

Development of Tourism Potential of Batu Putih Baths in Jorong Koto Tuo, Simarasok Tourism Village

Pengembangan Potensi Wisata Pemandian Batu Putih di Jorong Koto Tuo Desa Wisata Simarasok

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Abstract

This study is entitled “The Development of Tourism Potential of Batu Putih Baths in Jorong Koto Tuo, Simarasok Tourism Village”. The background of this study is that Batu Putih Baths possess natural tourism potential in the form of a river and its surrounding scenery that has not yet been optimally managed and developed. This study aims to determine the potential development of Batu Putih Baths Tourism in Jorong Koto Tuo, Simarasok Tourism Village, Agam Regency. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving nine informants consisting of village officials, the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), the Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS), and local community members. Data were analysed through data collection, data reduction, categorisation, and validity checking. The results show that Batu Putih Baths Tourism has natural potential in the form of a clear flowing river surrounded by hills and rice fields. Potential development covers four components: attraction development related to the river's appeal and natural uniqueness, accessibility development for the road access to the site, amenities development for supporting tourism facilities, and ancillary development through strengthening the management institution and human resources. This study recommends human resource training, facility improvement, environmental conservation, and improved service quality so that Batu Putih Baths Tourism can develop into a leading tourist attraction in Simarasok Village.

Keywords: *Batu Putih Baths Tourism; Tourism Potential; Tourism Development*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an inseparable part of human life, particularly in relation to social and economic activities. The World Tourism and Trade Council (WTTC) affirms that the tourism sector is currently one of the largest industries in the world and a major driver of the twenty-first-century economy, on par with the telecommunications and information technology industries. The dynamic development of the tourism industry, continuously reinforced by rising economic prosperity across nations, has positioned this sector as playing an important role in the economic development of countries worldwide.

West Sumatra has several regions with substantial tourism potential, one of which is Agam Regency. Within this regency lies Nagari Simarasok, a tourism village located in Baso Sub-district at an elevation of 800–1,200 metres above sea level, covering an area of 1,789 hectares and divided into four jorong (hamlets): Jorong Simarasok, Jorong Koto Tuo, Jorong Kampeh, and Jorong Sungai Angek. In Jorong Koto Tuo lies a bathing attraction called Batu Putih Baths, which possesses natural potential in the form of a river approximately one kilometre long with clear water originating from hillside springs, surrounded by mountain ranges and the community's rice fields.

According to visitor data from the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), the number of visits to Simarasok Tourism Village increased from 2,433 people in 2020 to 4,307 people in 2021. This increase reflects growing visitor interest that has not yet been matched by adequate development of supporting facilities and infrastructure. To date, Batu Putiah Baths lacks standard tourism facilities such as proper changing rooms, public toilets, a parking area, and an adequate prayer room (mushala), while the access road to the site is still under improvement. In addition, the human resources available to manage this attraction remain limited.

Based on these issues, this study aims to examine the development of the tourism potential of Batu Putiah Baths in Jorong Koto Tuo, Simarasok Tourism Village, guided by the four fundamental components of tourism proposed by Inskip (in Sudaryana, 2015): attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services.

Literature Review

According to Barreto and Gianfari (2015), tourism development is an effort to develop or improve a tourist attraction so that it becomes better and more appealing, both in terms of the site itself and the objects it contains, thereby attracting visitor interest. Tourism potential, according to Nawangsari (2018), refers to the various resources possessed by a region or place that can be developed into economically beneficial tourist attractions while still taking sustainability into account.

According to Inskip (in Sudaryana, 2015), the development of a tourist destination must take into account four fundamental components: (1) attraction, namely tourism appeal characterised by uniqueness, authenticity, and rarity; (2) accessibility, namely the ease with which domestic and international tourists can reach the destination, supported by transportation infrastructure and facilities; (3) amenities, namely supporting facilities such as accommodation and restaurants that allow tourists to stay longer; and (4) ancillary services, namely the presence of institutions or organisations that manage the attraction so that tourists feel safe and comfortable during their visit. These four components serve as the analytical framework of this study in assessing the development of Batu Putiah Baths' tourism potential.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, a type of research aimed at revealing facts, conditions, phenomena, and variables occurring during the research process as they actually exist in the field. The research was conducted at Batu Putiah Baths, Jorong Koto Tuo, Simarasok Tourism Village, Agam Regency, from April to August 2022.

Research subjects, or informants, were determined using data source triangulation, consisting of the Village Head (Wali Nagari), the Village Secretary, the Head of Jorong Koto Tuo, the Chair of Pokdarwis, the Chair of KUPS (Social Forestry Business Group), three representatives of community organisations (the youth leader, the head of the traditional arts group, and the hamlet head), and the manager of Batu Putiah Baths, for a total of nine informants, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Research Informants

No	Informant	Position / Description
1	Village Head	Village Head of Simarasok Tourism Village
2	Village Secretary	Village Secretary of Simarasok Tourism Village
3	Hamlet Head	Head of Jorong Koto Tuo
4	Pokdarwis	Chair of Pokdarwis, Simarasok Tourism Village
5	KUPS	Chair of KUPS, Jorong Koto Tuo
6	Community Organisations	Youth Leader, Traditional Arts Group Leader, Hamlet Head of Batu Putiah Baths (3 people)
7	Site Manager	Person in charge of Batu Putiah Baths Tourism

Source: Researcher's data (2022)

The data used in this study are primary data obtained directly from data sources through in-depth interviews. Data were collected using three techniques: direct observation of the physical conditions and activities at the site; semi-structured interviews guided by questions referring to the four research variables (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary), each comprising eight items; and documentation in the form of photographs of activities and site conditions.

Data analysis followed the stages proposed by Moleong (2012): (1) data collection through interviews and observation; (2) data reduction, namely summarising the core findings relevant to the research objectives; (3) categorisation of data into the research variable groups; and (4) verification of data validity through source triangulation, whereby data were considered valid when at least two of the three informants provided consistent information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Research Site

Batu Putiah Baths is located in Jorong Koto Tuo, Nagari Simarasok, Baso Sub-district, Agam Regency. This attraction has been self-managed by the local community since it became widely known during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The bathing area has a river approximately one kilometre long and about three metres wide, fed by clear water originating directly from hillside rock springs, so that the water remains continuously fresh due to constant flow renewal. The name 'Batu Putiah' ('white stone') derives from a large white rock located at the head of the river. The site is approximately a 45-minute drive from the centre of Bukittinggi.

Attraction

Observations and interviews with the nine informants indicate that the main appeal of Batu Putiah Baths lies in its natural authenticity, namely clear, cold river water sourced directly from hillside springs without contamination. Another distinctive feature is a coral-like rock formation locally referred to as 'batu buyia', a freshwater fish species known as

gariang that visitors can hand-feed using leaves, and scenic views of mountain ranges and terraced rice fields surrounding the bathing site. In addition, the area carries historical and legendary value through a cave in the hills believed by the community to be a meditation site for 'orang bunian' (invisible spirit beings), although access to the cave is currently no longer feasible.

At present, the attractions available to visitors remain limited to bathing and observing or feeding the fish. Several informants, including the Village Head, stated that the village government is proposing the construction of a dam and an additional swimming pool to the central government in order to enrich the tourist attractions. In terms of culture, Jorong Koto Tuo retains traditional arts such as randai and sewak dance, which hold potential to be developed as supporting cultural attractions.

Accessibility

Access to Batu Putiah Baths is currently being improved by the Simarasok Village Government. The road to the site can be traversed by both two- and four-wheeled vehicles; however, due to its limited width and one-way character at several points, only one four-wheeled vehicle can pass at a time. During the rainy season, unpaved sections of the road tend to become slippery and muddy. Directional signage to the site is already available, but parking space, particularly for four-wheeled vehicles, remains inadequate.

Regarding digital connectivity, internet access is available at the site but is limited to certain mobile network operators, namely XL and Axis, meaning not all providers can yet reach the area. Promotion of the attraction has been carried out through social media accounts managed by Pokdarwis Simarasok, such as 'Pesona Simarasok' and 'Koto Tuo Milenial', which play an important role in introducing Batu Putiah Baths to a wider audience despite the limitations of physical infrastructure.

Amenities

The supporting facilities currently available at Batu Putiah Baths remain very basic and do not yet meet tourism standards. Existing facilities include semi-permanent changing rooms, a prayer room (mushala) that is no longer in adequate condition, and small stalls run by local residents offering food and light refreshments for visitors. Public toilets, adequate waste disposal facilities, lodging or homestays in Jorong Koto Tuo, and safety facilities for visitors bathing in the river are not yet available.

Visitors are not charged an official entrance fee; instead, they are only asked to make a voluntary contribution or pay a cleaning fee. The lack of adequate facilities is one of the main constraints limiting visitors' length of stay at the site, and represents a key priority that the managers and the Village Government need to address promptly.

Ancillary

Batu Putiah Baths is currently managed independently by the local community and youth under the coordination of a local person in charge, with supervision and guidance from the Simarasok Village Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and the Jorong Koto Tuo Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS). However, this management arrangement does not yet have

a formal legal basis in the form of an official decree (SK) of appointment, and the human resources involved remain limited and have not received adequate training in tourism management.

The Simarasok Village Government, Pokdarwis, KUPS, traditional leaders (niniak mamak), Bundo Kandung (customary women's leaders), and local youth organisations have shown strong support for the development of this attraction, including through customary deliberations to ensure that tourism development remains aligned with the community's socio-cultural values. Efforts that have been and will continue to be undertaken include raising community awareness of tourism, training in tourism and culinary skills, and proposing infrastructure development assistance to regional and central government.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the results of the analysis of the four tourism development components at Batu Putiah Baths are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Current Conditions and Development Directions for Batu Putiah Baths Tourism Potential

Component	Current Condition	Development Direction
Attraction	Clear water, gariang fish, batu buyia rock formation, views of hills and rice fields; attractions limited to bathing	Adding attractions (swimming pool, photo spots), developing cultural attractions (randai, sewak dance)
Accessibility	Narrow one-way road, partly unpaved, limited internet network	Road widening and paving, additional parking space, expanded signal coverage
Amenities	Basic changing rooms, inadequate prayer room, no public toilets or homestays	Construction of public toilets, an adequate prayer room, homestays, and safety facilities
Ancillary	Self-managed by the community, no formal legal status or official decree	Formal legalisation of the managing body, human resource training, strengthening synergy among Pokdarwis, KUPS, and the Village Government

Source: Processed from the researcher's interviews and observations (2022)

These findings are consistent with the study by Nasrullah and Dewi (2014) on the Lejja Hot Spring Baths in Soppeng Regency, which also faced constraints in budget, human resources, and road access, despite possessing strong natural scenic potential. Similarly, Sitanggang's (2018) study on the Air Soda natural baths in Tarutung found that limited capital and inadequate local government support were the main obstacles to the development of community-based bathing attractions. This similarity confirms that community-based natural bathing attractions in rural areas generally possess strong natural appeal, yet their development tends to be constrained by the same three aspects: accessibility, facilities, and the institutional capacity of the managing body.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the application of the four tourism development components, attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary, strongly supports the development of the tourism potential of Batu Putiah Baths in Jorong Koto Tuo, Simarasok Tourism Village. Batu Putiah Baths possesses strong natural potential in the form of a clear river surrounded by mountain ranges and rice fields; however, its development remains constrained by road accessibility, limited standard tourism facilities, and a managing institution that has not yet been organised professionally and formally. Consistent support from the Village Government, Pokdarwis, KUPS, and the local community constitutes important social capital that needs to be continuously strengthened so that Batu Putiah Baths can develop into a leading tourist attraction that provides economic benefits for the local community.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The community should be provided with continuous training to enhance human resource capacity in tourism management.
- Managers, together with the Village Government, should improve bathing facilities such as public toilets, a prayer room, and parking areas to support the advancement of Batu Putiah Baths.
- Managers and the community should preserve the surrounding natural environment as the main attraction that must be maintained.
- Service quality for visiting tourists should be improved to create satisfaction and encourage revisit intention.
- Future research is recommended to further examine digital marketing strategies and institutional models for community-based tourism management.

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