

Identification of the Ecotourism Potential of Hot Springs in Matatun Village as a Tourism Village Destination, Kebar District, Tambrau District, Southwest Papua Province

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
ecotourism; hot springs; Matatun Village, tourism village; sustainability	This research aims to identify the potential of hot spring ecotourism in Matatun Village, Kebar District, Tambrau Regency, Southwest Papua, as a sustainable ecotourism-based tourist village destination. Using a qualitative approach with Miles and Huberman's interactive data analysis model, this research involved three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 informants consisting of local communities, tourism village managers, local government, and tourists. Apart from that, direct observations were made at the hot spring locations and documentation in the form of field notes and photos. The research results show that the hot springs in War Aremi have great potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination, supported by the unique natural environment, health benefits, and local socio-cultural values. The main challenge lies in inadequate infrastructure and the need to increase supporting facilities. This research concludes that ecotourism development in Matatun Village requires a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders to ensure economic, social, and environmental sustainability. With the right management strategy, Matatun Village can become a model of sustainable tourist village destination in Southwest Papua.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a tourism approach that emphasizes environmental preservation and empowerment of local communities, as well as providing educational experiences for tourists (Fandeli, 2000). This approach is considered effective in encouraging sustainable development, especially in areas that have natural and cultural richness that have not been widely explored (Nugroho, 2011). A research conducted by Damanik and Weber (2006) shows that ecotourism can increase public awareness of the importance of conservation, as well as create economic opportunities through environment-based activities. This emphasizes that ecotourism is not only an alternative to conventional tourism, but also an integrative solution for environmental preservation and socio-economic development.

Matatun Village, located in Kebar District, Tambrau Regency, Southwest Papua Province, has a natural hot spring known as Aremi Hot Springs or War Aremi (Asiar et al., 2019). This location is surrounded by natural vegetation such as banyan and coconut trees, which adds to the beauty and uniqueness of the destination (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023). The previous research by Suryawan (2015) confirms that hot springs have high appeal as health tourism destinations, especially if managed professionally with a community-based approach. This shows that developing destinations like War Aremi can be a strategic opportunity to optimize West Papua's rich but underutilized natural potential.

Besides, the hot water in War Aremi is believed to have health benefits, such as relieving fatigue and refreshing the body, so it is often used by local people after a day of activities (TribunPapuaBarat, 2023). The study by Fatmaningtyas et al. (2019) shows that the health benefits offered by hot springs are one of the main reasons tourists visit similar destinations in other regions of West Papua. Thus, the potential of hot springs in War Aremi as a health tourism destination can become an attraction that supports the development of nature-based tourism and local culture.

The development of War Aremi as an ecotourism destination in Matatun Village is in line with the government's efforts to encourage tourism villages through the 2023 Indonesian Tourism Village Award (*Anugerah Desa Wisata Indonesia/ADWI*) program, in which Matatun Village has received an award as a Tourism Village (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023). This initiative is expected to improve the local economy through sustainable and community-based tourism (Yewen, 2023). Nugroho's research (2011) emphasizes the importance of empowering local communities in developing ecotourism-based tourist destinations to ensure sustainable benefits for the community. This confirms that the active involvement of local communities is a key element in the success of ecotourism development.

However, to achieve optimal development, a comprehensive identification of ecotourism potential is required, including feasibility analysis and appropriate development strategies (Fatmaningtyas et al., 2019). The research conducted by Hidayat and Widagdo (2017) shows that initial identification of physical, social, and cultural potential is very important for determining appropriate strategies in managing ecotourism destinations. Thus, an in-depth potential analysis can become a strong basis for planning and managing sustainable destinations.

This research is aimed at identifying the ecotourism potential of hot springs in Matatun Village as a tourism village destination. By analyzing physical, biological, and socio-cultural aspects, it is hoped that appropriate development strategies can be formulated to maximize the benefits of ecotourism for local communities and to preserve the environment (Asiar et al., 2019). The previous research by Yuliana et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of collaboration between government, society, and businesspersons to ensure the sustainability of tourism destination development. Thus, the success of developing tourist destinations is not only determined by natural potential, but also by effective synergy between various related parties.

This research is expected to become a reference for local governments and other stakeholders in designing effective and sustainable ecotourism development programs. By involving various related parties, this research is also expected to strengthen the contribution of ecotourism to sustainable local development (Nugroho, 2011; Fatmaningtyas et al., 2019). This confirms that collaboration and sustainability-based approach are the keys in ensuring that ecotourism gives a long-term positive impact on society and the environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism as a Sustainable Tourism Concept

Ecotourism is defined as a responsible travel to natural areas that aims to preserve the environment and improve the welfare of local communities (Fandeli, 2000). Nugroho (2011) explains that ecotourism does not only focus on preserving the environment but also on empowering local communities through active involvement in tourism activities. Damanik and Weber (2006) state that ecotourism becomes one of the solutions for a continuous management of natural resources while creating economic opportunities for local communities.

Hot Springs Ecotourism Potentials

Natural hot springs are among other ecotourism objects that have high appeal. Besides presenting natural beauty, health benefits of hot springs often become the main reason for tourists' visits (Suryawan, 2015). Research by Fatmaningtyas et al. (2019) reveals that hot spring's health benefits, such as relaxation and body therapy make it a potential health tourism destination. In West Papua, hot springs are often surrounded by biodiversity, which adds to their appeal as ecotourism destinations.

Ecotourism Based Tourism Village

The development of ecotourism-based tourism villages has been carried out in various regions in Indonesia, including West Papua. Kusmayadi and Kaihatu's (2017) research in Yenwaupnor Tourism Village, Raja Ampat, shows that local community-based management strategies become the key to successful development of tourism villages. Collaboration between the community, government, and the private sector has been proven to improve the quality of destination management and provide direct economic benefits to local communities (Yuliana et al., 2020).

Identification Strategy of Ecotourism Potentials

The identification of ecotourism potential requires a comprehensive analysis of various aspects, including physical conditions, biodiversity, and socio-cultural aspects. Hidayat and Widagdo (2017) emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in understanding the potentials of a destination to ensure that the management is implemented in accordance with local characteristics. On the other hand, Yuliana et al. (2020) state that an effective ecotourism management must consider ecological sustainability and community involvement.

The Context of Matatun Village as a Tourism Village Destination

Matatun Village in Kebar District, Tambrau Regency, Southwest Papua, has a natural hot spring known as War Aremi (Asiar et al., 2019). Surrounded by natural vegetation such as banyan and coconut trees, this area is unique and has the potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination. The Indonesian Tourism Village Award (*Program Anugerah Desa Wisata Indonesia/ADWI*) program has included Matatun Village as one of the leading tourist villages, showing recognition of its potential as a tourism destination based on nature and local culture (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2023). A previous study by *TribunPapuaBarat* (2023) also noted that the health benefits of the hot springs in War Aremi become the main attraction for tourists.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative approach with an interactive data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This approach involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion or verification. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with local communities, tourist village managers, and tourists, as well as direct observation at the Matatun Village hot spring location to understand the physical, social, and cultural conditions. Documentations in the form of field notes, photos, and related documents were also used to support the analysis. The population in this study included all the people of Matatun Village, tourist village managers, local government handling tourism development, and tourists who have visited hot spring locations. From this population, the sample was selected on purpose, namely based on relevance and direct involvement with the issue being studied. The sample consisted of 15 people, including 5 local communities (including traditional leaders), 3 tourist village managers, 2 local government representatives, and 5 tourists. The data reduction process was carried out by sorting and filtering information that was relevant to ecotourism potential. The reduced data were presented in the form

of descriptive narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate further analysis. Conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and themes that emerge from the data, which were then verified through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the validity and validity of the findings. This approach allows the researcher to explore deeply the ecotourism potentials of hot springs in Matatun Village as a sustainable tourist village destination.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on data analysis carried out using the Miles and Huberman approach, several main potentials that support the development of hot springs in Matatun Village as a tourist village destination were found:

1. Physical and environmental aspects

The hot spring in War Aremi has a stable temperature, ranging from 40–50°C, which is suitable for health tourism such as relaxation therapy. The location is surrounded by natural vegetation such as banyan and coconut trees, adding to its ecotourism appeal. The harmonious surrounding environment and minimal pollution provide a refreshing tourism experience and support the principles of environmental conservation.

2. Sociocultural aspects

The people of Matatun Village show enthusiasm for the development of a tourism village. Local traditions, such as folklore about the origins of hot spring, can be presented as additional attractions for tourists. Community involvement in managing hot springs also provides opportunities for local economic empowerment.

3. Health and tourists aspects

The hot spring in War Aremi is believed by local people to have health benefits, such as relieving fatigue and curing joint pain. This becomes a major attraction for tourists looking for a health tourism experience. Most tourists who visit this location said that they were attracted by the relaxation and health benefits of the hot spring.

4. Infrastructure readiness

Supporting infrastructure, such as road access to Matatun Village, still requires improvement. Currently, facilities such as washrooms, gazebos, and information boards are also inadequate to support the tourists' comfort. This becomes one of the main challenges in destination development.

DISCUSSION

The research results show that the hot springs in Matatun Village have a great potential to be developed as an ecotourism-based tourist village destination. The main potential lies in the combination of natural attractions and distinctive local culture. This finding is in line with Suryawan's research (2015), which states that hot springs can become a health tourism attraction if they are managed well. From a socio-cultural aspect, the involvement of local communities is the key to the success of managing this destination. This supports the findings of Yuliana et al. (2020), which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between society, government, and the private sector in ecotourism development. In the context of Matatun Village, the community does not only become the beneficiary, but also the main actor in managing hot springs, which strengthens the value of sustainable development. However, challenges related to infrastructure indicate the

need for support from the government and other stakeholders to improve accessibility and supporting facilities. This finding is in accordance with Fatmaningtyas et al. (2019), who state that adequate infrastructure is an important factor in improving the appeal and comfort of tourists in nature-based destinations. Overall, the development of hot springs in Matatun Village as a tourist village destination requires a holistic approach that includes infrastructure improvements, environmental preservation, and involvement of local communities. With the right strategy, this destination will not only provide economic benefits to the community, but also support the preservation of nature and local culture, making it a model for sustainable ecotourism in Southwest Papua.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the hot springs in Matatun Village have great potential to be developed as an ecotourism-based tourism village destination. These potentials lie in the combination of natural attractions, such as stable hot water temperatures and a beautiful environment, as well as local cultural values, such as community traditions and the folklore surrounding the hot springs. In addition, the health benefits offered by the hot springs become a major attraction for tourists looking for a health tourism experience. The involvement of local communities in managing the hot springs is the key to the success of developing this destination, because it provides opportunities for economic empowerment and supports the preservation of traditions. However, supporting infrastructure such as road access, washroom facilities, gazebos, and information boards still require improvement to increase the tourists' comfort. Therefore, support from the government and other stakeholders are needed to improve the infrastructure and to ensure the continuous management. The development of the hot springs in Matatun Village requires a holistic approach that includes infrastructure improvements, environmental conservation, and collaboration between the community, government, and the private sector. With the right strategy, this destination can become a sustainable ecotourism model that not only provides economic benefits for local communities, but also preserves the environment and local culture in Southwest Papua.

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