



Analysis of Tourism Area Development in Bukit Lawang, North Sumatra

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Abstract. *This study aims to analyze the development of the Bukit Lawang tourism area. The research employs descriptive and qualitative data analysis, focusing on a problem-solving approach that is based on descriptions rather than numerical data. The purpose of using a qualitative research method is to facilitate a better understanding of information from the sources used as data, providing an effective comprehension of the ecotourism development strategy being studied. The qualitative analysis involves data collection through interviews, observations, documentation, and other methods. The research findings indicate that income from the development of the Bukit Lawang tourism sector has not significantly impacted the local revenue (PAD) of Langkat Regency as a whole. This is because Bukit Lawang tourism has not been fully implemented and managed effectively by the government. Tourism and conservation activities in Bukit Lawang have yet to be supported by proper tourism area planning, which is essential for sustainable tourism. The land division by the government is currently limited to conservation areas, plantations, and community-owned lands. Sustainable tourism land use planning would make Bukit Lawang a more responsive area. Achieving a sustainable tourism area in Bukit Lawang requires the involvement of both the government and local communities.*

Keywords: *Bukit Lawang, Development of the Tourism Area, Qualitative research*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Langkat Regency has become a central focus in development efforts, integrated within a systematically planned national development framework. According to the National Tourism Master Plan 2010–2025, this regency is part of the Medan-Toba National Tourism Destination (DPN) and is located within the Tangkahan-Leuser National Tourism Strategic Area (KSPN). It also includes the Tangkahan-Leuser National Tourism Development Area (KPPN) and the Bukit Lawang KPPN.

Although the tourism potential in Langkat Regency is increasingly evident, the sector has not yet fully developed as a leading or foundational sector. Despite a significant increase in GRDP contribution from tourism-related sectors in Langkat Regency in 2022, tourism-related sectors such as transportation & warehousing and accommodation, food, and beverage provision still display a location quotient index indicating that the tourism sector's role in the region's economic structure has not yet been optimized (BPS North Sumatra Province, 2023).

Furthermore, the primary focus of tourism development in Langkat is on tourism villages. Based on data from the Tourism Village Network (Jadesta), there are seven tourism villages in the region: Batu Rongring, Bukit Kencur (Sampe Raya), Bukit Lawang, Geol (Pematang Serai), Namo Sialang, Timbang Jaya, and Timbang Lawan. However, the information displayed on Jadesta does not accurately represent the true condition of each tourism village in Langkat Regency. In some cases, village locations are inaccurately mapped, with some appearing on maps as centered in Java rather than their actual locations. The mapping on Jadesta provides an initial picture of the readiness of the Tangkahan-Bukit Lawang tourism villages and their existing conditions, which need further evaluation. Reassessing the current conditions in these tourism villages will offer an accurate basis for identifying the strategies necessary to foster growth, progress, and self-sufficiency. Therefore, a study was conducted to develop a roadmap for the development of Bukit Lawang Plantation tourism villages.

Although Bukit Lawang has been designated as a National Tourism Development Area (KPPN), this does not necessarily mean that the number of visitors to Bukit Lawang has increased consistently. Each year, visitor numbers fluctuate significantly. The development of educational tourism focused on fauna is being planned through the design of a Conservation Center in Bukit Lawang with an Ecological Architecture approach. In addition to serving as a research and development center for fauna, this center will also provide educational tourism facilities. The introduction of this new type of tourism in Bukit Lawang is expected to attract more visitors.

Furthermore, the educational aspect on fauna conservation aims to raise awareness among local communities about the importance of protecting animal populations to prevent extinction due to illegal hunting. Several factors have influenced visitor numbers, including flash floods in 2019 and 2023, as well as the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have caused significant fluctuations in the number of visitors to Bukit Lawang over the past five years. The number of tourists from 2019 to 2023 is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Comparison of the Number of Tourists in Bukit Lawang National Tourism Development Area (KPPN) and Tangkahan

Tahun	KPPN Bukit Lawang	KPPN Tangkahan
2019	19.843	32.875
2020	13.366	37.530
2021	14.363	33.450
2022	12.575	31.200
2023	2.000	5.000

Source: Department of Tourism and Culture of Langkat Regency

Based on the table comparing the number of tourists visiting the Bukit Lawang National Tourism Development Area (KPPN) and Tangkahan KPPN from 2019 to 2023, it shows that over the five years, the total number of visitors reached 62,147, with fluctuations in visitor numbers each year. The average monthly visitor count is approximately 1,035 tourists, both local and international. This data indicates that tourist visits to Bukit Lawang, designated as a National Tourism Development Area (KPPN), remain very low.

In contrast, the Tangkahan KPPN averages about 2,334 tourists per month, highlighting a significant difference of 1,299 visitors, or nearly double the number. Notably, Bukit Lawang and Tangkahan KPPN are only about 35 km apart, and both areas leverage natural ecosystems in their tourism offerings. Therefore, there is a pressing need for tourism development in Bukit Lawang to rekindle tourist interest in visiting the area.

In order to achieve planned and sustainable national development goals, it is crucial to wisely utilize available resources. The tourism sector is one of the areas with significant potential for development and can be leveraged within the framework of national development. In addition to providing unique experiences for tourists, the management and development of tourism also have substantial economic impacts (Rahman, 2021).

One of the primary objectives of tourism management and development is to support national development financing. The revenue generated from the tourism sector can be used to fund various development programs that enhance community welfare and advance the country. Therefore, efforts to manage and develop tourism must be conducted wisely and sustainably so that the benefits can be felt by all members of Indonesian society.

Thus, tourism will not only serve as an attraction for local and international tourists but will also act as a strong economic engine for the country (Hardiman Sihombing et al., 2023; Situngkir et al., 2020). People have various reasons when they decide to travel. One common purpose is to escape the fatigue and stress of daily routines. Vacations provide an ideal opportunity to relax and recharge the energy depleted from everyday activities. For

many, a holiday is a chance to temporarily distance themselves from monotonous daily life and experience a new atmosphere (Apriani et al., 2022; Syari & Kadir, 2020).

Langkat Regency, known for its tourist attraction, the Bukit Lawang ecotourism area located in Bahorok District, is a popular destination for both local and international visitors. This is due to the potential offered by the Bukit Lawang ecotourism area, featuring clear river waters suitable for natural bathing and the cool forest scenery of Gunung Leuser National Park. However, there is an additional fee for entering Bukit Lawang ecotourism, collected by the vehicle storage management team under the name of the Bukit Lawang BUMDES (Village-Owned Enterprises), in collaboration with the Langkat Regency Social Service. Unfortunately, the transparency of these fees has raised concerns, as the results of these funds are not evident, leading to questions about where the revenue is directed.

The strategy for developing tourist attractions must be meticulously planned, accompanied by proper management from both the Bukit Lawang tourism managers and the local community. Community involvement is crucial to ensure that the development of the Bukit Lawang tourist attraction can be successfully realized. The Langkat Regency Department of Tourism and Culture plays a vital role in developing ecotourism areas. Strategies are necessary to create and preserve ecotourism sites, particularly Bukit Lawang, so that it remains competitive in attracting tourists. Strategic planning is essential for the development of an organization or company in achieving both short-term and long-term goals.

The analysis of strategic development is based on the strategic dimensions used, namely Objectives, Policies, and Programs.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Tourism

Tourism can be defined from various perspectives by different scholars. According to Mathieson and Wall, as cited in Pitana and Gyatri (2015), tourism is an activity that temporarily moves people to a destination outside their home and workplace to engage in activities there, alongside the provision of facilities to meet their needs. In contrast, Kodhyat Kurniansah (2014) describes tourism as a means to discover harmony and well-being within the social and cultural environment, involving travel from one place to another, either alone or in groups, characterized as a temporary journey with scientific aspects.

Hadiwijoyo (2012) further supports this notion by defining tourism as activities undertaken for leisure, travel, and tourism purposes. This definition aligns with the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2009 on Tourism, which defines tourism as various tourism activities supported by various facilities and services provided by society, businesses, the government, and local governments.

Together, these definitions highlight the multifaceted nature of tourism, emphasizing its role in recreation, cultural exchange, and economic development, while also underscoring the importance of adequate facilities and services to support this sector.

Development of Tourism Areas

Development is a strategy undertaken to enhance, improve, and advance tourist attractions in order to increase the number of visitors, allowing both the community and the government to experience positive impacts (Paturusi, 2011). According to Yoeti (2001, as cited in Suwarti and Yuliamir, 2017), tourism development is an effort made to improve and develop a product or to add types of tourism products. The development of tourism requires careful planning to ensure that the ongoing development aligns with the initial plan and achieves the desired goals. The primary reason for pursuing tourism development is to boost the economy of the region or country (Santi, 2010). The strategy for tourism development aims to ensure that existing tourism can grow and improve further in the future. The availability of complete and supportive facilities is essential for the development of tourism.

3. RESEARCH METHOD(S)

In this research, the researcher employs descriptive research and qualitative data analysis, which involves a problem-solving approach based on non-numeric descriptions (Moleong, in Aris et al, 2024; Pohan et al, 2024). The purpose of using qualitative research methods is to facilitate a better understanding of information from the sources used as data, enabling a more effective comprehension of the research on tourism development strategies (Moleong, 2004 in Nuraini, 2019; Rangkuti et al, 2023a). According to Sugiyono (2018), qualitative research is the researcher's effort to collect data based on the natural environment, and the scientific results can also be accounted for (Siregar et al, 2023). This qualitative descriptive method will only depict a single situation or event (Moleong, 2004 in Nuraini et al, 2023). This study is conducted by describing the current situation surrounding the research subjects, based on the emerging facts and data, investigating and problems solving through interviews, explaining issues to informants, and obtaining data

from the resulting dialogues (Groat & Wang, 2004 in Nuraini, 2024; Sugiarto & Ramadania (2023). Thus, this research clearly addresses the strategies implemented in the development of tourism in Bukit Lawang.

According to Stainback (as cited in Sugiyono, 2018), analysis is a vital movement in the process of subjective exploration aimed at creating and assessing predetermined speculations. Meanwhile, data analysis is equally important, involving the classification of data, description of results, pattern creation, synthesis, selection of data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documents, and systematically organizing them (Groat & Wang, 2004 in Satrya et al, 2023; Harmoko et al, 2024; Sugiarto & Ramadhan, (2021). It is essential to study what is learned to draw conclusions that are easily understood by the writer and others (Sugiyono, 2014). In this research, the author uses qualitative data analysis, which includes data collection from interviews, observations, documentation, and others (Yin 2001 in Sugiarto et al, 2023). Reduction is a stage in the data analysis technique that simplifies, categorizes, and filters data to produce useful information, making it easier to draw conclusions. Data presentation involves a collection of structured information that allows for the drawing of conclusions or actions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Development of Bukit Lawang Tourism Area

In this study, the researcher uses five dimensions of tourism development: Attraction, Accessibility, Amenities, Accommodation, and Activity to analyze the tourism development of Bukit Lawang.

a. Attraction

Various interesting tourist attractions are presented in Bukit Lawang to leave a lasting impression on visitors. Bukit Lawang is renowned as a center for orangutan rehabilitation, established in 1973 to conserve the dwindling population of orangutans due to hunting, trade, and deforestation. Tourists can meet orangutans in Bukit Lawang.

b. Accessibility

Accessibility includes the facilities and infrastructure needed by tourists to reach the tourist destination, which should provide services such as vehicle rentals and local transportation, as well as travel routes or patterns (Cooper et al., 2000). Bukit Lawang can be reached in approximately 2-3 hours from Medan City. Based on field research conducted by the researcher, accessibility in Bukit Lawang is not yet adequate and

remains a challenge due to insufficient roads leading to Bukit Lawang. In this regard, improving access to Bukit Lawang and enhancing accessibility through road improvements and transportation facilities is essential. Additionally, modernizing public facilities such as restrooms, parking areas, and parks is necessary to enhance visitor comfort.

c. Amenities

In the Bukit Lawang area, there are several facilities available, including transportation, accommodation, parking areas, gazebos, restrooms, prayer rooms, and restaurants.

d. Activities

Tourists can engage in trekking in the forests of the Gunung Leuser National Park, which features relatively hilly terrain and soil conditions that tend to be wet and muddy, typical of tropical rainforest soil. Additionally, tourists can participate in rafting activities on the Bahorok River, which has clean water.

e. Accommodation

There are several lodging options in Bukit Lawang, ranging from guesthouses to hotels. These include Hotel Orangutan, Wisma Batu Mandi, Waterstone Guesthouse, Etalauser Jungle Gate EcoResort Bukit Lawang, Asim Paris Guesthouse, Rambai Tree Jungle Lodges, Sumatra Jungle Trek in - Trips Orangutan, Junia Guesthouse Bukit Lawang, Ida Guesthouse & Restaurant, and Rain Forest Guesthouse. In this context, the management implements policies and regulations that support sustainable tourism, such as limiting the number of daily visitors to Gunung Leuser National Park and waste management policies.

Implementation of Tourism Area Development Policy in Bukit Lawang

a. Resource Dimension

Resources refer to the capabilities possessed that support the implementation process of the program, specifically human resources and other types of resources. The indicators for this dimension are as follows: The adequacy of competent staff in their respective roles, and the availability of facilities that support the development of tourist destinations. Based on interviews and observations, it was found that for the resource dimension, the indicator of adequate, competent staff in their respective roles is sufficiently met. This is evidenced by the presence of tour guides who meet the Indonesian National Standard (SNI) and are competent as guides. Additionally, efforts are maintained to preserve the flora and fauna unique to the Bukit Lawang ecotourism

area, including certain plants and animals that are not found in other ecotourism sites and are exclusive to Bukit Lawang. This uniqueness offers a potential opportunity for the long-term development of Bukit Lawang as an ecotourism destination.

b. Threat Indicator

The threat indicator refers to situations that may negatively impact the organization, particularly the Bukit Lawang ecotourism area. Such threats could lead to setbacks and losses in both the short and long term, especially concerning the development of ecotourism in Bukit Lawang. Identified threats include areas for improvement in Bukit Lawang’s ecotourism development, with a focus on enhancing infrastructure to encourage repeat visits from tourists. Additionally, the excessive presence of makeshift blue-tarp shelters along the Bukit Lawang riverside detracts from the aesthetic appeal of the ecotourism site. Addressing this issue falls under the responsibility of the local government, specifically the Langkat Regency Tourism and Culture Office, to provide guidance, recommendations, and viable solutions for improvement.



Figure 1. Bukit Lawang Guide

Disposition Dimension

Disposition refers to the commitment and attitude of program implementers in carrying out all activities related to the implementation of tourism destination development policies. The indicators for this dimension are as follows: the commitment and attitude of policy implementers, and the alignment of perspectives between implementers and related agencies in executing tourism destination development.

Based on observations, the disposition dimension for the indicator of commitment and attitude among policy implementers has been progressing well. Commitment by policy implementers is reinforced by their leadership, and the actions taken are shaped by

directives from higher-level authorities. It is essential for policy implementers to establish commitment and a proactive attitude from the outset to determine the future direction of the policy.

Additionally, observations indicate that alignment in perspectives between implementers and related agencies in the development of tourism destinations is functioning effectively. This is evidenced by the emergence of a strategy endorsed by the local government and supported by relevant organizations to elevate Bukit Lawang's river tourism site as a top-priority tourism destination.

Functional Allocation in the Land Use Plan for the Bukit Lawang Tourism Area

Meeting the needs of tourists in the Bukit Lawang land use plan is reflected in designated zones such as souvenir shops, dining areas, accommodations, parking, and places of worship. The development carried out independently by the local community after the 2003 flash flood was not based on prior planning as it should have been. Land-use classification should align with the requirements of each activity planned for the area, allowing activities to be carried out more effectively. The zoning in Bukit Lawang should ideally be developed with consideration for the functional land use needed to create a harmonious environment.

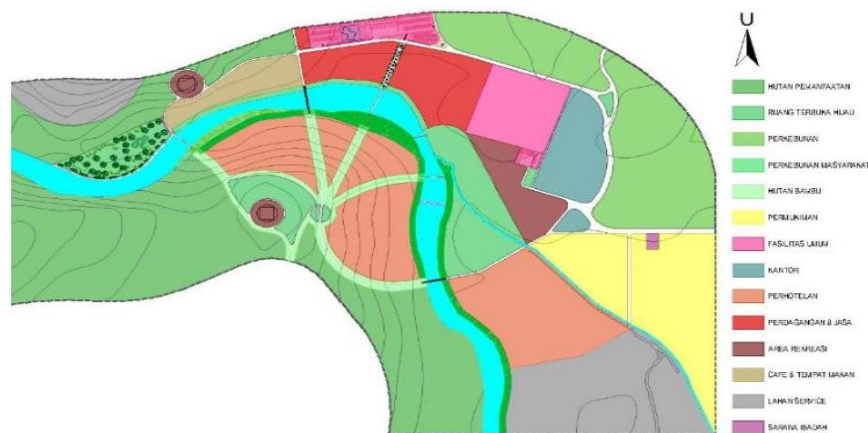


Figure 2 B. Planning for Functional Land Use Allocation in Bukit Lawang

The functional allocation in the land-use planning of Bukit Lawang is inspired by a similar case study from the Swann Hill Riverfront in Australia. Along the riverbank, an open-space function is planned to become part of the public space. Green areas maximizing the visual potential of the area can offer tourists an engaging experience. Utilizing the riverside zone as a public green open space will benefit Bukit Lawang by enhancing its resilience to disasters. Zones with limited access and scenic potential are planned for service functions, such as water treatment areas on elevated land and waste processing facilities in the southeastern part of the area. These service zones are also intended to

address issues of energy, water, and waste management, both liquid and solid, allowing Bukit Lawang to develop as a sustainable tourism destination.

Impact of Bukit Lawang Tourism Area Development on the Economy of Langkat Regency

The tourism industry impacts the economy, stimulating economic growth through various related sectors. While not the sole indicator of a country's development success, economic growth serves as a barometer of a region's economic progress. The tourism sector can potentially replace and even surpass the oil and gas sector and other industries if it is developed strategically and comprehensively (Suryani, 2021). Langkat Regency is one of the tourism destinations in North Sumatra Province. During the 2020-2022 period, the number of tourists visiting Langkat Regency fluctuated, including both domestic and international tourists. In 2022, the number of tourists visiting Langkat Regency increased by 114.58% from 2021. The growth rate of the Accommodation and Food & Beverage Provision category, supporting tourism, rose by 6.22%, attributed to the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the role of the Accommodation and Food & Beverage Provision category in Langkat Regency's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) in 2022 was relatively small, at only 1.96%.

Based on the researcher's survey results in several tourist areas in Bukit Lawang, Langkat Regency, positive impacts of tourism development on regional income and employment were identified as follows:

a. **Generating Income for the Community**

Each tourism activity generates income, particularly for the local community. This income is derived from transactions between tourists and residents through tourists' spending. Tourist expenditures are distributed not only to those directly involved in the tourism industry, such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour guides, but also to other sectors like agriculture, handicrafts, transportation, communication, and other related sectors.

b. **Creating Job Opportunities**

Tourism is an industry that offers various types of creative jobs, providing substantial employment opportunities for a large number of people.

c. **Enhancing Economic Structure**

Increased community income from the tourism industry improves the economic structure of society. People can enhance their quality of life by working in the tourism industry.

d. Creating Investment Opportunities

The diversity of businesses within the tourism industry provides opportunities for investors to contribute capital. Investment opportunities in tourist areas have the potential to build and enhance the local economy.

e. Encouraging Entrepreneurship

Tourist needs create opportunities for local residents to open businesses and become entrepreneurs, providing products and services that tourists require. Tourism offers entrepreneurial opportunities by catering to various tourist needs, including both goods and services.

f. Improving Facilities and Infrastructure

To attract tourists, better facilities and infrastructure are developed. For example, the Stabat-Langkat toll road was constructed to facilitate access to the city of Aceh.

g. Supporting Local Development

Tourism generates income for the government, which can be used to improve local facilities and infrastructure. This income supports the development of under-resourced areas.

h. Increasing Cultural Knowledge

Communities become more motivated to learn about their own culture and traditions to present them to tourists, making the tourist destination more appealing with diverse cultural attractions.

i. Encouraging Language Skills

Local residents gain foreign language skills to communicate with international tourists, enhancing knowledge and experience. This not only fosters closer connections in a familial atmosphere but also enriches the tourist experience.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research findings and discussions in the previous chapter, the conclusions are as follows:

Revenue from the tourism sector development in Bukit Lawang has not significantly contributed to the Regional Original Revenue (PAD) of Langkat Regency overall. This is due to the fact that Bukit Lawang tourism has not yet been fully implemented and effectively managed by the government. Tourism and conservation activities in Bukit Lawang are not yet supported by adequate tourism area planning, which would establish it

as a sustainable tourist destination. The land distribution carried out by the government has been limited to conservation areas, plantations, and community-owned land. Land use planning with a sustainable tourism concept would make Bukit Lawang a more resilient area. To achieve the goal of making Bukit Lawang a sustainable tourism area, both government involvement and local community participation are essential.

Bukit Lawang's potential as a tourist destination offers economic opportunities for the local community by meeting the needs of visitors. The community has already taken advantage of this potential, with many locals engaging in tourism activities that provide financial benefits. As a conservation area and tourist destination, Bukit Lawang still holds further development potential, allowing the area's value to be maximized. Through land-use planning based on sustainable tourism principles, Bukit Lawang's value can be optimized while preserving the environment. Land optimization through thoughtful land-use planning not only enhances environmental harmony but also boosts the economic value of the area.

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