



A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE AND ECO-FRIENDLY TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF BAJUIN VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Submitted:

4 February 2026

Reviewed:

30 June 2026

Accepted:

10 May 2026

Published:

15 May 2026

Bajuin Valley, located in Tanah Laut Regency, Indonesia, is a promising ecotourism destination due to its unique biodiversity, picturesque landscapes, and preserved natural ecosystem. However, the growing influx of tourists poses significant challenges, including environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited community participation in sustainable tourism management. This study aims to develop strategies to promote sustainable tourism in Bajuin Valley by assessing its potentials and challenges. Employing a case study and qualitative investigation approach, the research identifies key factors influencing the sustainable development of the area. Results highlight the need for improved infrastructure, effective waste management systems, and enhanced community involvement in tourism planning and operations. Additionally, strategies are proposed to address environmental conservation, economic empowerment of local communities, and cultural preservation. These findings provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders, including local governments, tourism managers, and communities, to ensure Bajuin Valley becomes a model of sustainable tourism that balances economic growth with environmental and cultural integrity.

Keywords: Bajuin Valley, sustainable tourism, ecotourism

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism is gaining increasing global attention as awareness grows regarding the importance of balancing natural resource exploitation with environmental conservation. This concept emphasizes tourism management that is not only economically driven but also considers environmental and socio-cultural aspects (Sulistiyadi et al., 2017). Indonesia, as a country rich in natural resources, has great potential for developing sustainable tourism, particularly in regions with high biodiversity and unique ecosystems.



Bajuin Valley, located in Tanah Laut Regency, is one of the nature tourism destinations that boasts main attractions such as waterfalls, diverse flora and fauna, and a well-preserved forest ecosystem. These potentials make Bajuin Valley an ideal destination for sustainable tourism development. However, its management faces several challenges, including the increasing number of tourists that may pose environmental threats, limited eco-friendly supporting infrastructure, and minimal community involvement in tourism management.

To ensure that the development of Bajuin Valley tourism remains sustainable and environmentally friendly, appropriate strategies based on scientific approaches are needed. Therefore, this study aims to identify the existing conditions of tourism in Bajuin Valley, analyze its potentials and challenges, and formulate sustainability-based development strategies. By employing case study methods, SWOT analysis, and the Delphi approach, this research is expected to provide practical recommendations for local governments, tourism managers, and local communities in maintaining a balance between tourism development and environmental conservation. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for formulating sustainable tourism management policies in Bajuin Valley, thereby enhancing economic benefits for the local community without compromising environmental sustainability.

METHOD

This study employs a case study approach by collecting data from various sources to understand the conditions and development potential of Bajuin Valley tourism.

Data Collection

The data used in this research consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained through direct observation of ecotourism conditions in Bajuin Valley, as well as in-depth interviews with stakeholders (tourism managers, local communities, and tourists). Secondary data is gathered from literature reviews on sustainable tourism and ecotourism concepts, as well as policy documents related to tourism development in Tanah Laut Regency. Additionally, statistical data on tourist visits and the economic contributions of the tourism sector are also considered.

Data Processing and Analysis Techniques

Qualitative investigation was applied in this study to identify various factors influencing the sustainable tourism development of Bajuin Valley. Through this approach, strengths such as natural beauty and biodiversity can be optimized, while weaknesses such as limited infrastructure and lack of community involvement can be addressed with appropriate strategies. Furthermore, opportunities such as the growing interest in ecotourism and government policy support can be leveraged to accelerate development, while threats such as environmental degradation and climate change need to be anticipated to ensure the sustainability of this tourism destination.

Meanwhile, content analysis is applied to process qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews with various stakeholders. This method enables

researchers to identify patterns, key themes, and emerging narratives related to environmentally friendly tourism management strategies. By analyzing the content of discussions and opinions shared by respondents, this study can formulate more targeted recommendations to realize a sustainable and environmentally conscious Bajuin Valley tourism model.

Research Stages

The research process begins with identifying the existing conditions through field surveys to observe the physical, social, and economic aspects of Bajuin Valley. Next, a feasibility analysis of sustainable tourism development is conducted by assessing its potential and challenges using the qualitative investigation approach. Based on the analysis results, the study then formulates sustainability-based tourism development strategies, utilizing interview data to generate precise and practical recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existing Conditions of Bajuin Valley Tourism

The existing conditions of Bajuin Valley tourism reflect significant potential for development as a sustainable tourism destination. This area boasts stunning natural beauty, supported by a relatively well-preserved ecosystem and community participation in the tourism economy sector. However, several challenges remain, including limited infrastructure, inadequate waste management, and the absence of clear regulations regarding environmentally-based management. To further understand the current conditions, the following table summarizes key aspects influencing tourism management in Bajuin Valley (Table 1).

Tabel 1. Existing Conditions and Issues of Bajuin Valley Tourist Attraction, Pelaihari

Issue	Existing condition	Problems
Natural Beauty	Featuring rivers, rapids, tropical forests, and a rich diversity of flora and fauna	Massive and poorly managed tourism activities can damage the river ecosystem, forests, flora, and fauna
Infrastructure	The access road to the location is passable by vehicles, although it is still in the form of gravel and stone surfacing	Some road sections need improvement to enhance the safety and comfort of tourists. The roads become muddy during the rainy season
	Supporting facilities (toilets, parking areas, resting spots) are available but still limited	The lack of adequate facilities and poor management
Cleanliness & Waste Management	Tourists' waste is often found around the tourist site	The waste management system is not yet very effective, and the awareness of some tourists is still low
Community Participation (Socio-Economic)	The community participates through small businesses such as food stalls, rental of inflatable tubes, and camping equipment rentals	Community involvement in tourism management is still limited, resulting in suboptimal economic benefits
	Tourism provides economic opportunities for the surrounding community	Limited access to training and economic empowerment based on sustainable tourism. There are no distinctive local products from the villages around Bajuin

			Valley tourism being marketed at the tourist sites
Regulation Management	&	Tourism is locally managed with unclear regulations	Lack of coordination between local government, tourism managers, and the community in managing environmentally-based tourism
Ecology Conservation	&	The ecosystem remains relatively intact, with the diverse flora and fauna typical of Bajuin Valley	The increase in the number of tourists without proper management has the potential to disrupt the balance of the ecosystem
		Some tourist areas are experiencing environmental pressure due to tourism activities	There is no clear and sustainable conservation program in place to protect the local ecosystem

(Source: Results of field observations and interviews with stakeholders)

Based on the conditions presented in the table above, the development of Bajuin Valley tourism needs to be carried out with a more systematic and sustainable approach. The implemented strategy should be able to optimize natural and socio-economic potential while addressing various existing challenges, particularly in environmental management and community empowerment. With proper planning, Bajuin Valley can evolve into a sustainable tourism destination that provides economic benefits without compromising environmental conservation.

Analysis of the Sustainability Issues

Sustainable tourism development must consider the balance between ecological, economic, and socio-cultural aspects. Bajuin Valley, as one of the nature tourism destinations in Tanah Laut Regency, has great potential to be developed with sustainability principles. However, the challenges faced in managing this tourism need to be studied in more detail to minimize the negative impacts on the environment, local economy, and socio-cultural aspects (Meldayanoor et al., 2023).

Ecology issue

Ecological sustainability is a key element in the management of nature tourism (Sulistiyadi et al., 2017; Suryade et al., 2022). Bajuin Valley has a fairly natural ecosystem with unique biodiversity (Figure 1). However, the increasing number of tourists, not balanced with a proper management system, can threaten environmental conservation (Al-Afkar & Nurhayati, 2019; Arifin, 2020; Ilmiah et al., 2022; Sandy Najeha et al., 2024). (Sulistiyadi et al., 2017; Suryade et al., 2022). Bajuin Valley has a relatively natural ecosystem with distinctive biodiversity (Figure 1). However, the increasing number of tourists, without being accompanied by a proper management system, can threaten environmental sustainability (Al-Afkar & Nurhayati, 2019; Arifin, 2020; Ilmiah et al., 2022; Sandy Najeha et al., 2024).



Figure 1. The natural beauty of the Bajuin Valley tourist attraction

Waste Management and Sanitation

One of the main issues in Bajuin Valley is the lack of trash bins and waste management systems. Based on field observations, many tourists dispose of waste irresponsibly, especially around the waterfall area and trekking paths. This has the potential to pollute the environment and disrupt the aesthetics of the tourism area. Poor waste management in nature tourism destinations can lead to ecosystem degradation and a decline in the quality of the tourist experience (Marinda & Ardillah, 2019b, 2019a; Putri & Syamsiyah, 2022). Therefore, a waste management system based on the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) is needed, along with the provision of segregated trash bins and an educational program for visitors. The management has provided simple waste disposal bins around the tourist area. It is necessary to provide containers for separating organic and non-organic waste, as well as to raise awareness among all visitors not to litter.



Figure 2. Waste disposal bins around the Bajuin Valley tourist attraction

In addition, the toilet facilities in this area are still minimal and do not meet proper sanitation standards (Figure 3). Poor sanitation in tourist areas can lead to water and soil contamination, increase the risk of infectious diseases, and diminish the quality of the tourist experience. Tourism managers need to provide environmentally friendly toilets that use sustainable waste treatment systems, such as biofiltration or closed septic tanks, to prevent environmental pollution (Marinda & Ardillah, 2019a, 2019b).



Figure 3. Toilet facilities for visitors at the Bajuin Valley tourist attraction

Ecosystem and Flora-Fauna Conservation

Bajuin Valley has a tropical forest ecosystem that serves as a habitat for various endemic flora and fauna species. However, the increasing number of uncontrolled tourism activities poses a threat to the preservation of this ecosystem. One of the main threats is soil erosion due to poorly maintained river trekking trails, as well as leftover campfire remains often abandoned by tourists (Figure 4). Tourism areas with trekking and river exploration activities without proper planning can lead to land degradation (Munawir et al., 2022; Najeha & Vitrianto, 2024). Therefore, structured trails made of environmentally friendly materials are needed, along with strict prohibitions against damaging forest and river areas.



Figure 4. Garbage incineration pile at the Bajuin Valley tourist spot

The presence of a river in Bajuin Valley is a major attraction for tourists, but it is also highly vulnerable to pollution. Without proper management, domestic waste and litter from visitors can contaminate the water source and disrupt the river ecosystem balance. Water pollution in nature tourism areas is often caused by tourists who lack environmental awareness. Therefore, strict regulations on river cleanliness are necessary, including a ban on littering and the use of detergents or soap in the river area (Sari et al., 2017).

Economical Issue

Sustainable tourism must provide benefits for the local community without compromising the sustainability of natural resources. Nature tourism in Bajuin Valley has had an economic impact on the surrounding residents, but several challenges still need to be addressed.

Empowerment of the Local Community Economy

The local community has begun to capitalize on tourism potential by opening food stalls and offering rental services for tourist equipment. However, the scale of these businesses is still limited and not well-organized. Community-based tourism can enhance economic welfare if supported by business management training and access to capital (Marinda & Ardillah, 2019b; Pramusita & Sarinastiti, 2017; A. Putra & Ariana, 2021; Rahmawati, 2018; Srihasnita et al., 2024). Therefore, community empowerment programs through entrepreneurship training, digital marketing, and access to small business credit should be implemented to enhance the economic competitiveness of local residents.

Marketing of flagship products for tourism souvenirs

Bajuin District has various flagship products, such as agricultural products and traditional crafts like bananas, durians, as well as processed goods such as crackers and cookies, which can be used as souvenirs for tourists (Figure 5). However, these products have not been maximally managed within the tourism concept. Local economy-based tourism that integrates regional flagship products can increase the income of the community (Bories et al., 2016; Pramusita & Sarinastiti, 2017). Therefore, there is a need for a souvenir center or tourist market that sells local products to enhance tourist attraction while simultaneously strengthening the local economy.



Figure 6. Pisang kapok sebagai produk unggulan Bajuin

Sociocultural Issue

Sociocultural aspects are also an important factor in the development of sustainable tourism. The presence of tourists can bring positive impacts, such as increased social interaction and economic growth, but it can also potentially lead to cultural shifts and social issues within the local community.

Praying Facilities and Social Values

The mosque or places of worship in this tourism area are still limited, so Muslim tourists often face difficulties in performing their religious duties (Figure 6). The availability of worship facilities in tourist destinations contributes to the comfort of visitors and supports the concept of halal tourism. Therefore, the development of representative worship facilities should be prioritized so that Bajuin

Valley tourism can be more inclusive for various visitor groups (Al-Afkar & Nurhayati, 2019; A. Putra & Ariana, 2021; A. M. Putra & Ariana, 2021).



Figure 6. Simple worship facilities at the Bajuin Valley nature tourism attraction

The issue of free association among tourists is also a concern, especially in maintaining the cultural and moral values of the local community. Uncontrolled tourist attractions can trigger shifts in social values and an increase in immoral behavior within the tourism area (A. Putra & Ariana, 2021). Stricter supervision and clear regulations regarding tourism ethics are needed to address this issue, including socializing tourists about the local community's social norms. Warnings against immoral behavior should be posted on trees around the tourist area (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Warning sign against immoral behavior posted on trees around the tourist area

Tourist Safety from Natural Threats

Bajuin Valley has a river that occasionally experiences flash floods due to heavy rainfall. However, there is currently no effective early warning system to anticipate these dangers. Flash floods in the tourist area have led to an increase in tourist accidents (BNPB, 2023; Herawati et al., 2023; Wardani, 2024). Therefore, the installation of warning signs, the development of a weather-based early warning system, and disaster mitigation training for the community and tourism managers are needed to reduce the risk of accidents. The Bajuin Valley tourism managers have created several posters or banners warning of rising river water levels during heavy rainfall in various locations (Figure 8). They also routinely patrol and remind visitors camping near the riverbank not to approach too close to the river's edge.



Figure 8. Warning Poster for the Danger of River Overflow

Strategies and Recommendations for the Development of Bajui Tourism

The strategies and recommendations for the development of Bajui Valley tourism based on sociocultural, economic, and ecological/environmental aspects are outlined in Table 2. Table 2 shows that a multidimensional approach is needed for this destination to develop sustainably. From a sociocultural aspect, improving worship facilities and implementing a halal tourism concept are crucial to attract Muslim tourists and maintain the comfort of all visitors. Furthermore, strengthening tourism ethics and social supervision is necessary to prevent behaviours that do not align with local norms, especially with the increasing number of visitors from various regions. Safety and disaster mitigation should also be a priority due to the proximity of the tourism area to a river that has the potential to overflow during heavy rainfall.

From an economic aspect, empowering MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) is key to improving the welfare of the local community. With access to capital, business management training, and digital marketing, the community can become more actively involved in tourism-based economic activities. Additionally, strengthening the appeal of local products through branding and promotion can create a unique identity for Lembah Bajui that differentiates it from other tourism destinations. Managing and diversifying tourism packages are also important strategies to increase visitor appeal and length of stay, such as developing educational tourism, local cultural experiences, and annual events that can boost visitation.

Tabel 2. Strategies and Recommendations for the Development of Bajuin Valley Tourism

Sustainable Issues	Strategies	Reccomendations
Ecology/Environment	1. Improvement of waste management and sanitation	- Provision of segregated trash bins and eco-friendly toilets. - "Zero waste tourism" campaign.
	2. Ecosystem conservation and protection of flora and fauna	- Development of eco-friendly trekking trails. - Tourist education on ecosystems. - Conservation zones for flora and fauna.
	3. River management and water pollution mitigation	- Provision of dedicated handwashing/equipment cleaning facilities. - Monitoring of river water quality - Riparian vegetation along the river
Economy	1. Empowerment of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises)	- Access to capital for local entrepreneurs. - Business management and digital marketing training.
	2. Strengthening the appeal of local products	- Establishment of local souvenir centers - Branding and promotion of local products
	3. Management and diversification of tour packages	- Development of cultural and ecotourism-based tour packages. - Organization of annual tourism events
Sociocultural	1. Improvement of worship facilities and halal tourism	- Building or renovating prayer rooms and ablution facilities - Implementing the concept of halal tourism
	2. Strengthening tourism ethics and social supervision	- Socialization of cultural norms through information boards and digital platforms - Enhancement of tourism patrols - Implementation of a tourist code of ethics
	3. Enhancement of security and disaster mitigation	- Installation of warning signs in disaster-prone areas - Early warning systems and disaster mitigation training

An ecological and environmental review shows that strategies should focus on waste and sanitation management, ecosystem conservation, and mitigation of river water pollution. Providing segregated waste bins, running "zero waste tourism" campaigns, and building environmental-friendly toilets are tangible steps in maintaining the cleanliness of the tourism area. Additionally, creating eco-friendly trekking paths and educating tourists on the importance of preserving flora and fauna can help maintain the balance of the ecosystem. The river, a key attraction in Lembah Bajuin, must also be well-managed by monitoring water quality and planting buffer vegetation along the river to prevent erosion and pollution.

Overall, these strategies and recommendations provide a clear direction for developing Lembah Bajuin as a sustainable tourism destination. Effective implementation will require collaboration between local governments, communities, academics, and the private sector. With an integrated approach, Lembah Bajuin tourism can not only become a source of local economic growth but

also continue to preserve the environment and the cultural values of the local community.

CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights Bajuin Valley's potential as a sustainable tourism destination, emphasizing its rich biodiversity and natural beauty. However, challenges such as poor infrastructure, ineffective waste management, and limited community involvement persist. Recommended strategies include eco-friendly facility upgrades, community empowerment through training and funding, and environmental conservation efforts. Future research should focus on monitoring the impact of these strategies, integrating smart tourism technologies, and fostering community-led management. By addressing these aspects, Bajuin Valley can achieve a balance between economic growth, environmental preservation, and cultural sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors sincerely thank Tanah Laut State Polytechnics for their support and resources in conducting this research. The authors also thank the editorial team of Media Wisata for facilitating the publication of this research.

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