



Analysis of the Level of Participation and Perception of the Perupuk Village Community in Baru Bara Regency Towards the Management of Pantai Sejarah Nature Tourism

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ABSTRACT

The management of natural tourism has one goal; one of the main objectives of natural tourism management is to increase local community income, which is closely linked to community participation and perception. This research aims to analyze the level of perception and participation of the Perupuk Village community towards the development of natural tourism at the Pantai Sejarah in Perupuk Village, Batu Bara Regency. This study employed a questionnaire-based interview method with 100 respondents for participation levels and 100 respondents for perception levels, including both residents and visiting tourists. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula. In addition, direct observations were conducted to study the habits of a group of people in the vicinity of the Pantai Sejarah location, including residents, visiting tourists, traders, and tourism managers. Meanwhile, the relationship between perception, participation, and respondent characteristics was analyzed using Spearman's Rank Correlation Test. The results obtained from this research indicate that the participation level of the Perupuk Village community was high (62.22%), while the perception level was moderate (59.64%). The correlation test results indicate no significant relationship between participation and public perception. These findings suggest that while community participation and perception levels are relatively high, demographic factors such as age, gender, and Education have minimal influence. Further studies should explore strategies to enhance community engagement in tourism development.

Keywords: Community participation, Ecotourism, Perception, Pantai Sejarah & Mangrove Conservation

1. Introduction

In the preamble to the 1945 Constitution, it is stated that national development for the Indonesian Nation aims to protect the entire nation and all of Indonesia's blood, promote general welfare, make the nation's life intelligent, and contribute to the implementation of world order. The goal of national development is to improve community welfare (Wulandari, 2022). One aspect of development is the sustainable use of the environment in the tourism sector. Ecotourism is a tourism sector that has gained significant public interest. It is environmentally oriented, prioritizing the protection of natural resources while supporting the tourism industry (Rangkuti, 2017).

Batu Bara Regency is an area located on the coast directly bordering the Malacca Strait. This is a supporting factor and a suitable potential for developing natural tourism areas. This natural tourism area boasts natural advantages, including a mangrove area that has received a community forest permit covering an area of 456 Hectares, of which 383 hectares have the status of Protected Forest. In comparison, 73 hectares are classified as Limited Production Forest. Tourism activities in this area have begun to incorporate environmental conservation efforts in accordance with the principles of ecotourism, a method that prioritizes the preservation of ecosystems. Tourism activities in this area aim to mitigate the environmental damage to the mangrove ecosystem, such as excessive exploitation (Mulyawati, 2024). Mangroves are a type of forest found along beaches or river estuaries that are influenced by sea tides. Mangroves are one of the most extensive mangrove forests in the world, found in Indonesia, and have the highest biodiversity. Mangroves play a strategic role in creating coastal ecosystems that are suitable for a wide range of living organisms.

The ecological balance of the coastal waters environment will be maintained if the existence of mangroves is maintained because mangroves can function to resist coastal erosion from tidal waves and tsunamis. This condition can ultimately be detrimental to humans and nature because it is associated with reduced functions in both ecological and economic contexts, as well as other aspects. Apart from having ecological value, mangrove forests also have economic and social functions (Mulyawati, 2024).

Tourism development is generally regarded as a key sector in growing the community's economy, increasing regional income, and enhancing the community's economic well-being by expanding the network of employment and business opportunities, as well as improving the introduction and marketing of products to benefit the local community. Natural tourism development requires careful planning and management to maximize community benefits (Pelenkahu, 2023). Natural tourism management and community participation are integral to conservation efforts in the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area, which aims to preserve the environment and mangrove forests. The development of natural tourism at Pantai Sejarah cannot be separated from the participation or involvement of the local community in planning and implementation to support the preservation of the mangrove forest area, preservation of the coastal environment, and fulfillment of the socio-economic needs of the Perupuk Village Community, so that all regional potential and local community resources will be unearthed. The development of tourist attractions will also enable sustainable regional development. Regional development has a very close correlation with the progress of a region, as the progress of a region is primarily determined by its level of development and will directly impact people's lives. Therefore, regional governments are required to continue regional development, especially in the tourism sector.

Community participation and perception in the management of the Pantai Sejarah natural tourist area should have a significant role in every tourist activity and community participation in the process and business of managing Pantai Sejarah tourism is vital, with that the community has a sense of responsibility in preserving the environment and potential natural resources, because In essence, there is no other group capable of protecting and preserving the area other than local communities. This is because the local community is the one that knows best about the problem and is the first to experience both the positive and negative impacts of the environment. Research related to participation and perceptions of the Perupuk village community is conducted to assess the local community's understanding of the meaning, aims, and objectives of environmental management, as well as their comprehension of the benefits and added value that mangrove tourism can provide to the community economy. Perception and attitude are part of the cognitive element that influences the community's involvement in or exclusion from mangrove ecotourism development (Nurhayati, 2018).

In the management of natural tourism, the Pantai Sejarah requires an essential role from the community because one of the goals of developing a tourist area is to encourage economic growth in the community, especially in reducing the number of unemployed in Perupuk village, therefore research was conducted related to analyzing the level of participation and perceptions of the Perupuk Village community in managing the area. Batu Bara Regency's Pantai Sejarah natural tourism aims to analyze community participation and perceptions in managing the Sejarah coastal natural tourism area. This study seeks to investigate the level of community participation and perception in the management of Pantai Sejarah natural tourism in Batu Bara Regency.

2. Method

2.1 Research Location & Period

This research was conducted in the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area, located in Perupuk Village, Limapuluh Pesisir District, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia, at coordinates 3.422339°N and 99.758090°E. The study was carried out from July to December 2023. Figure 1 presents the administrative map and geographical location of Pantai Sejarah, providing spatial context for the study area.

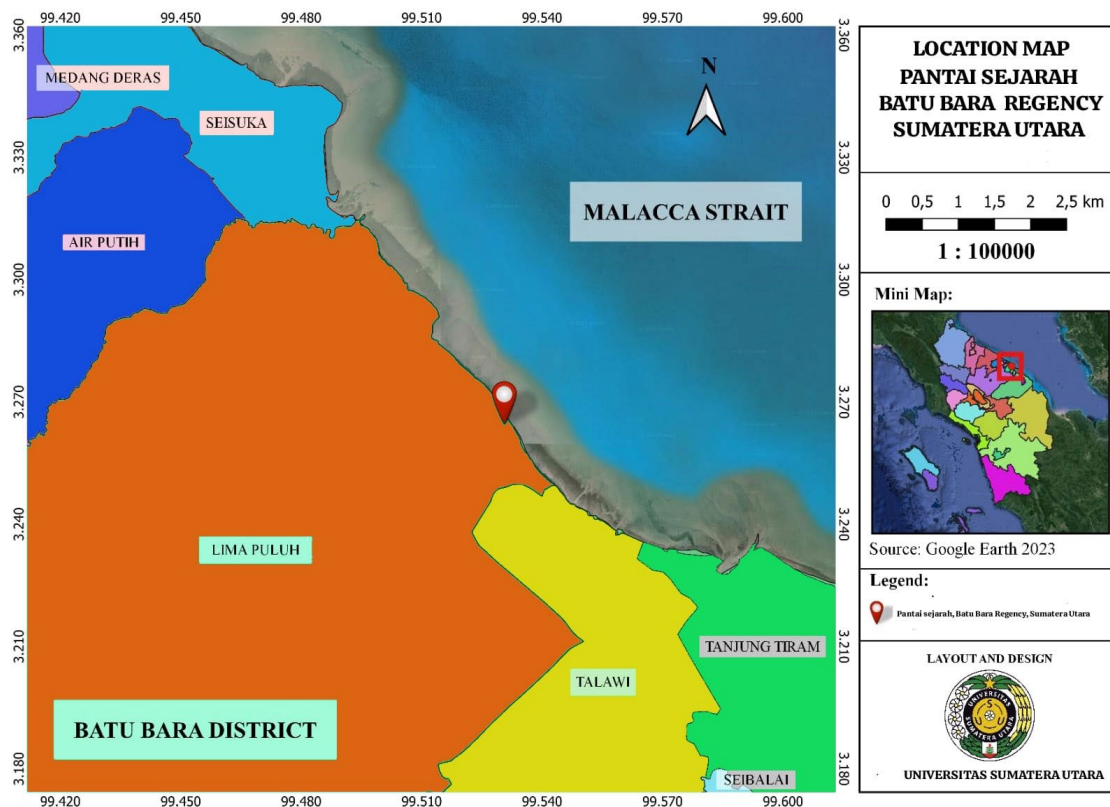


Figure 1. Map of research location

2.1 Data Collection Methods

Two methods were used: direct observation and semi-structured interviews.

- Observation aimed to verify whether respondents' statements matched field realities, focusing on residents, visiting tourists, traders, and tourism managers (Shandi, 2020).
- Interviews followed a questionnaire guide to collect primary data on community participation (forms, stages, and management principles) and perception of tourism benefits and challenges (Mukti, 2022). This approach allowed flexibility to explore respondents' views in depth

2.3 Population and Sampling

The research population consisted of residents of Perupuk Village aged 18–60 years and tourists visiting Pantai Sejarah. A proportional sampling method was applied to ensure representation from each group (Sugiyono, 2018). The sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Information:

- n = Sample size/number of respondents
- N = Population size
- e = Percentage of allowance for sampling error accuracy that can still be tolerated, e = 0.1

A 10% margin of error (e=0.1) was selected because the population is large, offering a balance between accuracy and practicality in data collection (Riyani, 2018).

3.4 Data Analysis Technique.

3.4.1 Descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis was applied to examine the research variables, namely community participation in managing the Pantai Sejarah tourist attraction. The data from the questionnaire in this research are quantitative data, which will be analyzed based on the numbers collected and tabulated, then described to understand perceptions and stages of community participation, as well as the forms of community participation. Descriptively, the Percentage uses steps to calculate the respondent's value and each aspect or sub-variable, recaps the value, and calculates the average value.

The results were analyzed using descriptive percentage analysis. The criteria levels were determined through the following steps:

Scoring responses – Each item in the questionnaire (covering forms of community participation, stages of participation, and principles of tourism management) was scored as follows:

Always = 3

Sometimes = 2

Never = 1

Determining criteria – The scores were then used to establish the criteria for community participation and perception levels.

1. Identify the maximum Score, minimum Score, and range.

Maximum Score = maximum score x number of items

Minimum Score = minimum score x number of items

Range = maximum Score - minimum Score

2. Determine the score range (Range)

$$Interval = \frac{Range}{Criteria}$$

3. Percentage range

$$Maximum\ Score\ Percentage = \frac{Maximum\ Score}{Maximum\ Total\ Score} \times 100\%$$

Maximum score percentage = minimum score x number of items

Percentage Range = Maximum Score – minimum Score

The range of community participation levels in the management of Pantai Sejarah natural tourism is divided into three criteria and is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation and perception criteria

%	Participation level	%	Level of Perceptions
79-100	High	79-100	High
56-78	Medium	29-78	Medium
0-55	Low	0-28	Low

The next step is to prepare a parameter table for the frequency of stages of community participation and perception in managing the Pantai Sejarah tourist attraction, as in Figure 2

Low	Medium	High
55	78	100
Low	Medium	High
28	78	100

Figure 2. Parameters of Community Participation and Perception at Pantai Sejarah

Information

- 0% – 55 (TS/TT) = The level of community participation is said to be low.
 0% – 55 (TS/TT) = The level of community perception said to be low
 56% – 78% (KK/RR) = The level of participation and perception is said to be moderate
 79% – 100% (S/T) = The level of participation and perception is said to be high

3.4.2. Correlation Analysis. Meanwhile, to determine the correlation between perception, participation, and the characteristics of respondents, an analysis was conducted using the Spearman Rank Correlation Test.

4. Results and Discussions

Based on the results of a questionnaire with 100 respondents, the Perupuk Village Community exhibited varying levels of participation depending on the types of questions asked in the questionnaire. The level of community participation in developing the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of community participation in the development of the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area

Level of Participation	Number of Respondents	Total scores
Never	1406	1406
Sometimes	474	948
Frequently	1020	3060
Total	2900	5.414

Based on the data in Table 2, the results show that community participation in contributing ideas for village development is categorized as medium. This categorization is influenced by the community's educational background, which is generally at a moderate level. The score intervals are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Interval scores

Interval score	%	Participation level	Persentase
69-87	79-100	High	
49-68	56-78	Medium	62,22%
29-48	0-55	Low	

To clarify the results of the analysis that has been carried out based on the formula:

$$\text{Index} = \frac{\text{Total Scores}}{\text{Maximum Scores}} \times 100\%$$

$$\text{Index} = \frac{5,414}{87} \times 100\%$$

$$\text{Index} = 62,22\%$$

Based on the calculations above, it is generally known that the level of community participation in developing the natural tourist area of Pantai Sejarah, Batubara Regency, is 69.41%, which falls into the medium category. The scale of community participation levels is presented in Figure 3.

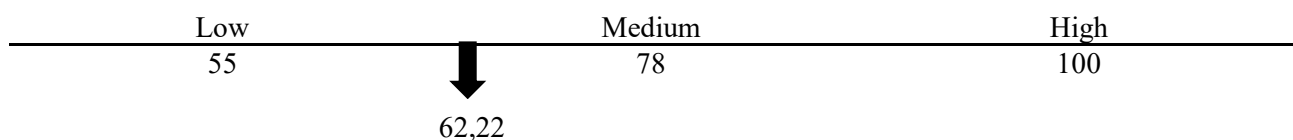


Figure 3. Participation index parameters

Based on Figure 3 above, it can be seen that the level of participation in the Perupuk Village community falls into the medium category. This can be influenced by various factors, one of which is the individual's level of awareness of natural tourism and the surrounding area's natural potential. The development of the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area requires synergy with various groups, including the government and other relevant agencies. Apart from that, the community also plays a crucial role in this process, considering the aim of natural tourism, one of which is to improve the community's economy and develop the skills of traditional communities. Tourism development not only requires supporting environmental resources but also community

support in the form of medium and low-level competencies. The obstacles faced by the tourism sector are minimal compared to those faced by other sectors. One of the problems that requires a serious solution and response is related to providing the right approach to develop supporting industries, such as hotels, restaurants, tour bus rentals, boat rentals, souvenir industries, and others (Prasetyo, 2019).

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires conducted, it is evident that the people of Perupuk Village are willing to participate in managing the area; however, this process has not yet been fully implemented within the community. This is supported by Faizal's (2023) research, which indicates that the development of community-based Pantai Sejarah tourism in Batu Bara Regency has not reached the community, resulting in a lack of understanding of the management of community-based Pantai Sejarah tourism development aimed at increasing local original income in Batu Regency. Bara. Meanwhile, according to Ekapratiwi (2021), the implementation of natural tourism must have good and synchronous coordination between programs among existing stakeholders, with active participation that is synergistic (integrated and mutually reinforcing) among the government, the private sector/tourism industry, and the relevant local communities. Theoretically, the management pattern of sustainable tourism development organizers, which involves the participation of relevant communities and the involvement of all stakeholders, is something that needs improvement.

Local community participation is evident in the community's role in forming the Mangrove Love Farmers Group, which is responsible for managing the Pantai Sejarah natural tourist area. Apart from that, the community also participated in enlivening the activities in the Pantai Sejarah natural tourist area, such as conducting buying and selling activities, especially filling food stands and selling souvenirs like mebatik, a typical souvenir of the area. The management of the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area has a very close correlation with the level of participation provided by the local community, this is supported by research by Tebay et al (2021) which states that community participation is the key to success that must be realized and becomes the basis for developing policies, strategies and main tourism development programs, especially in responding to strategic issues of empowering the people's economy; which emphasizes the need for alignment and empowerment of local communities, including empowering the capacity and role of communities as the leading actors in development. This is further supported by the statement in the research results of Tampubolon et al. (2021), which states that Arborek natural tourism activities are running well, due to the support factor from the local community in the form of participation and a positive community perception.

3.2 Public perception

The level of public perception in the development of the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Tourism Perception Level in the development of Sejarah coastal natural tourism areas

Level of Participation	Number of Respondents	Total Score
Don't know	989	989
Doubtful	216	432
Know	495	1.485
Amount	1700	2.906

Based on the data in Table 4, it is evident that the total Score obtained from respondents' answers regarding tourist perceptions in developing the natural tourist area of Pantai Sejarah, Batu Bara Regency, is 3042. The interval table is presented in the following table.

Table 5. Interval scores

Interval score	%	Level of Participation	Percentage
41-51	79-100	high	-
29-40	29-78	medium	56,98
17-28	0-28	Low	-

To clarify the results of the analysis that has been carried out based on the formula :

$$Index = \frac{\text{Total Scores}}{\text{Score Max}} \times 100\%$$

$$Index = \frac{3042}{51} \times 100\%$$

$$Index = 59,98 \%$$

Based on the calculations above, it is evident that the level of public perception regarding the development of the natural tourism area of Pantai Sejarah in Batu Bara Regency is 59.64%, which falls within the medium category. The scale of tourist perception levels is presented in Figure 4.

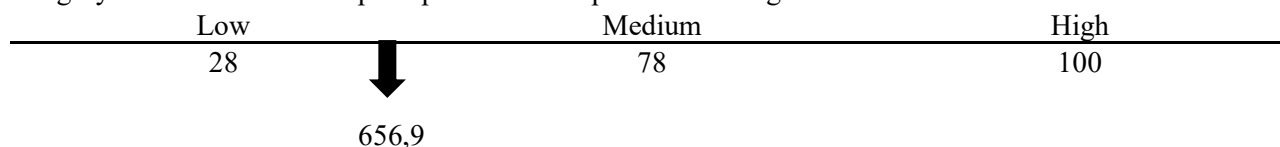


Figure 4. Perupuk Village Community Participation Level

Based on Table 4 above, it can be seen that the level of public perception is classified as moderate. The factors that influence each community's perception include a person's experience, motivation to learn, and their personality. The development of the Pantai Sejarah natural tourism area actually requires good cooperation between various parties, as ecotourism, in theory and practice, grows out of criticism of mass tourism, which is seen as damaging to its resource base, namely the environment and culture. Community perception regarding the management of natural tourism areas influences the development process of an area. In the perception process, individuals are required to provide positive, negative, and so on understanding. If the community has a positive perception of the surrounding forest, it will have positive implications. Likewise, vice versa, if the public's perception is negative, the resulting actions will tend to damage or harm forest sustainability. Community support in managing conservation areas is crucial for maintaining the sustainability of these forest areas (Rahmawati, 2024). Individuals who will actively participate influence the perception process (Sidiq, 2018). Community perception will accommodate efforts to increase community role and participation in area management. That's why this research is essential.

The behavior of the people around the Pantai Sejarah natural tourist area is greatly influenced by their perception of the natural tourist area. Perception is defined as a process involving the entry of messages or information into the human brain. This perception is a unified state of the individual regarding the stimulus they receive. Thoughts, feelings, experiences. The community really needs to increase knowledge through outreach activities and increased participation in area management. This aligns with Suyono, Harahap, and Aththorick (2017), who explain that the community's active role will develop if more benefits are obtained, considering the high dependence of the community on the area. Perupuk Village community perception is classified as moderate and can be influenced by progress in the management of the area, especially after Covid-19 hit and caused the area to be closed and paralyzed the economy, especially in the tourism sector, there was a decrease in the number of tourists, resulting in the local community being less involved in the area, such as various trade activities. . Community participation certainly influences community perceptions and knowledge regarding the management of the area.

The results of this research are also supported by the opinion that community perception is influenced by community assessment and knowledge regarding the benefits of the area. Additionally, the distance between people's homes and the location of the area will also affect the level of local community perception. Residents of the area will be able to witness firsthand the activities in the natural tourism area. They will also experience the direct benefits of the tourist area, which will have a strong correlation with the community's welfare. It is better if people live far from natural tourist areas, as they tend to have low knowledge of these areas. Many factors can influence the level of participation and perception of each community and visitors, as noted by Bhokaleba et al. (2022). It is essential to involve the community in every program conducted in the village. So that people can learn more about the potential of their village and take an active role in maintaining the quality of their village's environment, making it a key selling point for tourism. Rachmawati and Firmansyah (2019) stated that maintaining the ecological condition of waters is an attraction for aquatic tourism, causing tourists to feel happy to stay for a long time at tourist locations.

Based on the results of correlation tests carried out on participation and perception, the community is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the Spearman rank correlation test of the relationship between perception and participation

	tourist perception	community participation
tourist perception	1	-0,018
community participation	-0,018	1

Based on Table 6, it can be seen that the results of Spearman's correlation analysis show that the relationship between tourist perception and community participation is almost nonexistent. There is. Correlation value between tourist perception and community participation. The correlation value between community participation and perception is -0.018, which is very close to 0, indicating a weak and non-significant relationship between these two variables. A small negative correlation indicates that if a relationship exists, it is in the opposite direction; however, the difference is almost insignificant. Tourist Perception and Community Participation have a perfect correlation with each other, as indicated by a correlation value of 1. Absence: The correlation between participation and public perception can be influenced by various factors. Actual participation is only focused on the surrounding community and is rarely carried out by visiting tourists.

Meanwhile, perception itself does not determine the high level of participation in managing this area. These differences in perception and participation can be influenced by various factors, such as self-awareness, which comes from the mindset of participating. In some cases, individuals already have a relatively good level of awareness but have not been motivated to participate. The results of this research are supported by Rahmadda *et al.* (2021), who state that there is no correlation between participation and public perception, which can be attributed to the differences in the participants used and the variations in each respondent's characteristics.

Correlation test results of respondents' characteristics of community participation and community perceptions are presented in Table 7

Table 7. Spearman's rank correlation test results of respondents' characteristics and public perception of community participation

	Age	Gender	Education
tourist perception	0,078	-0,201*	0,053
community participation	0,119	-,053	-0,132

Based on Table 7, the results of Spearman's correlation analysis reveal several significant relationships between the variables age, gender, Education, perception, tourists, and community participation. There is a very weak positive correlation between age and tourist perception, with a correlation value of 0.078, indicating that changes in age for tourists have little to no influence on their perceptions. Gender has a weak but significant negative correlation with tourist perception, with a value of -0.201, indicating that changes in tourist gender are likely to be associated with changes that are in the opposite direction in their perception. Age has a weak, significant relationship with community perception and participation. This is due to tourism area management activities at natural beaches. History is an activity that almost anyone can do.

Additionally, this suggests that, despite gender differences, each respondent still has awareness of environmental management, although several indicators suggest a weak correlation. Education also shows a weak positive correlation with tourist perception, with a value of 0.053, indicating that the level of tourist education has a minimal influence on their perception. Meanwhile, age and community participation have a very weak positive correlation, with a value of 0.119, indicating that changes in people's ages have had a slight influence on their participation. Gender and community participation exhibit a weak negative correlation, with a value of -0.053, suggesting that societal changes in gender have a minimal impact on their participation. Lastly, Education shows a weak negative correlation with community participation, with a value of -0.132, indicating that changes in the level of community education tend to be associated with a decrease in participation.

5. Conclusion

The research on the level of participation and perception of the Perupuk Village community in the management of Pantai Sejarah natural tourism has shown that while the community's participation is categorized as moderate, their perception of tourism development is similarly moderate. The participation index of 62.22% and perception index of 59.64% suggest that the community acknowledges the importance of tourism development but has room for further engagement and understanding.

Although community participation is relatively high, the correlation analysis reveals a weak and non-significant relationship between participation and perception, implying that factors such as age, gender, and Education have a minimal impact on either perception or participation within the community. This finding suggests that other elements, such as awareness and community-based approaches to tourism management, may play a larger role in enhancing both perception and participation levels.

The study emphasizes the importance of enhancing community involvement and increasing awareness of the benefits of natural tourism through targeted outreach and educational programs. Further efforts to build community awareness and increase the perceived value of the tourism sector can enhance the socio-economic benefits derived from Pantai Sejarah. Additionally, local governments and stakeholders should foster stronger coordination to ensure that tourism development is inclusive and beneficial to all community members, thereby supporting both environmental conservation and local economic growth.

Moreover, while the participation and perception levels in the management of Pantai Sejarah are commendable, there remains significant potential for improvement, particularly through more active community involvement and improved communication about the benefits of tourism in enhancing local livelihoods. Future studies should explore more targeted strategies to encourage deeper engagement in tourism development and foster a stronger, more informed relationship between the community and natural tourism areas.

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