

## Research Article

# Ecotourism in Banyuwangi during the Corona Outbreak: Case Study in Pulau Merah, Banyuwangi Regency

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**Abstract.**

This study aims to describe the condition of ecotourism in Pulau Merah, Banyuwangi Regency during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it attempts to analyze local government policies in the tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research method is descriptive qualitative with data collection, namely in-depth interviews and documentation. The results of this study show that during the pandemic period, Pulau Merah was closed for some time and experienced a fall in visitors. This can also be seen from some of the tour guides that had no customers. The local government issued a new normal policy to survive in the pandemic while still implementing the health protocol.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, new normal policy, tourism policy

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## 1. Introduction

As a big country with different natural resources, Indonesia (Erdoğan et al., 2020) has a lot of promise in the tourist industry. Indonesia's potential includes not just natural resources, but also cultural variety and other potentials that assist the community's economic, social, and cultural empowerment. (Jaelani et al., 2020) (Cholik, 2017) (Ollivaud & Haxton, 2018) Indonesia's region has been dubbed Mega Biodiversity due to the diversity of its resources. (Keong, 2015) (Ollivaud & Haxton, 2018) Indonesia, being an archipelagic country stretching from Sabang to Merauke, offers an abundance of natural potential, marine potential, coastal tourism, and other natural places that encourage tourism in Indonesia. (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2020)

Banyuwangi is one of the regencies of East Java, which is located on the island of Java's eastern edge. Banyuwangi has a lot of natural resources that may be used

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for tourist activities due to its strategic geographical position. (Zen & Wulandari, 2016). Banyuwangi has exhibited development and improvement since about ten years ago, particularly in the tourist sector. Many new tourist attractions that make use of nature have begun to open to benefit the local community's economy and enhance regional development. Tourism is one industry that contributes to the economy of Banyuwangi Regency. (Murniati et al., 2021). Promotions in the form of activities that encourage international visitor arrivals are also sponsored. Tourists include both domestic and international visitors. The average visit grows year after year, according to statistics from local and foreign tourists. This demonstrates that tourism in the Banyuwangi Regency is in high demand from a variety of sources.

With an increasing number of tourists emerging throughout Indonesia, particularly in the Banyuwangi province, the phrase ecotourism is becoming increasingly popular. The term "ecotourism" refers to travel that is environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable. Because conservation is the primary focus of the word ecotourism, we can assume that ecotourism is also known as responsible travel. Ecotourism activities have given rise to a tourism business or sector in their development. (Noh, 2020)

Since 2020, most countries' conditions in various sectors have been affected by a wave that has resulted in a decrease in output. The shock induced by the Covid-19 outbreak has been judged to trigger a global pandemic. The economic impact of the epidemic has been the most severe. For example, altering people's income to the number of community businesses forced them to go bankrupt. Aside from the economy, the tourism industry has seen considerable changes. (Dube & Nhamo, 2020) (Couto et al., 2020) (Vărzaru et al., 2021). This is because both foreign and domestic tourists would visit the tourism sector. When a pandemic strikes, everyone will prefer to postpone their outside activities, including visiting tourist sites.

Banyuwangi, as one of the developing tourism regions, is also affected, which is worrying. The local government's efforts to boost the tourism sector must pause for a bit. However, an alternative was discovered in the end, namely the use of ecotourism in the new normal period. This is, of course, a local government policy to save tourism and reduce the detrimental impact of the epidemic in Banyuwangi. Pulau Merah Beach is one of the tourist destinations in Banyuwangi that has acquired a tourism policy in the new normal period. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, Pulau Merah was briefly shuttered.

Given the state of tourism in Banyuwangi during the pandemic, Pulau Merah, one of the most famous beach tourism destinations in Banyuwangi, was also affected by the global COVID-19 outbreak. The goal of this research is to examine the state of tourism

in Banyuwangi, as well as how Banyuwangi's tourism policy in the new normal period is viewed from the tourist area in Banyuwangi, particularly the Pulau Merah tourist area.

## 2. Method

This research employed a tourist sociology approach, which allows researchers to see the phenomena that occur in the community, particularly the impact of the pandemic on the Pulau Merah tourism sector. This research used descriptive qualitative approaches to understand how tourism in Banyuwangi changed during the covid pandemic. To limit data gathering, the researchers chose Pulau Merah, Banyuwangi, as the site of ecotourism. The researchers chose Pulau Merah as a location because it is one of the most famous beaches in Banyuwangi Regency, and according to the researchers' observations, Pulau Merah has become one of the tourist spots that has been temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this study, data was gathered through in-depth interviews with tourism managers, communities surrounding tourist sites, commercial actors in tourist sites, and visitors in the tourist sites. The descriptive qualitative analysis was used to explain the situation of Pulau Merah tourism during the pandemic based on the results of interviews.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1. Tourism Sector in Banyuwangi

Indonesia is currently expanding its tourism sector as one of the countries with strong tourism potential, natural potential, and a favorable geographical location. (Jaelani et al., 2020) Indonesia is one of the countries with a strong tourism industry that helps the country's foreign exchange. (Jaelani et al., 2020) (Jaelani et al., 2020). This is evident in various locations that have begun to increase tourism depending on the possibilities of each region. Tourism that is developed based on regional potential will contribute to the region's growth and economic development. (Jaelani et al., 2020) Furthermore, tourism development based on regional potential will enhance employment prospects in the local community.

According to BPS data, tourist visits to East Java from 2018 to 2020 are higher than in other regions. This demonstrates that the tourism industry in East Java is quickly expanding. The fact is that East Java's natural potential substantially supports the development of the tourism sector. Furthermore, local government assistance is one

form of business in promoting economic growth in East Java. Banyuwangi Regency is one of the locations where the tourism industry is fast expanding. (Aziiza & Susanto, 2020)

The tourism attractiveness in Banyuwangi is growing in tandem with the development of tourism policy over the last ten years. Various tourism mappings in Banyuwangi have grown in popularity and potential. The government, as a sponsor of tourism activities, aims to create various mappings that become tourism potential. Banyuwangi mapping tourism can be divided into various tours:

### 3.1.1. Culture Tourism

One of the major potentials for tourism growth is the diversity of Indonesian ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have a wide range of languages, musical instruments, dances, and gastronomic pleasures. Osing Kemiren is a traditional tourism village in Banyuwangi that offers cultural tourism. (Yunikawati et al., 2021). Whereas the Kemiren tourism village demonstrates Banyuwangi's typical culture through the creation of a tourist village that offers traditional residences and culinary pleasures.

### 3.1.2. History Tourism

Indonesia has a history of being a colony of both the Netherlands and Japan. As a result, visiting Indonesia's history is a worthwhile experience. This historical history is particularly appealing to both foreign and domestic tourists in some locations. For example, Yogyakarta Special Region contains historical potential such as temples and museums as proof of historical history. It is exhibited in the Blambangan park in Banyuwangi, where there are Hindu-Buddhist-style art performances.

### 3.1.3. Nature Tourism

In Indonesia, nature tourism reigns supreme. (Jaelani et al., 2020) This is due to Indonesia's natural potential and geographical factors, which greatly favor nature tourism. The majority of Indonesia's landmass is made up of islands and oceans. Beach tourism will be prevalent in Indonesia as a result of this potential. (Siswanto & Moeljadi, 2015) Nature tourism is one of the potentials following Banyuwangi's natural circumstances, which is known for its beaches in the northern and southern regions of the island. The waves

in Banyuwangi beach in the south are notable for their size and suitability for surfing. Meanwhile, beaches with natural beauty may be found on Banyuwangi's northern coast.

Pulau Merah is one of the beaches in the southern region of Banyuwangi Regency. (Istiqomah et al., 2021) (Sumarmi et al., 2021). Pulau Merah attracts the attention of visitors because there is an interesting icon, namely an island that is separated from the mainland coast. This island is the icon of the Pulau Merah. Furthermore, Pulau Merah is one of the famous beaches in Banyuwangi.

### 3.1.4. Shopping Tourism

When someone travels on a trip, shopping tours are always popular. Shopping malls are generally built in tourist areas. MSMEs play an important role in this shopping tour since they can empower the community to manufacture new unique products that are then marketed around tourist attractions. These local products are typically handicrafts unique to a particular region. Shopping tourism can be found in a variety of tourist sites around Indonesia. Tangkuban Perahu, for example. Sundanese crafts and culture include the angklung musical instrument. Many angklung musical instruments are sold around tourist attractions. In Yogyakarta, there are Malioboro and Klewer Markets which are crowded with tourists because they sell handicrafts typical of the Yogyakarta region, such as Batik.

As one of the areas that are a tourist destination for foreign and local tourists, shopping tourism in Banyuwangi presents more typical culinary tours or typical Banyuwangi souvenirs, such as the Pelangi Sari and Pia Glenmore souvenir center.

### 3.1.5. Religious Tourism

Indonesia is well-known for being a location for the spread of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. According to Indonesian history, religion spread through trade due to Indonesia's key location in trade. The religion left many historical remnants, such as the Borobudur Temple, Prambanan Temple, and mosques that were the focus of Islam's spread. Cultural legacy with religious overtones is a special attraction for both foreign and domestic tourists.

Indonesia has a predominantly Muslim population. Wali Songo is responsible for the expansion of Islam in Indonesia. Wali Songo, also known as the Nine Guardians, preached Islam throughout the island of Java. Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Gunug Jati, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Muria, Sunan Bonang, and Sunan Drajat are

among them. The Wali Songo area is popular among Indonesians as a religious tourism destination. The mosque is one of the religious tourism sites, similar to Banyuwangi. The Baiturrahman mosque is one of them, and it is always filled with visitors to Banyuwangi.

Banyuwangi's tourism industry has grown during the last decade. Tourism in Banyuwangi primarily makes use of natural resources such as beaches due to its strategic location at the eastern end of the island of Java and as the entry and exit point for tourists traveling by sea from Java to Bali. Before the epidemic, tourism development in Banyuwangi produced great results. This is demonstrated by the development of new tourism destinations and the encouragement of MSMEs in Banyuwangi. Local Banyuwangi products, such as Batik Banyuwangi and Banyuwangi culinary delicacies, are being developed as MSMEs.

Banyuwangi's tourism policy prioritizes tourism development through the construction of tourist sites. (Jaelani et al., 2020) The Banyuwangi local government's role in offering assistance to tourist sites is to continue to stimulate the development of tourism in Banyuwangi. The local government has established a tourism-aware community in addition to coaching on tourist destinations. This has been observed in one of Banyuwangi's tourist settlements, Kemiren Village.

The development of tourism groups, also known as Pokdarwis (tourism awareness groups), strives to increase tourism in the village by emphasizing each hamlet's regional potential. Pokdarwis is made up of youth from tourist areas who participate in projects to enhance tourist communities. Pokdarwis in each village will contribute to the creation of a tourist village that emphasizes local potential and introduces tourists to tourism.

### 3.2. Tourism Policy During the Pandemic

Based on the research data we found in the field, we see from the perspective of several parties related to the environment of the Pulau Merah ecotourism location. We conducted in-depth interviews to obtain data from the Pulau Merah tourism manager. The data collected is in the form of a description of the information about the condition of Pulau Merah Beach during the pandemic based on information from participants.

The pandemic period in Indonesia, which began in March 2020, prompted the government to implement policies to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The policy is to close all tourist sites in Banyuwangi Regency. Participants explained that the implementation of this policy lasted for approximately 4 months. The impact is a reduction in ecotourism activities in Banyuwangi Regency, especially in Pulau Merah. Pulau Merah as a tourism location is also expected to be able to implement a new

normal in the implementation of ecotourism activities. From the results of interviews conducted by researchers with tourist business actors, the implementation of the new normal is enough to contribute, namely the increasing number of visitors to Pulau Merah tourist sites. Although the number of visits is not the same as before the pandemic, with the implementation of this new normal, it is possible to revive tourism that had fallen asleep due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourism is one of the spearheads in the economy of Banyuwangi . (Novandi & Adi, 2021). Tourism, as a sector that demands high mobility in its execution, has seen a major decrease in mobility. Due to restrictions in several places, the fall in visitor mobility has drastically impacted local people's income. All tourism in Banyuwangi was closed as of the start of the COVID-19 epidemic in March 2020. Business actors and tourism managers are feeling the effects.

During the pandemic, local governments are attempting to maintain tourism by creating tourist policies. The policy is a collaboration between the local government and the tourism office to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Banyuwangi Regency administration created a policy governing the deployment of new tourists. Regulations in the new normal age for the globe of tourism began to be imposed to continue carrying out tourism activities while still being able to increase the tourism sector's economy.

Some of the policies carried out by the local government for Pulau Merah tourism are:

- a. Temporary closure of the Pulau Merah tourist area from public visits until a time limit of approximately 4 months
- b. Tighten the Health protocol by adding more hand washing stations, providing hand sanitizer
- c. Limit the number of visitors

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a substantial influence on the income of Pulau Merah tourism managers, according to the results of interviews with tourism managers. The temporary closure also influences the ecology, which is becoming increasingly unclean as a result of a lack of effort in cleaning the beach. However, conversations with the village government revealed that there was a group called eco rangers that was aware of environmental cleanliness and volunteered to clean the tourism area surrounding the coast of Pulau Merah.

The results of interviews with tourists show that the temporary closure of the Pulau Merah tourism location is the best method for dealing with covid19. Visitors to Pulau Merah claimed that they were aware of the Health procedure at Pulau Merah tourist attractions after the launch of the Pulau Merah tourism destination. Maintaining a safe distance between guests who are not family members, as well as wearing masks and having hand sanitizer on hand. Visitors recognize that the length of time spent on a tourist visit is also a concern visitors, thus this can assist lessen crowds when traveling on Pulau Merah.

According to the findings of interviews with the surrounding community, the existence of the Pulau Merah tourist destination provides economic benefits to the surrounding community. The area near Pulau Merah has a lot of agricultural potentials, especially for tropical crops including melons, watermelons, dragon fruits, and oranges. The local community sells the fruit crop on the route to the Pulau Merah tourist destination. However, the impact of this pandemic is that income has fallen as a result of the temporary closure, and fewer tourists visit Pulau Merah tourist sites when it reopens.

In addition to the parties mentioned above, the researchers interviewed business owners at Pulau Merah tourist attractions. Food and beverage vendors in tourist areas are among them. Food and beverage vendors also ceased operations during the closure of the Pulau Merah tourist site since the closure hindered guests from visiting tourist destinations. Income had dropped, but it began to rise again with the establishment of the new normal and the restoration of the Pulau Merah tourist attraction.

## 4. Conclusions

Pulau Merah is a popular tourist attraction for both local and foreign tourists because it is one of Banyuwangi's most well-known beaches. According to the goal of this research, Pulau Merah promotes the new normal policy by adhering to the local government's different Health protocol policies. During the epidemic, Pulau Merah saw a spike in visitor numbers, particularly during the policy of absolute closure of tourist areas and restrictions on community mobility. However, in this new normal phase, travelers are gradually beginning to visit Pulau Merah with the Health protocol.

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