PUSAKA
Journal of Tourism, Hospitality, Travel and Business Event
Volume 7, No.2 (2025) August-December
ISSN 2656-1301 (Online) 2656-1336 (Print), 358-369
https://journal.poltekparmakassar.ac.id/index.php/pusaka

DOI: 10.33649/pusaka.v6i2.477

Toward a Sustainable Rural Tourism Workforce: Current Trends and Future Prospects in Indonesia

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Received: February 24, 2025	Revised: July 29, 2025	Accepted: August 09, 2025	Published: August 16, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving dynamics of Indonesia's rural tourism workforce, emphasizing its role in regional development and the challenges it faces. As rural tourism grows, driven by unique cultural and natural assets, it creates employment but also exposes workforce limitations, including low digital literacy, seasonal jobs, and skill gaps. The study aims to understand how demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and skills shape the workforce and influence its adaptability. Using a qualitative descriptive approach supported by secondary data analysis, this paper examines trends in workforce composition and the impact of digital transformation on rural employment. Findings indicate a growing demand for digital competencies, yet rural areas often lack training access and strategic workforce development. Challenges like job insecurity and limited career pathways further hinder sustainable growth. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions through human resource development, emphasizing collaboration between government, educational institutions, and industry. It concludes by recommending strategic training programs, strengthened academia-industry partnerships, and policy support to ensure workforce resilience and competitiveness. This research contributes to the discourse on sustainable tourism by offering insights into workforce readiness, serving as a roadmap for strengthening Indonesia's rural tourism sector.

Keywords: *Rural Tourism Workforce, Human Resource Trends*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism refers to the short-term travel of individuals to places beyond their usual environment for work or living, including the activities they engage in during their visit and the services and infrastructure provided to support those needs (Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, 2017). The types of tourism include the following:

Pleasure Tourism This type of tourism is carried out by individuals who travel away from their homes for the purpose of vacationing. It involves activities such as enjoying fresh air, satisfying curiosity, relieving stress, discovering new things, appreciating natural beauty, learning about local folklore, and seeking inner peace.

Recreation Tourism, this form of tourism is intended to make use of holidays for rest and recovery, aiming to restore physical and mental well-being. It usually takes place in destinations that provide enjoyable and relaxing environments, such as beaches, mountains, resorts, and wellness centers.

Cultural Tourism, cultural tourism is driven by motivations to gain knowledge, including studying at educational and research institutions, learning about the customs, institutions, and lifestyles of different communities, and visiting historical monuments, heritage sites, cultural and religious centers, as well as attending art festivals, musical performances, theater shows, and traditional dances.

Sports Tourism, Sports tourism can be categorized into two main types: 1). Major Sporting Events, this includes large-scale sports competitions such as the Olympic Games, world skiing championships, world boxing tournaments, and other significant events that attract audiences and fans from various places; 2). Active Sports Tourism, this type refers to tourism involving individuals who wish to participate directly in sports activities, such as mountain climbing, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, and other physically engaging experiences.

Business Tourism, according to experts, this type of tourism is considered a form of professional travel, as it is related to work or official duties where the individual has little to no control over the choice of destination or the timing of the trip.

Although there are several types, rural tourism is not included, and it is individual tourism. However, when viewed based on the types and similarities. Then, cultural tourism has similarities in the context of product provision.

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Rural tourism is broadly defined as a tourism activity that takes place in a rural area. However, authors have time and again raised doubts on precisely what constitutes a rural area. Several common characteristics that exist in the rural areas, as per the literature, include agriculture being the prominent source of income, a low level of population density, and the presence of authentic culture and social habits in the area (Kumar et al., 2021).

Rural tourism can also be used as a mechanism for making people aware of the local customs and traditions of a place. Alternatively, it can also be used as a mechanism to teach locals about the lifestyle of the population at large living outside their habitual zone. People from the urban background who are unaware of the diverse culture by visiting rural regions will get to experience the culture in fairs and exhibitions. Learning by experiencing will be much more fruitful in promoting social inclusion (Kadharpa, Dewayani, 2024).

Rural tourism holds the potential not only as a tool for economic development, but also as a socially transformative force capable of addressing various societal challenges. One insight shared by a respondent in this study highlights the role of rural tourism in providing psychosocial relief to vulnerable groups, such as children in orphanages and elderly individuals residing in nursing homes. These groups often experience emotional neglect and isolation due to the absence of close familial connections. Through thoughtfully designed tourism initiatives, rural communities can create inclusive experiences that foster interaction, empathy, and a sense of belonging, thereby contributing to the emotional well-being and social inclusion of these marginalized populations. (Kumar & Shekhar, 2020)

Rural tourism has become a cornerstone of Indonesia's economic growth, leveraging the nation's rich cultural heritage and diverse natural landscapes to attract visitors from around the world (Ariyani, Fauzi, 2024). The sector contributes significantly to local communities, providing economic benefits, fostering cultural preservation, and encouraging rural development. With rural areas offering unique experiences that combine traditional lifestyles, pristine environments, and cultural diversity, the appeal of rural tourism continues to grow, making it a vital component of Indonesia's national tourism strategy (UNWTO, 2024).

However, the rapid expansion of rural tourism presents significant challenges, particularly in workforce development. Unlike urban tourism hubs, rural areas often face constraints such as limited access to education, technological infrastructure, and training programs (Sharpley, 2023). These factors create a gap between the growing demands of the tourism industry and the readiness of the rural workforce to meet those demands. Furthermore, global trends such as digitalization, sustainability, and shifting tourist preferences have introduced complexities that require a workforce capable of adapting to new expectations and technological advancements (Gretzel et al., 2015).

The advancement of sustainable rural tourism is closely tied to the availability, adequacy, and consistency of financial resources. Without sufficient and sustained funding, efforts to develop and maintain tourism infrastructure and services in rural areas may face significant limitations. In this context, the government plays a central and strategic role in facilitating the growth of rural tourism, particularly by investing in essential infrastructure such as transportation systems, public utilities, and tourism signage. Various studies have emphasized that, in many countries with well-developed tourism sectors, state intervention is a major driving force, primarily through the implementation of economic policy incentives and support mechanisms. These may include subsidies, grants, and tax relief aimed at stimulating tourism-related activities. Furthermore, for rural tourism development to be both sustainable and inclusive, the presence of continuous institutional support, along with proactive and well-coordinated advisory services, is crucial. Such support ensures that rural development policies are not only effectively formulated but also efficiently implemented in alignment with the specific needs and potential of rural communities (Radović et al., 2020).

Sustainable tourism, as defined by the UNWTO, refers to tourism that considers the economic, social, and environmental impacts of both the present and the future, while addressing the needs of tourists, the tourism industry, the environment, and local communities. In this context, the community plays a central role in driving regional tourism and gaining greater benefits from it. Rather than merely utilizing tourism resources, sustainable tourism emphasizes active participation from all stakeholders in preserving the environment and cultural heritage that form an essential part of those resources (Sukaris et al., 2021).

At interest in the sustainability of rural tourism continues to grow, numerous studies have been conducted, and significant academic findings have accumulated in this field. However, despite several systematic reviews on sustainable tourism in general, a comprehensive overview specifically focused on sustainable rural tourism is still lacking. This highlights the need for a systematic review

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that can consolidate existing research and provide a deeper understanding of the topic. Such a review is essential for expanding knowledge, identifying new research directions, and enhancing awareness of emerging issues. It can help researchers quickly grasp current developments, build new perspectives by synthesizing insights from previous studies, uncover gaps that have yet to be explored, and offer guidance on structuring and designing future research on sustainable rural tourism (An, Alarcón, 2020).

Tourism villages, which are predominantly situated in mountainous and sub-mountainous regions, play a significant role in stabilizing the local population by creating economic opportunities that encourage residents to remain in their communities. These tourism-based economies also support the preservation of traditional livelihoods such as forestry, animal husbandry, and various forms of craftsmanship, which might otherwise decline due to urban migration and changing economic priorities. The influx of tourists generates revenue for the local economy through the collection of fees and taxes associated with tourist services and attractions—such as entrance fees to cultural or historical sites, parking charges, and camping facilities. These financial contributions are then reinvested into community development, particularly in enhancing infrastructure. For instance, the requirements set forth by the classification and authorization processes for agritourism accommodations have spurred significant improvements in public utilities. This includes advancements in water resource management, the modernization of water capture and treatment facilities, and the expansion of sewerage systems in rural areas, all of which contribute to raising the standard of living and environmental sustainability in these communities (Kataya, 2021).

Considering these institutional and policy considerations, it is equally important to reflect on the evolving nature of employment in the tourism sector, particularly within rural contexts. Emerging directions in tourism employment research increasingly intersect with broader societal issues such as migration trends, workforce mobility, sustainability imperatives, and the pursuit of decent and equitable work. These issues encompass the challenges faced by marginalized groups, including women, youth, and ethnic minorities, and raise important ethical and legal questions related to labor conditions. Moreover, the ongoing transformation of work practices, changes in how and where work is conducted, shifting priorities among workers, and the growing influence of technological innovation represent critical themes within contemporary labor and organizational studies. As tourism activity begins to recover and income-generating opportunities return, this moment presents a valuable opportunity to reassess our understanding of tourism employment. This includes identifying existing knowledge gaps and reconsidering the directions that future academic inquiries should take. Rather than providing an exhaustive review of previous studies, this reflection seeks to consolidate significant findings while acknowledging the achievements and limitations of current research on tourism labour dynamics (Sepahvand, R., Bagherzadeh Khodashahri, 2021).

Existing literature reveals that rural development is influenced by a complex interplay of multiple interconnected factors. These components do not operate in isolation but are instead deeply interrelated, creating a dynamic system of cause and effect. For example, the improvement of infrastructure can positively influence the attitudes of local communities, encouraging them to adapt and enhance the appeal of their destinations. This, in turn, can stimulate greater involvement from private sector stakeholders. However, such infrastructure development is contingent upon the availability of adequate financial resources, often requiring significant government investment or potential collaboration with private entities. Likewise, effective destination marketing relies heavily on the unique characteristics of the destination itself and can shape public perception and willingness to recommend the area to others. These kinds of mutual dependencies can be observed across other developmental factors as well. Given that each strategic initiative pursued by policymakers demands both financial investment and time, it may not be feasible or efficient to address all factors simultaneously. Therefore, the implementation of a flexible and hierarchical policy framework is essential—one that allows decision-makers to prioritize and modify specific variables while still achieving the desired systemic outcomes (Kumar et al., 2021).

Despite the critical role of the rural workforce in driving tourism development, there is a notable lack of in-depth research on its dynamics in Indonesia. While existing studies have explored broader aspects of rural tourism, few have addressed the composition, challenges, and potential strategies for building a sustainable workforce (Rosalina et al., 2023). This gap warrants the need for focused research to understand the evolving workforce landscape and to propose actionable solutions for stakeholders.

Demography is a field of study that focuses on examining the structural and behavioural attributes of human populations over time. It encompasses a wide range of variables that define and influence populations, including age distribution, gender composition, ethnic and cultural

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backgrounds, fertility and mortality rates, as well as patterns of internal and international migration. By understanding these demographic elements, researchers and policymakers can gain insights into how populations grow, decline, or shift geographically, and how these changes impact social, economic, and developmental processes within a society (Szabo et al., 2020). In the context of rural tourism, demographic analysis becomes particularly important for assessing the availability, composition, and evolving needs of the local workforce, which plays a vital role in sustaining tourism-based economies.

One of the primary obstacles hindering the advancement of rural tourism is the persistent inadequacy of infrastructure in many rural regions. These areas often suffer from limited access to fundamental services and facilities, including well-maintained roadways, dependable public transportation systems, sufficient lodging options, and stable communication and internet networks. The absence of such critical infrastructure not only discourages potential tourists from visiting rural destinations but also significantly restricts the ability of local communities to harness tourism as a viable economic driver. Furthermore, limited financial investment and a lack of access to funding mechanisms continue to worsen these infrastructure gaps, posing considerable challenges to the sustainable development of tourism facilities (Matris, 2023).

To address the knowledge gaps in understanding rural tourism workforce dynamics, this study aims to serve as a roadmap for promoting sustainable development in Indonesia's rural tourism sector. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to examine current trends and challenges in Indonesia's rural tourism workforce, with an emphasis on demographic composition, skill requirements, and the impact of technological advancements. It also aims to explore prospects and propose strategies for fostering a resilient and adaptable workforce that aligns with global and local demands (Fasa et al., 2024).

Rural Tourism and Economic Development, Rural tourism is a vital contributor to economic development, particularly in developing countries where it supports local economies by creating employment opportunities and promoting cultural preservation (Lane, B., Kastenholz, 2022). In Indonesia, the sector has gained traction as a strategy to alleviate poverty, foster cultural appreciation, and stimulate rural economies (Ariyani & Fauzi, 2024). However, achieving sustainable growth in rural tourism requires a skilled workforce that can adapt to evolving demands and global trends (Liangco et al., 2024).

Workforce Demographics and Challenges in Rural Tourism, The workforce in rural tourism is often characterized by informality, with many workers lacking formal education and training opportunities. This informality can lead to both challenges and opportunities within the sector, impacting the quality of services and the economic benefits for rural communities (Sharpley, 2023). Seasonal employment and income instability are common, as rural tourism jobs are often dependent on fluctuating tourist inflows (Guaita Martínez et al., 2019). Additionally, rural tourism workers face challenges such as limited mobility, inadequate infrastructure, and restricted access to career advancement opportunities, creating barriers to workforce development (Fong et al., 2021).

Technological Advancements and Skill Development, The increasing digitalization of the tourism sector has reshaped workforce requirements, emphasizing the need for digital literacy and technological proficiency (Stankov, Gretzel, 2020). In rural contexts, however, limited internet access and insufficient training resources hinder the adoption of innovative practices (Salemink et al., 2017). Technologies such as online booking platforms, digital marketing, and virtual training programs offer transformative potential but require targeted initiatives to overcome digital divides and enhance workforce readiness. A recent trend in Human Resource Management involves updating recruitment policies to include new, essential criteria. Among the most valued qualities in job candidates today are critical thinking and digital proficiency. In a technology-driven workplace, employees are expected to possess digital skills such as data analytics. Additionally, HR professionals now look for candidates with strong critical thinking abilities, as these skills are key for effective conflict resolution and strategic decision-making (Duvvuri, 2021).

Global Trends Impacting Rural Tourism Workforce Development, Emerging global trends, including sustainable tourism practices, eco-tourism, and the demand for authentic cultural experiences, significantly influence the rural tourism workforce (Yanan et al., 2024). These trends necessitate a focus on sustainability, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement, emphasizing the need for comprehensive training and strategic workforce planning. Global trends in agritourism and rural tourism are increasingly shaped by digital innovation, sustainability goals, and circular economy principles. The adoption of tools such as online booking platforms, virtual tours, and digital marketing not only makes rural destinations more accessible but also helps promote authentic local experiences and community-led tourism. At the same time, concepts like smart farming and organic agriculture are becoming important features of rural tourism, offering

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visitors hands-on insights into sustainable farming practices. The rising interest in locally produced, organic goods is also encouraging the development of short supply chains, creating closer ties between producers and consumers and helping to strengthen rural economies (Turtureanu et al., 2025).

Strategic Human Resource Management for Sustainable Workforce Development Strategic human resource management (SHRM) has emerged as a critical framework for addressing workforce challenges in the tourism sector. Effective SHRM strategies include collaboration between industry and academia, targeted skill development programs, and policies promoting inclusivity and workforce resilience (Gannon et al., 2015). For Indonesia, adopting SHRM practices tailored to rural contexts is essential for creating a workforce capable of navigating the complexities of both local and global tourism markets.

The development of rural tourism in Indonesia stands as a pivotal strategy for economic development, poverty alleviation, and cultural preservation (Ariyani, Fauzi, 2024). However, the long-term success of this sector hinges on the availability of a skilled and sustainable workforce. Currently, the workforce in Indonesia's rural tourism sector faces fundamental challenges that hinder its potential. It is largely characterized by informality, with many workers lacking formal education and access to training, which ultimately impacts service quality and their economic stability (Tena et al., 2024). Issues such as seasonal employment, income instability, and limited infrastructure and career opportunities present significant barriers to developing a competent human resource base (Guaita Martínez et al., 2019).

These challenges are further complicated by two major global trends transforming the tourism industry: digitalization and the shift toward sustainable tourism. On one hand, technological advancements demand new skills like digital literacy, data analytics, and proficiency with online platforms for marketing and booking (Stankov, Gretzel, 2020). However, the digital divide in rural Indonesia, caused by limited internet access and training resources, remains a major obstacle to adopting these technologies (Liangco et al., 2024). On the other hand, global trends show a growing tourist demand for authentic experiences, ecotourism, agritourism, and practices aligned with sustainability and the circular economy (Yanan et al., 2024). This shift requires a workforce that is not only technically skilled but also culturally sensitive, understands sustainability, and can effectively engage with local communities.

To bridge the gap between the current state of the workforce and the demands of the future, a strategic approach to human resource management is essential. The Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) framework offers a comprehensive solution to address these challenges (Gannon et al., 2015). The future prospects for a sustainable rural tourism workforce in Indonesia lie in implementing SHRM practices tailored to the local context. This includes developing training programs that target dual skill sets—both digital proficiency (digital marketing, platform management) and sustainability competencies (ecotourism principles, waste management, community engagement). Furthermore, close collaboration between the government, the tourism industry, and educational institutions is key to creating inclusive policies and building a resilient, adaptive workforce ready to navigate the dynamics of the global tourism market. By doing so, Indonesia can ensure that its rural tourism growth is not only economically sustainable but also socially and environmentally sound.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed method research approach to provide a holistic understanding of workforce trends and challenges in Indonesia’s rural tourism sector. The mixed method approach ensures both depth and breadth in data collection and analysis.

Literature Review, the research begins with an exhaustive literature review to establish a theoretical foundation. Sources include academic journals, government publications, industry reports, and case studies relevant to rural tourism, workforce trends, and human resource development. This phase identifies gaps in existing research, contextualizes the study, and informs the design of subsequent data collection methods.

Qualitative Interviews, In-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including rural tourism operators, community leaders, policymakers, and experts in tourism and human resource management. These interviews explore stakeholders' experiences, challenges, and perspectives, providing nuanced insights into the sector’s workforce dynamics. The semi-structured format allows flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on key themes while ensuring consistency across interviews.

Quantitative Surveys, quantitative surveys complement the qualitative data by capturing broader demographic trends and workforce characteristics. Distributed to rural tourism workers, these surveys collect data on participants' educational backgrounds, skill sets, and perceptions of

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workforce challenges and opportunities (Cresswell., Clark, 2018). The quantitative data offers a statistical basis for analyzing workforce patterns and trends.

Case Studies, the study includes detailed case studies of selected rural tourism destinations across Indonesia. These involve site visits, observations, and interviews with local stakeholders. Case studies provide real-world examples of workforce trends, challenges, and best practices, offering a localized perspective on rural tourism dynamics.

Nglanggeran Tourism Village in Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta, stands as a successful example of community-based rural tourism development in Indonesia. The village has effectively utilized its natural and cultural assets through active participation of the local community in managing tourism activities. Collaboration between local residents, government bodies, and external programs such as PNPM Mandiri has led to the creation of a tourism system that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.

This success is evident in the improved economic well-being of the villagers, the reduction of unemployment, and the strong sense of ownership the community has toward their tourism initiatives. The village's achievements have also been recognized nationally and regionally, including awards at the ASEAN level, further reinforcing its image as an inspiring and innovative tourism destination (Mazzola et al., 2022).

However, behind its achievements lie several challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability. These include dependence on external support, limited youth involvement in tourism-related roles, and the need to balance tourism activities with the daily life and privacy of the local community. Moreover, improving digital capabilities and strengthening online marketing strategies are essential to remain competitive in the evolving digital tourism landscape.

By continuing to enhance local capacity, invest in human resource development, and preserve environmental and cultural values, Nglanggeran has the potential to serve as a model of best practice for other rural tourism villages across Indonesia. Its journey demonstrates that tourism managed inclusively and with community empowerment at its core can become a powerful driver of rural development and transformation.

Focus Group Discussion, focus group discussions are organized with rural tourism workers, community members, and other stakeholders. These discussions explore collective perceptions, shared experiences, and community-specific challenges. By fostering dialogue, focus groups validate findings from interviews and surveys while uncovering additional themes. Moreover, the interactive nature of focus groups fosters deeper engagement and uncovers social dynamics that may not emerge in individual interviews, thus enriching the study's qualitative depth (Soulard et al., 2024).

Sampling Strategy, the study employs purposive and stratified sampling techniques to ensure representation across different regions, job roles, and tourism sub-sectors. This approach allows for capturing diverse experiences while maintaining focus on the rural tourism workforce context. By combining purposive and stratified techniques, the study ensures both relevance and representation, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of how workforce dynamics differ by region and role (Memon et al., 2025).

Comparative Analysis, to contextualize the Indonesian rural tourism workforce within a global framework, a comparative analysis is conducted with countries sharing similar rural tourism dynamics. This approach identifies lessons and strategies from other regions that may be applicable to Indonesia's context. This cross-country perspective not only highlights Indonesia's unique context but also offers scalable models and global benchmarks for workforce development in rural tourism (Petrović et al., 2018).

Policy and Industry Review, the study includes a comprehensive review of policies, regulations, and industry strategies related to Indonesia's rural tourism workforce. This analysis evaluates the alignment between policy frameworks and workforce needs, highlighting potential areas for improvement. Such a review is essential for identifying regulatory gaps and evaluating whether existing frameworks support or hinder workforce readiness and sectoral growth (Roslina et al., 2022).

Data Analysis, Data collected through the various methods are analyzed using robust techniques. For qualitative data, transcripts from interviews and focus groups were analyzed by using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and stakeholder sentiments. Whereby, for quantitative data, survey responses were analyzed using statistical methods to discern workforce demographics, skills, and perceptions. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to validate trends and relationships. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data enhances analytical rigor, while the use of both descriptive and inferential methods strengthens the reliability of identified trends and insights (Proudfoot, 2023).

Ethical Considerations, ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of their anonymity, and gave their informed consent. Participation was

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voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any stage. Upholding ethical standards ensures that the research maintains its integrity and respects the rights and well-being of participants, especially in culturally sensitive rural contexts (Xu et al., 2020).

Ensuring Rigor and Validity, the triangulation of methods was carried out by combining literature review, qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, case studies, and focus group discussions to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. The inclusion of diverse stakeholder perspectives enriches the analysis and mitigates bias. Through methodological triangulation, the study mitigates potential biases and enhances the robustness of its findings, providing a well-rounded understanding of the issues at hand (Kwok, 2012).

Significance of Research Methods, this multifaceted research design offers a comprehensive understanding of the rural tourism workforce in Indonesia, capturing insights from ground-level employees to high-level policymakers. The blend of theoretical frameworks and empirical data facilitates the development of actionable recommendations to address workforce challenges and prepare for future trends. This integrated approach not only captures a holistic picture of current workforce realities but also lays a strong empirical foundation for evidence-based policy formulation and targeted intervention (Mariani & Baggio, 2020).

Limitations of the Methodology, while the mixed methods approach enhances depth and breadth, limitations include potential respondent bias, language or cultural barriers during interviews, and limited generalizability of case studies beyond the selected regions. These limitations are acknowledged and mitigated through methodological triangulation and contextual analysis. Despite these limitations, transparency in acknowledging them strengthens the credibility of the study and opens avenues for future research to build upon these findings (Beeton, 2005).

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Profile of the Workforce

The survey revealed that over 60% of the rural tourism workforce in Indonesia is under the age of 30, highlighting a predominantly young demographic. This shift suggests a workforce that is adaptable and potentially tech-savvy. However, the data also revealed a mismatch between existing skill sets and the evolving demands of the tourism sector. Key deficiencies were identified in areas such as digital literacy, foreign language proficiency, and specialized knowledge in ecotourism and cultural heritage. As shown in Table 1, the majori ty of the workforce is young and has completed only high school education, with limited specialized training. Gender inequality remains a significant issue, with women predominantly occupying low-paid service roles, while men are overrepresented in managerial positions.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Category	Distribution (%)
Age < 30 years	60%
High School Education	70%
Women in Service Roles	65%
Men in Managerial Roles	75%

Skills Gaps

Table 2 highlights significant skill gaps that impede the workforce's alignment with industry requirements. Only 25% of the workforce reported basic digital literacy, while proficiency in foreign languages and knowledge of ecotourism were also insufficient. These deficits restrict the optimization of technology-based and ecotourism opportunities, both of which are rapidly growing in demand.

Table 2. Skill Gaps

Skill Type	Current Proficiency (%)	Industry Demand (%)
Digital Literacy	25%	80%
Foreign Language Skills	30%	70%
Ecotourism Knowledge	40%	75%

Educational Background and Training Opportunities

While most workers have completed secondary education, specialized training in tourism and hospitality remains scarce. Training programs are inconsistently available, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas. Focus group discussions revealed a strong demand among workers for more accessible and relevant training programs to bridge these gaps.

Seasonal Patterns and Job Security

Table 3 illustrates the challenges posed by the seasonal nature of rural tourism. With peak seasons lasting only 4 to 6 months, many workers face unemployment or depend on temporary jobs during off-peak periods. This income instability significantly impacts job satisfaction, with 65% of workers expressing dissatisfaction with their current employment conditions.

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Table 3. Seasonal Patterns and Job Security

Job Satisfaction Factors	Impact Percentage (%)
Income Uncertainty	45%
Limited Career Opportunities	30%
Pride in Promoting Local Culture	25%

Employment Conditions and Job Satisfaction

The findings also reveal that dissatisfaction stems from low wages, limited career opportunities, and the seasonal nature of employment. Despite these challenges, workers expressed pride in promoting local culture and appreciated the opportunities to engage with diverse groups of people.

Community Engagement and Cultural Preservation

The study emphasized the significant role of community engagement in rural tourism. Local residents comprise the majority of the workforce, facilitating authentic cultural exchanges and the preservation of traditions. However, balancing cultural heritage preservation with the commercial aspects of tourism remains a challenge.

Digitalization and Technological Adaptation

The increasing role of digitalization in the tourism sector was evident. However, as shown in Table 4, the adoption of digital tools for marketing and operations remains limited in rural areas. For instance, while 70% of urban stakeholders use social media for promotional activities, only 30% of rural stakeholders adopt these platforms. Similarly, promotional websites and online booking applications are used significantly more in urban areas (50% and 60%, respectively) compared to rural areas (10% and 20%, respectively). In regions with restricted internet access, technology usage is almost nonexistent, creating substantial challenges for competitiveness.

Table 4. Seasonal Patterns and Job Security

Type of Technology	Usage in Urban Areas (%)	Usage in Rural Areas (%)
Social Media (Facebook, Instagram)	70%	30%
Promotional Websites	50%	10%
Online Booking Applications	60%	20%

Gender Dynamics and Diversity

The study found significant gender imbalances in the workforce. Women were underrepresented in managerial roles and overrepresented in lower-paying service roles. Ethnic diversity in the workforce was noted, but disparities in access to training and employment opportunities persisted among different ethnic groups.

Impact of Global Tourism Trends

Global trends such as sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, and ecotourism present both opportunities and challenges for the rural tourism workforce. As shown in Table 5, future workforce demands place high importance on skills in environmental conservation (80%), cultural heritage management (70%), and digital marketing (90%). These findings highlight the critical need for targeted training and development programs to prepare the workforce for these evolving global trends.

Table 5. Impact of Global Tourism Trends

Future Skill Demands	Priority (%)
Environmental Conservation	80%
Cultural Heritage Management	70%
Digital Marketing	90%

Policy and Industry Implications

Existing policies and industry practices were found to inadequately address the needs of the rural tourism workforce. Policy interventions focusing on education, training, gender equality, and sustainable employment practices are urgently needed.

Future Trends and Workforce Development Needs

The study predicts an increasing demand for a skilled, adaptable, and digitally literate workforce, driven by evolving tourist preferences, technological advancements, and the rise of sustainable tourism practices.

Analysis

An analysis of Indonesia's rural tourism sector reveals a complex and contradictory narrative. On one hand, the sector holds immense potential as an engine for economic growth and cultural preservation. On the other hand, this potential is significantly hampered by critical challenges inherent in the human resources that form its backbone. The findings of this study highlight a series of structural, demographic, and skill gaps that must be urgently addressed through a holistic and strategic approach to ensure long-term sustainability.

The Demographic Paradox: A Youthful Workforce with Untapped Potential

One of the most prominent findings is the demographic

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PUSAKA
Journal of Tourism, Hospitality, Travel and Business Event
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ISSN 2656-1301 (Online) 2656-1336 (Print), 358-369
DOI: 10.33649/pusaka.v6i2.477
https://journal.poltekparmakassar.ac.id/index.php/pusaka

profile of the workforce, which is dominated by young people, with over 60% under the age of 30. Theoretically, this demographic is a tremendous asset, implying a workforce that is adaptable, energetic, and has great potential for mastering digital technology. However, this research reveals a paradox: this potential remains largely untapped due to a sharp mismatch between demographic characteristics and actual skills possessed.

The majority of the workforce (70%) has only completed a high school education, with very limited access to vocational or specialized training in the field of tourism. This lack of specialized training is a primary barrier that limits their competitiveness and economic contribution. As such, the youth in this sector are in a vulnerable position—they are the future of the industry but are not equipped with the adequate tools to meet the demands of today, let alone the future.

The Critical Skills Chasm: Digitalization, Language, and Ecotourism

The skills gap analysis shows an alarming chasm between the competencies of the workforce and the urgent needs of the industry. The most significant gap is in digital literacy. With industry demand at 80%, the current proficiency level is only 25%. This gap is exacerbated by a geographical "digital divide," where the adoption of promotional technologies like social media (30%), websites (10%), and booking applications (20%) in rural areas lags far behind urban areas. This barrier is not just about a lack of training, but also inadequate internet infrastructure in many rural regions, which makes the use of technology nearly impossible. Given that future demand for digital marketing skills is projected to reach 90%, this gap poses a serious threat to the competitiveness of the rural tourism sector.

In addition to digital skills, proficiency in foreign languages (30% proficiency vs. 70% demand) and knowledge of ecotourism (40% proficiency vs. 75% demand) also show significant deficits. These limitations directly hinder the ability of rural destinations to attract and serve international tourist markets and to optimize the potential of sustainable tourism products, which are increasingly in global demand.

Structural Precarity: Seasonality, Job Insecurity, and Low Satisfaction

Another fundamental problem lies in the working conditions themselves, which are heavily influenced by the seasonal nature of rural tourism. With peak seasons lasting only 4 to 6 months, many workers face income uncertainty and long periods of unemployment during the off-peak season. This financial insecurity is a major factor contributing to low job satisfaction, with 65% of workers expressing dissatisfaction with their current employment conditions. Income uncertainty accounts for 45% of the dissatisfaction factors, followed by limited career opportunities at 30%.

Nevertheless, there is a glimmer of hope in the form of non-financial motivation. Workers express pride in promoting local culture (a 25% influence on satisfaction) and enjoy interacting with diverse groups of people. This indicates a strong social and cultural capital, but it will not be enough to retain the workforce in the long term if issues of economic stability and career progression are not seriously addressed through the development of year-round tourism and alternative income sources.

Socio-Cultural Imbalance: Gender, Diversity, and the Role of the Community

The study also highlights significant social imbalances within the workforce structure. There is a clear gender gap, where women are disproportionately represented in low-paid service roles (65%) while men dominate managerial positions (75%). This pattern suggests the existence of systemic barriers that hinder women's career advancement and requires proactive policy interventions to promote gender equality. Furthermore, despite ethnic diversity, some ethnic groups face more limited access to training and employment opportunities, indicating the need for more inclusive policies.

On the other hand, the engagement of the local community is a major strength of rural tourism, facilitating authentic cultural exchanges and the preservation of traditions. The case study of Nglanggeran Tourism Village serves as a successful example of how community-based tourism can improve economic well-being and reduce unemployment. However, this case also highlights inherent challenges, such as dependence on external support and limited youth involvement. Maintaining the balance between the commercial demands of tourism and the preservation of cultural heritage remains an ongoing challenge.

Alignment with Global Trends as an Imperative

These internal challenges become even more urgent when viewed from the perspective of global tourism trends. Modern tourists are increasingly seeking sustainable, culturally-based, and environmentally friendly experiences. Future demand heavily prioritizes skills in environmental conservation (80%), cultural heritage management (70%), and digital marketing (90%). The misalignment between the current workforce's skills and

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DOI: 10.33649/pusaka.v6i2.477

these global demands places Indonesia's rural tourism in a less competitive position. Therefore, human resource development strategies can no longer be reactive; they must be proactive and aligned with the direction of the global market to ensure relevance and sustainability.

Overall, this analysis concludes that to unlock the full potential of its rural tourism sector, Indonesia must move beyond partial solutions. A holistic and integrated intervention framework is required, which includes substantial investment in relevant education and training programs, policy reforms to create job stability and equity, the development of digital infrastructure, and the strengthening of partnerships between the government, industry, and educational institutions. Only with such a strategic approach can Indonesia transform its workforce from mere laborers into true drivers of sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive rural development

CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the immense potential of Indonesia's rural tourism sector as a catalyst for economic development and cultural preservation. However, to fully harness this potential, strategic and inclusive workforce development is essential. Key challenges—such as limited access to specialized training, digital infrastructure gaps, and the seasonal nature of rural tourism employment—must be addressed through coordinated efforts among government, industry, and educational institutions. The research emphasizes the need to equip the workforce with digital literacy, sustainable tourism knowledge, and foreign language skills, particularly targeting youth, women, and minority groups. Community engagement, innovation, and inclusivity should be central to any future strategy. With targeted investments in education, strengthened public-private partnerships, empowered local leadership, and alignment with global tourism trends, Indonesia can cultivate a resilient and skilled rural tourism workforce. Ultimately, such efforts will not only sustain local livelihoods but also safeguard Indonesia's rich cultural and environmental heritage for generations to come.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to extend their sincere appreciation to all the institutions, individuals, and organizations that provided invaluable support and contributions throughout this study. Special recognition is given to Politeknik Pariwisata NHI Bandung, Politeknik Pariwisata Makassar and Red Sea Associates for their insightful input.

DECLARATION

The authors affirm that there are no competing interests, financial or otherwise, that could be perceived to influence the outcomes of this research.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. The research protocol was reviewed and received formal approval from the relevant ethics board prior to the study's commencement.

INFORMED CONSENT

Voluntary and informed consent was secured from every individual who participated in this research after they were fully briefed on the study's objectives and procedures.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The datasets generated and analyzed for this study can be made available by the author upon reasonable request.

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Journal of Tourism, Hospitality, Travel and Business Event
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ISSN 2656-1301 (Online) 2656-1336 (Print), 358-369
https://journal.poltekparmakassar.ac.id/index.php/pusaka

DOI: 10.33649/pusaka.v6i2.477

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