

Analysis of the Attractiveness and Sustainability of Surfing Tourism in the Mentawai Islands

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the attractiveness and sustainability of surfing tourism in the Mentawai Islands. The research background focuses on the rapid growth of surfing tourism, which presents challenges in maintaining a balance between tourist appeal and environmental and social sustainability. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method, where data were collected through direct observation of surfing conditions and literature review. The analysis utilizes the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model to identify the development phases of surfing tourism and its impact on attractiveness and sustainability. The results show that the attractiveness of surfing tourism in the Mentawai Islands is influenced by natural beauty, supporting facilities, accessibility, and unique local culture. The consistent and high-quality waves at several spots, such as Macaronis, Hollow Trees, and Playgrounds, are the main attractions for surfers. However, the study also identifies significant challenges to sustainability due to environmental degradation and economic dependency on the tourism sector. According to the TALC analysis, the Mentawai Islands are currently in the development phase, requiring holistic and sustainable management to prevent a future decline in attractiveness.

Keywords: Surfing Tourism, Tourist Attraction, Sustainability, Mentawai Islands

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mentawai Islands, located in western Sumatra, are one of the most famous surfing destinations in the world, known for their consistent, high-quality waves. The region's natural beauty and wave quality have made it a magnet for international surfers, influencing rapid growth in the local tourism sector. However, this growth brings great challenges, especially in terms of maintaining the tourist attraction while ensuring environmental and social sustainability. This research is significant as it offers an in-depth understanding of how the surfing tourism appeal of the Mentawai Islands can be assessed and maintained, as well as how the negative impacts of tourism growth can be minimized to ensure long-term sustainability.

The problem formulation in this research includes two main aspects. First, the assessment of surfing tourism attractiveness in the Mentawai Islands includes various factors such as wave quality, supporting infrastructure, and the experience gained by visitors. Based on the theory of tourist attraction according to Gunn (1988), tourist attraction consists of three main components: natural attraction, supporting facilities, and accessibility. This measurement is important to understand what makes these destinations so attractive and how these factors can be maintained or improved. Secondly, this research will explore how the sustainability of surf tourism can be maintained. According to Butler (1980), the concept of sustainability in tourism focuses on maintaining a balance between economic profit, environmental preservation, and social welfare. This involves analyzing

the environmental, social and economic impacts of surf tourism and identifying strategies to manage and mitigate negative impacts. Understanding and addressing these two issues will provide a solid foundation for better destination management.

The purpose of this research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the surf tourism attraction in the Mentawai Islands and assess the sustainability of the sector using the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. This research aims to identify the key elements that contribute to the surfing attraction and assess how sustainability can be maintained through sustainable management practices. The results of this research are expected to provide strategic guidance for destination managers and stakeholders in designing policies and practices that support the development of tourism that is not only attractive but also environmentally and socially sustainable.

The benefits of this research are wide-ranging. For governments and destination managers, the results of this research will provide useful data and recommendations for designing policies that support the development of sustainable surf tourism. This information will assist in the management of natural resources and infrastructure to maintain the quality of visitor experience and environmental health. For industry players and local entrepreneurs, this research offers insights into how to increase tourist attraction while reducing negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems. In addition, this research will also add to the academic literature on sustainable tourism, particularly in the context of surfing destinations, as well as pave the way for further research that can deepen our understanding of the dynamics of sustainable tourism. Because of the increasing number of tourists and their possible impacts, it is imperative to immediately conduct an in-depth analysis to identify and address potential problems before negative impacts become more severe. If not handled properly, the negative impacts of tourism growth could damage the natural beauty of the Mentawai Islands and threaten the well-being of local communities. This research should be conducted immediately to provide practical guidance and mitigation strategies needed to manage the attractiveness and sustainability of surf tourism, so that the Mentawai Islands can continue to develop as a leading destination without compromising long-term sustainability.

1.1 TOURIST ATTRACTION

Gunn (1988) identifies three main components that play a role in attracting tourists, namely natural attractions, supporting facilities, and accessibility. Natural attractions include the beauty of landscapes and unique natural phenomena such as mountains, beaches, lakes, and biodiversity that are the main attraction for tourists. Supporting facilities include tourism infrastructure such as accommodation, restaurants, and other services that play an important role in enhancing tourists' comfort and experience in the destination. The third component, accessibility, refers to the ease with which tourists can reach the destination, including the availability of transportation and adequate road conditions.

In addition, Leiper (1990) adds that tourism attractiveness is also influenced by the uniqueness of culture, history, and natural beauty that offers different experiences for tourists. Cultural uniqueness includes local traditions, languages, arts, and customs that add value to the tourist experience. Historical aspects, such as historical sites, monuments, or narratives of the past, are also important elements that attract tourists. Natural beauty that is rare and not found elsewhere provides an additional attraction for tourists looking for a unique and authentic experience.

The three components proposed by Gunn (1988) and additional factors from Leiper (1990) interact with each other in creating a strong attraction for tourist destinations. Destinations that are able to optimize natural attractions, provide adequate supporting facilities, have good accessibility, and offer unique cultural and historical characteristics, have more potential to attract tourists and maintain their attractiveness in the long term. Effective tourism attraction management must consider all these aspects holistically in order for the destination to develop sustainably and remain relevant in a competitive tourism industry.

1.2 SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM

Tourism sustainability is an essential concept in tourism management that focuses on maintaining natural and cultural resources for future generations, while ensuring current economic and social benefits. In *Sustainable Tourism Management*, Swarbrooke (1999) presents a comprehensive guide to the principles and practices of sustainability in tourism. Swarbrooke (1999) emphasizes the importance of integration between economic, social, and environmental aspects in planning and managing tourist destinations, as well as strategies to minimize negative impacts on the environment and local communities by involving all stakeholders. In addition, Weaver (2006), in *Sustainable Tourism*, offers an in-depth approach to the theory and practice of sustainability in tourism. Weaver (2006) identifies different types of sustainable tourism, such as ecotourism and community tourism, and explores the challenges and opportunities in their application. Weaver (2006) also discusses the important role of government policies, local community participation, and the private sector in achieving sustainability goals.

1.3 SURF TOURISM

Surf tourism is a form of tourism that is highly dependent on the quality and consistency of waves, as well as the supporting infrastructure in coastal locations. Thorpe (2012) in his article “The Geography of Surfing: A Review of the Literature” emphasizes that ideal wave conditions, which include factors such as wave size, stability and regularity, are key in attracting surfers. Locations with good waves are often the main destinations for surf tourism. In addition, accessibility to the location, such as transportation and facilities like surf schools and equipment rentals, play an important role in determining the attractiveness of a surf destination (Weber et al., 2011).

The dynamics of surf tourism include significant economic and social impacts for local communities. Henderson (2011) in “Surfing and the Beach: Sociocultural Perspectives” notes that surf tourism can stimulate local economies by creating jobs and increasing revenue from various sectors, such as restaurants, surf shops and lodging. However, this development also requires attention to environmental impacts, where Davis and Tisdell (1998) in their article “Tourism and the Environment: A Case Study of Surfing Destinations” emphasize the need for careful management to protect coastal ecosystems and reduce negative impacts on natural habitats.

Developments in surf tourism show changing trends, such as the emergence of big wave surfing and innovations in surf equipment. Buckley (2002) in “Surfing Tourism: Trends and Impacts” identified that these innovations and changes in traveler

preferences affect the dynamics of the surf industry. This study underscores the need for adaptation in the planning and management of surf destinations to meet new challenges and maximize benefits to local communities and the environment.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research methodology uses a qualitative approach with a case study to analyze surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands. The research location focuses on the Mentawai Islands, with primary data collection through direct observation of surf tourism conditions, visitor activities, and interactions between tourists and local communities. Secondary data were collected from literature studies that included books, journal articles, research reports, and other related documents. The analytical tool used is the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, which helps in analyzing the development phase of surf tourism and its impact on the attractiveness and sustainability of the destination. Data collection techniques involved field observations and literature review, while data analysis techniques included qualitative descriptive analysis and application of the TALC model to analyze the data obtained.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Mentawai Islands, located off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, are an international surfer's paradise with a number of highly acclaimed surf spots. The archipelago is known for its consistent and high quality waves throughout the year, which have perfect shapes with various types such as reef breaks, point breaks, and beach breaks. Some of the famous spots such as Macaronis, Hollow Trees (HTs), Lances Right, and Playgrounds are highly regarded among surfers worldwide for their challenging and unique waves. Macaronis in Silabu Island offers long and rolling waves, suitable for different skill levels. Hollow Trees (HTs) on Siberut Island is known for its tubular waves that provide an extreme surfing experience, especially during big waves. Playgrounds on Sipora Island provides long, consistent waves ideal for surfers of all skill levels. Lances Right on Siberut Island and Rifles on Siberut Island are also favorites with stable and challenging long waves. In addition, the Mentawai Islands offer a diversity of surf spots with different levels of difficulty, from beginner-friendly waves to waves that test the mettle of professional surfers. This variety makes Mentawai appealing to a wide segment of surfers, from amateurs to professionals. The pristine natural beauty, with dense tropical forests, white sandy beaches, and clear sea water, adds to Mentawai's appeal. The relatively untouched environment by mass tourism provides an authentic natural experience for tourists. In addition, the culture and traditions of the indigenous Mentawai tribe, such as traditional tattoos and a way of life in harmony with nature, add value to the tourist experience. Access to the Mentawai Islands is also improving with fast boat services and charter flights, as well as supporting facilities such as resorts and comfortable lodges with special services for surfers. Mentawai's international reputation as one of the best surfing destinations in the world is further strengthened by various international surfing events and global media coverage. With all these advantages, the potential of surfing in the Mentawai Islands is enormous, both in terms of tourist attraction and economic contribution to the region. However, prudent management is essential to ensure the sustainability of the environment and local culture is maintained.

Based on observations and analysis conducted by researchers, it can be concluded that the attractiveness of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands is not only influenced by the natural beauty and quality of the waves, but also by supporting factors such as facilities, accessibility, and the richness of local culture. the sustainability of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands faces challenges in maintaining a balance between environmental, social, and economic impacts. Although tourism provides economic benefits and social opportunities for local

communities, negative environmental impacts and potential social change must be carefully managed.

3.1 SURFING ATTRACTION

The results showed that the attractiveness of surfing tourism in the Mentawai Islands is influenced by a combination of natural attractions, supporting facilities, accessibility, and the uniqueness of local culture, in accordance with the theory of tourist attraction described by Gunn (1988) and Leiper (1990). The natural attraction, especially the quality of the waves which are recognized as one of the best in the world, is the main magnet for surfers. Locations such as Macaronis, Hollow Trees (HTs) and Playgrounds offer different waves, ranging from beginner-friendly to professionally challenging. Mentawai's natural beauty is also supported by biodiversity and unspoiled coastal scenery. Observations show that the natural attraction of the Mentawai Islands, especially consistent and high-quality waves such as those found at Macaronis, Hollow Trees (HTs), and Playgrounds spots, is the main magnet for surfers. The unspoiled beauty of the beaches and the relatively untouched environment further strengthen the destination's natural appeal.

However, the research also identified some challenges related to supporting facilities and accessibility. While there are some well-developed resorts, such as in Macaronis and HTs, the general tourism infrastructure still needs to be improved. For example, the availability of accommodation and public facilities such as restaurants and health centers is still limited, especially in more remote areas. This is in line with Gunn's (1988) view that supporting facilities play an important role in improving tourist comfort.

Accessibility is also an important issue in this study. The Mentawai Islands, although offering a great surfing experience, have challenges in terms of accessibility. The long and sometimes arduous journey from Padang to Mentawai is often an obstacle for some tourists, especially those with limited time. While this remoteness is part of the appeal for some travelers seeking an exclusive and different experience, improved accessibility could increase the number of tourists visiting without compromising the sustainability of the destination.

In addition, the uniqueness of Mentawai's local culture provides significant added value to the tourist attraction. Interviews with local communities revealed that the traditions, customs and local beliefs of the Mentawai tribe provide a cultural dimension that enriches the tourist experience. This is in line with Leiper's (1990) view that emphasizes the importance of cultural and historical elements in creating a unique and authentic tourism experience.

The use of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model in this study shows that the Mentawai Islands are at a developmental stage, where its popularity as an international surfing destination continues to increase. However, without proper management, the destination is at risk of environmental and social pressures that could hinder its future sustainability. Therefore, it is important to consider all of these factors holistically in the development of Mentawai's tourist destination in order to maintain its long-lasting appeal while maintaining a balance between tourism, culture and the environment.

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the attractiveness of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands is not only influenced by the natural beauty and quality of the waves, but also by supporting factors such as facilities, accessibility, and the richness of local culture. Optimization of all these aspects is important to ensure the sustainability and long-term appeal of the Mentawai Islands as a world-class tourist destination.

3.2 SUSTAINABILITY OF SURF TOURISM

Sustainability theory according to Butler (1980), which emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between economic benefits, environmental preservation, and social welfare in tourism. Based on the observation, surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands has a significant impact on the environment, especially on the coastal ecosystem. The development of resorts and tourism infrastructure in some spots has changed the natural landscape and caused potential environmental degradation, such as beach erosion and water quality degradation. In addition, the increasing volume of tourists also adds pressure on natural resources, including waste and waste management. According to Butler (1980), environmental sustainability is one of the main pillars that must be considered in tourism development. In order to preserve the environment, better management strategies are needed, such as implementing sustainable tourism practices, regulating the number of tourists, and developing environmentally friendly infrastructure. The findings of this research are in line with several previous studies that examine natural tourism destinations in Indonesia and the sustainability challenges they face. Related studies on tourism in Bali and Lombok show that rapid tourism development without adequate environmental management can lead to environmental degradation and a decline in destination attractiveness. Another study in the Nias Islands also highlighted the importance of managing the social and cultural impacts of surf tourism. These findings reinforce the argument that without proper management, natural tourism destinations, including the Mentawai Islands, risk a decline in quality and attractiveness as tourism develops.

Meanwhile, from a social perspective, surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands has brought significant changes to the lives of local communities. Observations and interviews show that tourism provides new economic opportunities for the community, such as employment in the tourism sector, increased income, and access to better services. However, there are also negative impacts such as cultural changes, increased dependence on tourism, and unequal distribution of economic benefits. In line with Butler's (1980) concept, it is important to ensure that tourism is not only economically beneficial but also improves social welfare without damaging local cultural values. Inclusive and community-based tourism management can be a solution to maintain this balance.

From an economic perspective, surf tourism has become the main source of income for the Mentawai Islands. The increasing number of international tourists coming to enjoy the Mentawai waves has contributed significantly to the local economy, especially through accommodation businesses, transportation, and other supporting services. However, economic dependence on tourism also poses risks, especially when facing global uncertainties such as pandemic or climate change that may affect the flow of tourists. Butler (1980) emphasized the importance of economic diversification to ensure long-term sustainability. Therefore, the development of a more diversified economy, which is not solely dependent on tourism, needs to be considered.

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the sustainability of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands faces challenges in maintaining a balance between environmental, social, and economic impacts. Although tourism provides economic benefits and social opportunities for local communities, negative environmental impacts and potential social change must be carefully managed. Referring to Butler's (1980) theory, a holistic and sustainable management

strategy is needed to mitigate negative impacts and ensure that surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands can continue to thrive without damaging the foundations of environmental, social and economic well-being in the region.

3.3 APPLICATION OF TOURISM AREA LIFE CYCLE (TALC) MODEL ON SURFING TOURISM IN MENTAWAI ISLAND

The analysis based on Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model shows that surfing tourism in Mentawai Islands is currently in the development phase towards consolidation. In the exploration phase, the Mentawai Islands were initially recognized by a handful of surfers who were attracted to the high quality waves and unspoiled environment. The involvement phase occurred when the number of tourists began to increase, followed by the development of basic infrastructure such as lodging and transportation to support the needs of tourists. In the development phase, which is ongoing, the Mentawai Islands begin to attract international attention as a world-class surf destination, with resort construction, improved accessibility and wider promotion. This has led to a significant surge in tourist numbers and tourism investment.

Future projections show that the Mentawai Islands have the potential to enter the consolidation phase in the next few years. In this phase, the number of tourists will peak, and growth begins to stabilize, but the destination may face challenges related to sustainability, such as environmental degradation and social pressure due to increased tourist volumes. To prevent a shift to the stagnation or decline phase, management strategies that focus on environmental preservation, controlling the number of tourists, and increasing the involvement of local communities need to be implemented. Thus, the Mentawai Islands can remain a sustainable and desirable surfing destination in the long term.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research shows that the main attraction of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands lies in its natural beauty, especially the high quality waves that attract surfers from all over the world. However, the sustainability of this destination faces serious challenges related to environmental, social and economic impacts. Rapid development of tourism infrastructure has led to environmental degradation, while high economic dependence on the tourism sector poses long-term risks. In the context of the TALC model, the Mentawai Islands are currently in the development to consolidation phase, which demands special attention to the management of negative impacts that may arise due to increased tourist numbers.

To maintain the sustainability of surf tourism in the Mentawai Islands, a holistic and sustainable management approach is required. The implementation of strategies such as controlling the number of tourists, preserving the environment through the development of environmentally friendly infrastructure, and empowering local communities in tourism development is essential. Economic diversification should also be considered to reduce dependence on tourism and ensure a balance between economic growth, environmental preservation and social welfare. With these measures, the Mentawai Islands can continue to develop as an attractive and sustainable surf tourism destination.

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