**Conference Paper**

# An Assessment of Cirebon's Image As a Tourist Destination

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## Abstract

Cirebon has a variety of popular tourist attractions such as the Kasepuhan Palace for cultural / historical tourism, the tomb of Sunan Gunung Djati for religious tourism, the Batik Trusmi tourist area for shopping tourism, and many restaurants that provide local food for culinary tourism. As such, Cirebon has a diverse image as a tourist destination. But efforts to measure the image of Cirebon as a tourist destination empirically have never been undertaken. This research was conducted to fill the lack of empirical studies on the image of Cirebon as a tourist destination. This study uses a qualitative approach to provide opportunities for respondents to freely express their opinions. Data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews of 400 domestic tourists. Data were processed by listing the words and calculated the percentage of frequency of occurrence. The results show that Cirebon is perceived as a destination for historical tourism, culinary and batik shopping. The respondents were found to feel happy, comfortable and enthusiastic when traveling to Cirebon. The palace (keraton), Sunyaragi cave and Batik Trusmi tourist areas are perceived as Cirebon's unique destinations.

**Keywords:** destination image, qualitative approach, culinary tourism, historical tourism

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## 1. Introduction

Cirebon region has been known as an attractive tourist destination for domestic and foreign tourists. The tourism potential of the Cirebon region is huge because Cirebon has a palace for cultural / historical tourism, the tomb of Sunan Gunung Djati and the At Taqwa mosque for religious tourism, the Batik Trusmi tourism area for shopping tourism, and many restaurants that provide special food for culinary tourism.

Destination image literature shows that research on the image of cities as tourist destinations has started for the last two decades with Hong Kong [1], Singapore [2] and Bandung [3] as a tourist destination. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, empirical research on the image of Cirebon as a tourist destination has been lacking. Previous studies have confirmed that destination image and travel experience positively influence intention to visit and revisit [4, 5]. With such diverse tourist destinations,

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Page 450

empirical research needs to be done to identify the main image of Cirebon as a tourist destination.

This study focuses on measuring the image of Cirebon as a tourist destination by using a qualitative approach. This is important as qualitative approach allows all kinds of tourist impressions about Cirebon to be accommodated and identified, so that the images of Cirebon as a tourist destination can be identified more thoroughly.

## 2. Literature Review

The definition of destination image most frequently cited by tourism scholars is from Crompton [6, p. 18]: "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" [7]. Previous research shows that destination image significantly influence behavior prior [8] and post visits [9]. Scholars also find consistent results that show destination image's influences intention to visit, overall image, and intention to recommend [8]. Other studies find empirical evidence on the influence of destination image on perceived quality [10] satisfaction [4, 9] and intention to revisit [4]. Thus, it can be concluded that having a positive destination image is important for a tourist destination because it will have a positive impact on tourist visits. Therefore, the image of the destination as perceived by tourists needs to be measured so that the actual image can be identified.

Measuring a destination image can be conducted by two approaches, namely: structured and unstructured approaches [11, 12]. A structured approach usually uses a set of pre-determined questions. Respondents are required to answer on predetermined choices usually in the form of Likert scales [13]. Whereas the unstructured approach usually uses open-ended questions. Previous studies have shown that structured approaches are more often used because of their ease in analyzing data [14].

One drawback of the structured approach is that it does not give an opportunity for respondents to express their opinions beyond those already asked on the questionnaire. This resulting in difficulties in identifying the real reason they came to the destination [12, 14]. The unstructured approach seems to solve this problem. The most unstructured method used in measuring destination image is, most likely, the three open-ended questions proposed by Echtner & Ritchie [12, 15].

Echtner and Ritchie [12] argue that destination image has two components namely the attribute component and the holistic component. The attribute component can range from functional (tangible) to psychological (intangible). The attribute component can also represent something that is general to unique. The holistic component is the mental

picture or an overall representation of a destination. The holistic component shows the image and stereotype of a destination [16]. The uniqueness component functions to differentiate a destination from other destinations. The three open-ended question proposed by Echtner and Ritchie [12] is intended to measure the holistic component and the unique component.

## 3. Methods

The research instrument used consisted of two parts. The first part contains three open-ended questions adopted directly from Echtner and Ritchie [12] and one additional question about the main activities during a tour in Cirebon. The first question: "What image comes to mind when you think of Cirebon as a tourist destination?" Measures the holistic component that is functional, while the second question: "What kind of atmosphere or mood do you expect that you will experience when visit Cirebon?" measure the holistic component that is psychological. The third question: "Please mention unique tourist attractions in Cirebon" is intended to measure the uniqueness of Cirebon destinations. The fourth question identifies the most dominant activities undertaken by tourists during a tour in Cirebon: "What is the most dominant activity you do during a tour in Cirebon?" The second part of the instrument contains questions about the respondent's demographic background.

Data were collected by direct interviews with domestic tourists who are willing to participate in this study. Interviews were conducted in various tourist destinations in Cirebon and the surrounding areas. The respondents consisted of male (41,8%) and female (58,2%) with the majority come from the age of 20 to 29. Of the 423 completed questionnaires, 23 of them were considered ineligible, leaving 400 filled questionnaires ready for further analysis. Data were processed by listing the answer words and calculating the percentage based on the frequency of occurrence. The results were then entered onto a table that illustrates Cirebon's image as a tourist destination as perceived by respondents.

## 4. Results

The main objective of this qualitative research is to identify the image of Cirebon in accordance with what is perceived by tourists. By using the framework of Echtner and Ritchie [12], the functional holistic components can be identified as follows.

Question 1: What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Cirebon as a travel destination?

TABLE 1: Images of Cirebon

|  | Freq | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Historical tourism | 112 | 24,0 |
| Culinary tour | 86 | 18,5 |
| Batik Trusmi | 55 | 11,8 |
| Hot weather | 47 | 10,1 |
| Religious tourism | 30 | 6,4 |

The three images most frequently perceived by tourists are historical tourism, culinary tourism and Batik Trusmi can be seen in Table 1 above. This is not surprising as Cirebon has been well known for the three tourism images. The hot weather which come at the fourth place indicates that many of the tourists come from the regions with the weather that is not as hot as Cirebon's weather. The religious tourism with the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati as its icon come at the fourth place.

Question 2: How would you describe the atmosphere or mood that you would expect to experience while visiting Cirebon?

TABLE 2: Mood Experienced in Cirebon

|  | Freq | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Happy | 249 | 53,1 |
| Comfortable | 72 | 15,4 |
| Enthusiastic | 52 | 11,1 |
| Quiet/restful | 30 | 6,4 |
| Cool | 29 | 6,2 |

The psychological holistic component which shows the mood that is expected to experience while traveling in Cirebon can be seen in Table 2 above. More than half of the respondents perceive that their visit to Cirebon will make them happy. Psychologically Cirebon is also perceived as a destination that related to comfort, enthusiasm, quiet/restful and cool.

Question 3: Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Cirebon.

The uniqueness component shows the tourist attractions that considered to be unique to Cirebon can be seen in Table 3 above. The most frequently mentioned tourist attractions in Cirebon are the Palace (keraton), Sunyaragi cave and Batik Trusmi shopping area. Cirebon Waterland Ade Irma comes at the fourth place and the tomb of

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Table 3: Unique Tourist Attractions

|  | Freq | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Palace (Keraton) | 188 | 32,2 |
| Sunyaragi cave | 170 | 29,1 |
| Batik Trusmi shopping area | 83 | 14,2 |
| Cirebon Waterland Ade Irma | 58 | 9,9 |
| The tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati | 26 | 4,5 |

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Sunan Gunung Jati as an icon of religious tourism ranks fifth. The results indicate the importance of historical tourism, shopping tourism and religious tourism for Cirebon.

Question 4: Please list any distinctive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Cirebon

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Table 4: Main Activities

| Activity | Freq. | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Culinary tour | 158 | 34,2 |
| Walking around | 88 | 19,0 |
| Taking pictures | 85 | 18,4 |
| Shopping | 75 | 16,2 |
| Visiting historical places | 29 | 6,3 |

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Culinary tourism is the most frequently mentioned activity can be seen in Table 4 above. The other activities are walking around, shopping, and visiting historical places. Taking photos is also a dominant activity carried out by tourists during a tour in Cirebon.

## 5. Discussion

This research extends our understanding about the image of Cirebon as a tourist destination. The results of this research show that Cirebon is holistically perceived as related to historical tourism (palace, Sunyaragi cave), culinary tourism, and batik shopping tourism. Thus, those three types of tourism are the three main magnets that attract tourists to Cirebon. Any attempt on promoting Cirebon as a tourist destination should concentrate on improving the images on those the three tourism sectors including: historical, culinary and shopping tourism. Psychologically, tourists feel happy and enthusiastic every time they travel to Cirebon. The impression of comfortable, quiet/restful and cool are also felt by tourists. This indicates that tourism services and facilities in Cirebon have managed to provide tourist with positive feelings toward their trip to Cirebon. This research is the first attempt to identify the image of Cirebon as a

tourist destination using a qualitative approach. The results of this research uncover the image of Cirebon as perceived by tourists. With a qualitative approach, the impression and mood of tourists in relation to trips to Cirebon can be identified.

# 6. Conclusion

Most of the previous research on destination image were conducted using a quantitative approach with predetermined questionnaires as the research instrument. As a result, the tourist respondents were not able to express their impressions and opinions freely. This study focuses on using a qualitative approach to identify the image of Cirebon as perceived by tourists. The results show that Cirebon is perceived as a destination for historical, culinary, and batik shopping tourism. Psychologically, tourists also feel happy, comfortable and enthusiastic while traveling in Cirebon. In addition to providing useful implications in understanding of tourist perceptions on tourist destinations, this research also enhances the understanding that in measuring destination images, the use of a qualitative approach can identify images that match with what tourists are saying. Even so, this research has limitation. This research cannot identify any factors that influence tourists to travel to Cirebon. Thus, future research needs to be done using mixed methods involving qualitative and quantitative approaches so that the determinants and consequences of Cirebon's images a tourist destination can be identified.

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