

COVID-19 and the Moment to Evaluate Tourism Euphoria, Indonesia

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Abstract

COVID-19 outbreak has been influenced tourism sectors in Indonesia. Many economic activity related to tourism industry was drop and many tourism worker loss jobs. In the absent of tourism activity, the natural ecosystem has opportunities to restore the degraded system caused by intensive use of tourist visitation. Traveling responsible to pandemic disease spread through the tourist movement and human physical contact. New tourism should be able to promote responsible travels through the management of visitor, reduce mass tourism and create high tourism product which are able to support economic benefits to local community, socio-cultural aspect preservation, and environmental conservation. The quality is important rather than quantity or the number of tourist. COVID-19 pandemic provides significant lesson learned for new tourism implementation in Indonesia.

Keywords: environmental conservation, mass tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 suddenly destroys the tourism sector in Indonesia. The ambitious target of tourism grows has disturbed by new virus strains, which spread very fast. The new pandemic called Corona Virus Disease firstly identified in Wuhan in December 2019, and rapidly spread to Europe, America, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. COVID-19 identified as a new strain of corona virus (SARS-CoV-2) cause serious pneumonia. UNWTO report that global tourism sectors significantly affected by COVID-19 pandemic [1,2,3].

Since the first case of COVID-19 in Jakarta, the confirmed COVID-19 case has been reported increased significantly. The local transmission continuously grows a function of government late responses, community poor literacy, awareness about pathogens pandemic, lack of health instrument to identify pathogens spreads, and lack of health system readiness [4,5,6]. Without comprehensive emergency actions and community participation, there is a potentiality for Indonesia as a new epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Global pandemic management argues that human travels should be minimized to reduce pathogens spreads [1,7]. Global policy to restrict traveling causes a significant tourist arrival in Indonesia. On February 5th, 2020, the Indonesian government officially suspend flight to mainland China. By April 24th, 2020, the Indonesian government closed international and domestic

flight [8]. Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia reported international tourist arrivals in March 2020 decrease 45.50% compared to February 2020. Compared to March 2019, international tourism arrivals decreased by 64.11% [9]. These lead to a significant impact on the tourism industry in Indonesia. The aim of the paper was to describe the Indonesian responses to COVID-19 pandemic, especially in tourism sectors and the government scenarios in the tourism industry recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic as a moment to evaluate tourism was discussed to enhance the future sustainability and competitiveness of tourism industry in Indonesia. Recent literature reviews, document reports, and newspaper content analysis were done to construct discussion. The discussion focused on the recent Indonesian responses to COVID Pandemic, and argument to establish a new approach in tourism implementation in Indonesia.

Indonesian Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic

Indonesia's government argues that managing human movement, traveling, and strictly control community health with COVID-19 symptoms is important to minimize the recent Corona virus outbreak. In order to minimize outbreak potentiality in the Indonesian archipelago that caused by tourism activities, international flight and visa on arrivals policy were suspended. Health checks were implemented in many sites, including airport, seaport, and terminals.

Numerous regulations were released as responses to minimize COVID-19 outbreaks. Some crucial regulations were released related to the restriction of human concentration in a particular area and human movement. It is

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particularly important because May has many holidays, and there is a collective leave of Eid-al-Fitr, the great day of Muslims in Indonesia. Every year, there is significant people movement to visit relatives and recreation activities during the collective leave of Eid-al-Fitr. In response to these situations, the Indonesian government released some significant regulations related to traveling. It includes:

- Regulation No. 25/2020 regulates the use of transport vehicles during the exodus (also known as *mudik* or *pulang kampung*, which translates to going home) season that will come in the last weeks of May (issued by The Ministry of Transportation) [8].
- Circular No. HK.02.01/Menkes/332/2020 on Health Protocols for Indonesians or foreign nationals arriving from overseas into areas where PSBB has been declared (issued by The Ministry of Health) [10].
- Circular No. 4/2020 on the Criteria of Personal Travel in the Effort to Mitigate COVID-19 (issued by The Indonesian COVID-19 Task Force) [11].

Indonesian government identifies numerous people to lose jobs as an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. International and domestic flight cancels influences travel industry jobs decrease significantly. In the accommodation sector, the number of guests in hotels, resort, lodges, and home stay was decreasing sharply. Domestic transportation stopped, and access to attractions was closed to minimize the corona outbreak spread. According to Mr. Sukamdani, head of PHRI, about 1.642 hotel and 353 restaurant and tourism attractions have closed as an impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. These lead to the loss of 4 US\$ (equal to 62 trillion rupiahs) potential revenue generated from tourism sectors. The most serious impacted area included Bali, Batam, and Manado [12]. Decrease of the tourism industry in such place influence the national economic earnings from tourism.

COVID-19 has leads to the economic crisis, especially among workers works in tourism industry. To cope with such an economic crisis, the Indonesia government release *Bantuan Langsung Tunai* (Direct Cash Assistance, a temporary cash transfer program) to tourism workers who are seriously affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The Ministry of Tourism allocates 500 billion rupiahs to support tourism workers through the Direct Cash Assistance program. The Indonesian government also

released numerous workshops and training to increase human capacity in tourism sectors [13].

MOMENT TO EVALUATE TOURISM

Tourism rapid growth in Indonesia is an interesting phenomenon. In the past decades, tourism has contributed to a significant role in national economic earning in Indonesia, but it was received little attention, especially in the development context. The intensive tourism development in Indonesia took place in 2015 through the initial development of a strategy called "new 10 Bali". The ambitious international tourist arrival was targeted at 20 million by the end of 2019 [14]. Numerous infrastructures to support tourism growth were developed. It was accompanied by massive training and skill improvement program to tourism sector workers and communities surrounding tourism destinations. The community development especially implemented to prepare the community as an active party in optimizing cultural and natural resources as a tourism attraction.

The euphoria of tourism in the local context was shown by the growth of village tourism sites (*Desa Wisata*). The precise number of village tourism was not available, but many areas report the significant increase in village tourism number. From the online newspaper and tourism websites, the Ministry of Village, Disadvantaged Regions Development, and Transmigration (*KEMENDES*A) have the target to create ten thousand villages tourism. By August 2019, it claimed that the number of village tourism was 7,275 or equal to 9.75% of total villages in Indonesia.

According to BPS-Statistic Indonesia, the potential number of village tourism sites in Indonesia in 2018 was 1,734 sites. The highest number of village tourism was found in Java-Bali (857 sites), followed by Sumatera (355 villages tourism sites), Nusa Tenggara (187 villages sites), Sulawesi (119 villages sites), Kalimantan (117 villages sites), Papua (74 villages sites) and Maluku region (23 village sites). Another report mentioned Bali has 110 villages tourism, and claimed as the province with the highest village tourism number [15].

By 2019, East Java reported 290 sites as tourism villages, and the number could increase in the near future. From 290 village sites, only 26 sites have been reported visited by tourists [16]. There is no study was conducted to describe the reason behind the less number of the visited area

compared to the reported sites. Besides the problems of data generated from the field, it seems that the declaration of villages as village tourism without comprehensive planning contributes to the less-visited sites. The top-down approach of village tourism development is dominant rather than bottom-up initiation.

Tourism in the village area or forest adjacent to the villages has created Self-Portrait spots to attract tourists. The creativity and innovation to create interesting tourism object in village tourism sites has been fast developed, even, it is sometimes beyond normality of natural features. The original rural landscapes often contaminated by numerous tourism attractions. Tourism program which is able to deliver environmental messages were absent, lead to the fail of environmental education and awareness programs.

Mass tourism is another issue of tourism implementation in Indonesia, especially in villages and natural areas. It has been widely criticized that the high number of tourists in the natural area has a negative impact on the ecosystem. Problem with serious mass tourism was observed in Mt. Bromo [17,18]. Natural beach is the other example of sites with abundance visitors in fragile ecosystem.

Problems with the sudden increase in tourist visitation contribute to the problems in the area of the villages. The traffic jam was the common problems related to the abundance of tourist vehicles. It was often followed by soil erosion, dust pollution, vegetation disturbance along corridors, and waste abundance. Parking area availability is often in problems with the abundance of car and tourist vehicle. These lead to social problems in the local community.

The current COVID-19 outbreak has stop tourism activity and leads the natural ecosystem in a temporary break. It is a good sound for environmental resiliency after high-intensity use of the natural ecosystem as tourism destinations. Conservationists, photographers, and news reporters report some wild species during the pandemic era. In Mt. Unggaran, conservationists from Universitas Negeri Semarang found deer, eagle, hornbill, Javan langur, and pigs roaming freely in empty habitat [18]. Sumatran serow was reported rarely found, but it was captured by the camera at the end of May in Leuser national park [20]. There are no scientific studies to confirm the relationship of less human activity during pandemic and wildlife emergence. However, COVID-19 outbreaks seem to contribute to the

ecosystem resilience after heavy human disturbance.

Tourism without proper management is the main factor in the rapid pandemic spread. Three months of COVID-19 pandemic incident has hit the tourism sector in Indonesia. Strict control and limitation in traveling, avoiding crowding, and enhancing physical distancing to minimize pandemic diseases spread provides a clear argument to the importance of visitor management, especially in visitor numbers in limited space recreation sites. Health protocols against pandemic were established and promoted to all stakeholders related to the tourism industry. The new regulation and implementation of tourism through visitor management were introduced to minimize the pathogens spreads. Lesson learned from three months within pandemic provides evidence and suggestion to consider the carrying capacity and avoid mass tourism.

Recent policy to open recreation sites, however, should be criticized to ensure the past worst of tourism practices and its impact were not repeated. Environmental issues should be put as a crucial point since the aspect influence the quality of destination, including health issues in recreation sites. Reducing tourist numbers without disturbing economic potential loss should be the main agenda of tourism planning and implementation. Attempts to create a high quality of tourism experiences in the natural tourism area were urgent to increase the economic benefits generated from visitation in controlled visitor numbers. The quality is important rather than quantity or the number of tourists.

A recent trend in "new normal" provides new opportunities for new tourism with smarter and consider economic, socio-cultural, and environmental balance. This linear with the recent global tourism trend, in which tourism should contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. Tourism should be contributing to the increase in human life through health quality. Specifically, tourism should be able to reduce potential mechanisms for pandemic disease threats, provides experience to live within sustainable living frameworks, and provides healthy food and environment to support the sustainability of man in the biosphere [21].

Indonesia movement and the local community should be able to changes the aspect

tourism models (i.e. mass tourism) to the responsible tourism through:

- 1) Evaluate the impact of aspect tourism in social, cultural, and environmental issues
- 2) Establish and develop a mechanism to meet sustainable tourism business
- 3) Increase local government, planner, field manager, and the local community participation to be able to think and implement sustainable tourism
- 4) Strengthen stakeholder support to implement sustainable tourism

In the recent rapid tourism growth in Indonesia, these aspects crucial to accelerate responsible tourism and reduce mass tourism waves in Indonesia. There should be the spirit in planning and implementation that the quality is important rather than quantity or the number of tourists.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunities to re-thinking tourism practices and implementation. Since tourism is a potential vehicle for disease spreads, the management of tourism destinations to be able to minimize pandemic disease spread was crucial. Mass tourism should be evaluated, and tourism programs with high quality of the product should be promoted to increase the economic benefit of tourism, appreciate the socio-cultural aspect of the local community and conserve the environment.

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