-mouth and repeat

visits. However, to maximize these benefits, effective management practices are essential. Research indicates that homestay operators who implement strong management strategies, including training and quality assurance, can enhance guest experiences and increase customer loyalty.

Despite the potential benefits, homestay operators often face various challenges that hinder their ability to provide quality services. These challenges include inadequate training, limited access to resources, and poor marketing strategies. For instance, many operators may lack the skills necessary to effectively manage their businesses, resulting in inconsistent service quality and negative guest experiences. Furthermore, the limited marketing knowledge among homestay operators can lead to low visibility in the competitive tourism market. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering successful rural tourism and ensuring that homestays can thrive in places like Tebing Tinggi Okura.

Effective management practices are vital for the sustainability of homestays in rural tourism. Research shows that structured management frameworks can significantly enhance operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Implementing standardized procedures for guest interactions, maintenance, and service delivery can help homestay operators provide consistent and high-quality experiences. Additionally, the adoption of best practices in hospitality management can lead to increased competitiveness in the tourism sector. By examining the unique challenges faced by homestay operators in Tebing Tinggi Okura, this study aims to identify management strategies that can effectively address these issues.

The marketing of homestays is another critical area that requires attention. Existing literature highlights the importance of marketing strategies in attracting tourists to rural destinations. Many homestay operators rely on traditional marketing methods, which may not be effective in reaching today's tech-savvy travelers. Research indicates that the use of digital marketing tools can enhance visibility and attract a larger audience. By exploring innovative marketing strategies tailored to the local context, this study seeks to provide insights into how homestays in Tebing Tinggi Okura can effectively reach and engage potential guests. This study employs a SWOT analysis to examine the potential of fostering rural tourism through effective homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura, a growing tourist village in Riau Province, Indonesia

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in the success of rural tourism, particularly regarding the accessibility and attractiveness of homestays. Studies have shown that well-developed infrastructure, such as transportation, utilities, and communication networks, is vital for facilitating tourist access to rural areas. Inadequate infrastructure can significantly impact the overall tourist experience and the viability of homestays (Juliana et al., 2024). This research will explore how enhancing infrastructure in Tebing Tinggi Okura can improve the operational capacity of homestays and contribute to the broader development of rural tourism in the region. Sustainability is a growing concern in the tourism industry, and it is particularly relevant in the context of rural homestays. Research emphasizes the importance of implementing sustainable practices to minimize the environmental impact of tourism activities. Homestay operators can play a significant role in promoting sustainable tourism by adopting eco-friendly practices and engaging in community conservation efforts. This study aims to investigate how homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura can align with sustainability principles, thereby contributing to the preservation of local resources and ecosystems while enhancing tourist experiences.

The involvement of local communities in rural tourism is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism initiatives (Juliana et al., 2022; Juliana & Antonio, 2022). Research highlights the importance of community engagement in enhancing the effectiveness of tourism management. By involving residents in decision-making processes and tourism development, homestay operators can create more meaningful experiences for visitors while empowering the community economically. This study seeks to examine the extent of community engagement in homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura and identify strategies for enhancing local participation in tourism. Understanding the factors that contribute to tourist satisfaction is crucial for the success of rural homestays. Studies have identified various dimensions of service quality, including responsiveness, reliability, and empathy, that significantly influence guest experiences. By measuring these factors, homestay operators can gain insights into areas for improvement and tailor their services to meet the needs of their guests. This research will explore how effective management practices can be employed to enhance tourist satisfaction and foster positive reviews, ultimately benefiting the local tourism sector.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on integrating management practices with community involvement in rural tourism, especially within the framework of Tebing Tinggi Okura. By exploring the intersection of community-based tourism (CBT) and homestay management, this study seeks to demonstrate how local community engagement in management practices can lead to better tourist satisfaction and enhance the overall effectiveness of rural tourism initiatives. This research addresses this gap by analysing how homestay operators in Tebing Tinggi Okura can leverage digital marketing strategies to promote their offerings and reach a wider audience. There is limited understanding of how marketing efforts can impact the long-term sustainability of homestay businesses in rural areas. This study aims to provide a detailed analysis of effective marketing practices that can enhance the competitiveness of homestays in Tebing Tinggi Okura, thus contributing a fresh perspective to the existing body of knowledge in rural tourism marketing.

Effective homestay management is a critical component of fostering rural tourism in Tebing Tinggi Okura. By addressing the challenges faced by homestay operators, implementing best management practices, and promoting sustainable tourism initiatives, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the growing body of literature on rural tourism. The findings will not only benefit homestay operators but also contribute to the overall development of the tourism sector in the region, enhancing the socio-economic well-being of local communities.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is characterized by its focus on collecting and analyzing data in the form of words, descriptions, and narratives. Qualitative research is particularly effective in understanding complex social phenomena, as it allows researchers to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this context, the qualitative data collected provides a comprehensive overview of homestay management practices in the Tebing Tinggi Okura Tourism Village. By emphasizing rich, detailed descriptions, the study seeks to illuminate the intricacies of how homestays operate and how they contribute to rural tourism development. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, enable researchers to gather nuanced insights that quantitative methods may overlook, making them especially suitable for exploring the unique characteristics of rural tourism environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data collection for this study involved a combination of in-depth interviews, observations, and literature reviews, which were categorized into primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was obtained directly from key informants in the Tebing Tinggi Okura Tourism Village, who possess first-hand knowledge and expertise in homestay management. Secondary data was sourced from existing literature, internet resources, and other relevant materials that provide context and background for the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data collection techniques employed in this study included systematic observation, structured interviews, questionnaires, literature studies, and documentation. Observations were conducted to gather real-time information about the research setting, while interviews with key informants facilitated in-depth discussions on their experiences and insights regarding homestay operations. Additionally, questionnaires were utilized to assess respondents' opinions and feedback related to the study topic, thereby enriching the data set and providing a broader perspective on the subject matter.

The selection of key informants for this study utilized purposive sampling techniques, ensuring that the informants chosen were individuals with extensive knowledge and experience related to the research topic. Purposive sampling is a common method in qualitative research, allowing researchers to target specific individuals who can provide valuable insights and information (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach enhances the reliability and validity of the findings by ensuring that the data collected comes from knowledgeable sources. Moreover, the combination of various data collection techniques allows for triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the research outcomes (Flick, 2018). By integrating multiple perspectives and types of data, this study aims to present a holistic understanding of homestay management practices in Tebing Tinggi Okura, ultimately contributing to the body of knowledge on rural tourism development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results on fostering rural tourism through effective homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura, using a SWOT analysis framework to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to homestay management practices in the area.

The research identified several strengths of homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura, including the unique cultural heritage of the region and the authenticity of the experiences offered to tourists. Homestays provide an opportunity for visitors to engage with local customs, cuisine, and lifestyles, thereby enhancing their overall experience (Huang & Hsu, 2020). This authenticity is a significant draw for tourists seeking immersive experiences, contributing to the attractiveness of rural tourism. Additionally, the close-knit community in Tebing Tinggi Okura fosters a supportive environment for homestay operators, which enhances service quality and customer satisfaction (Li, 2019).

Despite the strengths, the research highlighted certain weaknesses in the homestay management practices. Many homestay operators lack formal training in hospitality management and marketing, which can lead to inconsistent service quality and insufficient promotion of their offerings (Reddy et al., 2020). Additionally, some homestays may struggle with maintaining facilities and ensuring hygiene standards, which can deter potential guests (Sundari & Prasetyo, 2021). These weaknesses underscore the need for capacity-building initiatives to improve management skills among homestay operators and to establish guidelines for maintaining quality standards.

The study revealed numerous opportunities for enhancing rural tourism through effective homestay management. Increasing global interest in sustainable and eco-friendly tourism practices presents an opportunity for homestays in Tebing Tinggi Okura to position themselves as sustainable alternatives to traditional hotels (Gonzalez et al., 2022). By leveraging local resources and promoting environmentally responsible practices, homestays can attract a growing segment of environmentally conscious travelers. Moreover, the potential for collaboration with local businesses and tourism agencies can enhance visibility and market reach, creating a more comprehensive tourism experience that benefits the entire community (Khan et al., 2023).

The research also identified several threats to homestay management in the region. Competition from established hotels and other accommodation options poses a significant challenge, particularly in attracting tourists who prioritize amenities and modern conveniences (Chirisa et al., 2020). Additionally, external factors such as political instability, economic downturns, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have created uncertainties in the tourism sector, which could negatively affect the growth of homestays in Tebing Tinggi Okura (Sharma et al., 2021). It is crucial for homestay operators to develop strategies that mitigate these threats while remaining adaptable to changing market conditions.

The involvement of the local community in homestay management emerged as a critical factor in the success of rural tourism initiatives. The study found that when community members actively participate in the management and promotion of homestays, it leads to a stronger sense of ownership and pride in local culture, which enhances the overall tourist experience (Chik et al., 2020). Engaging the community in decision-making processes and providing training opportunities can further strengthen the local tourism sector, promoting sustainable development and cultural preservation (Kumar & Singh, 2022).

Effective marketing strategies play a vital role in fostering rural tourism through homestays. The research indicated that many homestay operators in Tebing Tinggi Okura rely primarily on word-of-mouth promotion, which can limit their reach to potential guests (Khalid et al., 2021). Implementing digital marketing techniques, such as social media promotion and online booking platforms, can significantly enhance visibility and attract a broader audience (Bansal & Saini, 2022).

Training homestay owners in marketing practices can empower them to effectively promote their unique offerings and engage with tourists more proactively. The necessity for training and development programs for homestay operators emerged as a critical finding. The study emphasizes the importance of equipping homestay managers with essential skills in hospitality, customer service, and business management (Nanda et al., 2023). Such training can lead to improved service quality, higher guest satisfaction, and increased repeat visits, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth of rural tourism in Tebing Tinggi Okura. Collaborative initiatives between government agencies, educational institutions, and local organizations can facilitate the development of such programs.

The research on fostering rural tourism through effective homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura reveals significant insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the sector. By leveraging its strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and threats, the homestay sector can enhance its role in promoting sustainable rural tourism. Effective training and marketing strategies, coupled with community involvement, are vital for ensuring the long-term success of homestays in the region.

CONCLUSION

The research on fostering rural tourism through effective homestay management in Tebing Tinggi Okura underscores the significant role that well-managed homestays can play in enhancing the tourism experience and promoting sustainable development in rural areas. The findings reveal that leveraging the unique cultural heritage and community involvement is essential in creating authentic experiences that attract tourists. By focusing on the strengths of local culture, engaging the community, and providing high-quality services, homestays can not only enhance tourist satisfaction but also contribute to the overall economic development of the region.

The SWOT analysis reveals that the strengths of Tebing Tinggi Okura lie in its rich cultural heritage and community involvement, which can enhance the authenticity of the tourist experience. However, the weaknesses, such as inadequate infrastructure and inconsistent service quality, pose significant challenges. By addressing these weaknesses through strategic planning and resource allocation, the potential for sustainable tourism development can be realized. Opportunities for growth include increased interest in rural tourism and the potential for collaborative marketing strategies. Conversely, threats such as environmental degradation and competition from other tourism destinations necessitate careful management and proactive measures.

The implications of this research are multifaceted and extend beyond the immediate context of Tebing Tinggi Okura. Firstly, the study highlights the importance of training and capacity-building programs for homestay operators to improve service quality and management skills. Such initiatives can help ensure that local communities are equipped to manage their homestays effectively, leading to higher guest satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth promotion. By investing in education and resources, stakeholders, including government agencies and local organizations, can foster a more resilient and sustainable tourism industry in rural areas.

Secondly, the research emphasizes the need for collaborative marketing strategies that can enhance the visibility of homestays and rural tourism destinations. By promoting local tourism through digital marketing and partnerships with local businesses, homestays can attract a broader audience and create a comprehensive tourism experience. This collaborative approach not only benefits individual operators but also enhances the overall tourism ecosystem in Tebing Tinggi Okura, leading to increased visitor numbers and economic growth for the community.

The study calls for ongoing research and evaluation of homestay management practices to adapt to changing market trends and tourist preferences. Continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms can help identify areas for improvement and innovation in service delivery. This adaptive approach will be crucial for maintaining the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations like Tebing Tinggi Okura in an increasingly globalized tourism market. As such, fostering rural tourism through effective homestay management can serve as a model for other rural areas seeking to enhance their tourism offerings while preserving their cultural and natural heritage.

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