

# Community Engagement and Resilience in Indonesian Tourism: Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dynamics of community engagement and resilience within Indonesia's tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. It adopts a qualitative methodology, with document analysis as the primary technique. Publicly accessible documents, including news reports, journal articles, and policy briefs, are compiled and systematically analyzed using content analysis. The study extracts key themes and strategies local communities use to sustain involvement and enhance resilience during the crisis. Data from multiple sources are triangulated to validate findings and provide a comprehensive perspective. The research uncovers innovative approaches such as digital transformation, collaborative networks, health protocols, and public-private partnerships employed by communities to adapt to pandemic challenges. It highlights efforts to engage communities, preserve culture, promote eco-tourism, and foster social entrepreneurship to aid tourism recovery. The study

offers insights that can inform strategies for strengthening community participation, resilience, and sustainability in Indonesian and global tourism as the world emerges from the pandemic. Elucidating community engagement and resilience dynamics contributes critical perspectives to guide policymakers and practitioners in future-proofing tourism against crises.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry has faced massive disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring stakeholders to rapidly adapt to safeguard communities and rebuild more sustainably (Gössling et al., 2020). Indonesia has been significantly impacted, experiencing substantial declines in international and domestic tourism (Esquivias et al., 2021). While existing research has explored pandemic impacts on Indonesian tourism quantitatively (Kristiana et al., 2021; Pramana et al., 2022), there remains a lack of in-depth investigation into the strategies and experiences of local communities in sustaining engagement and enhancing resilience during this crisis.

Without sufficient understanding of community-level perspectives and responses, policy interventions risk being ineffective or disconnected from grassroots needs and realities. This gap in knowledge can have detrimental short-term consequences, failing to provide adequate support for vulnerable tourism-dependent communities. In the long run, tourism recovery and sustainability efforts may not align with community priorities and values, leading to imbalanced development and diminished community participation. Research focused on illuminating community engagement and resilience dynamics can make vital contributions by guiding responsive, locally-attuned policies and strategies.

While studies have surveyed resilience factors (King et al., 2021; Rela et al., 2022) and documented basic adaptive measures (Sharma et al., 2021), the intricate relationship between engagement and resilience within local contexts remains underexplored. Furthermore, perspectives integrating cultural and environmental considerations with economic recovery goals are lacking. Recent studies have provided initial qualitative insights into community-driven innovations in India (Chatterjee, K., & Chaturvedi, 2022) and Thailand (Kontogeorgopoulos, N., Churyen, A., & Duangsaeng, 2022). However, nuanced understanding of strategies employed by Indonesian communities specifically is still absent. For instance, Singgalen et al. (2019) examined community participation but did not provide nuanced insights into innovative practices adopted. Furthermore, Nugroho et al. (2022) discussed sustainability concepts without offering grounded examples from local contexts.

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This study addresses these gaps by thoroughly investigating community-driven innovations using qualitative methodology. It develops a multilayered understanding of engagement and resilience, offering tailored, context-specific insights to inform practical strategies and policy reforms. By highlighting diverse local responses, this research provides a granular perspective that enriches the discourse on fortifying tourism for the future. Lessons from Indonesia's experiences can inspire both national and global communities seeking to rebuild amidst uncertainty. This study brings nuanced perspectives from the ground level to the forefront, emphasizing tourism's sociocultural and environmental dimensions, not just economic impacts. The knowledge generated aims to guide authorities in crafting policies and interventions that resonate with and empower communities for a more sustainable, resilient, and participatory tourism landscape post-pandemic.

**2. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative methodology, using document analysis as the primary technique. Purposive sampling is used to identify and select documents containing rich, relevant information to address the research objectives. Data sources are limited to documents published from 2021-2022 to provide current perspectives. Initial keyword searches on academic databases and search engines guide document collection.

Documents are thoroughly reviewed through an iterative process of skimming, reading and interpretation. Content analysis is used to systematically code and identify key themes related to innovations, strategies, and experiences of local communities during the pandemic. The reliance on documentation raises validity concerns due to the lack of primary data such as direct community interviews. Document analysis may not fully capture all facets of the community's experiences and strategies (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, information from public documents can be subjective or unverifiable (Owen, 2014). To mitigate these limitations, the study triangulates data from multiple document sources including news articles, research papers, policy briefs, organizational reports, and online surveys. Triangulation compares findings across document types and sources to validate the accuracy and completeness of information. This diversification provides a more comprehensive perspective to complement the document findings (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). Information is verified through cross-validation between sources and checking documents' authenticity. Where possible, key points are confirmed with relevant organizations to improve validity.

While document analysis has limitations, it provides efficient access to extensive information representing a breadth of perspectives (Bowen, 2009). By combining insights from public and internal documents with other sources, this study aims to develop a rigorous understanding of community strategies, resilience factors, and tourism experiences within constraints. The research employs reflexivity to assess subjectivities in data interpretation (Darawsheh, 2014). Overall, a thoughtful triangulated approach enhances the trustworthiness of document analysis findings. Researcher reflexivity acknowledges subjectivities in qualitative document analysis. Methodological rigor is upheld through an audit trail detailing the data collection and analytical procedures. Overall, this qualitative document analysis aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of community engagement and resilience in Indonesian tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesian communities, like many others around the world, have employed various strategies to enhance their resilience in the face of challenges within the tourism industry (King et al., 2021; Kristiana et al., 2021). Resilience in this context refers to the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruptions that can impact tourism, such as natural disasters, economic downturns, political instability, and health crises. There are several strategies for Indonesians to maintain their involvement in tourism and increase resilience to COVID-19 are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Strategies for Indonesians to maintain tourism involvement and increase resilience to COVID-19

No	Strategies	Activities
1	Digital Transformation (Daulay et al., 2022; Idris et al., 2021; Purwaningsih et al., 2021; Rianty et al., 2022; Sadayi et al., 2022)	Indonesians have embraced digital platforms to adapt to the new normal. Online booking systems, virtual tours, and digital marketing have enabled businesses to maintain customer engagement and attract new audiences. This digital shift has broadened the reach of local tourism offerings. For instance, traditional homestay operators in Bali have embraced online booking platforms, allowing travelers to reserve accommodations conveniently and safely from their homes. Virtual tours of cultural sites and natural attractions have been created to offer immersive experiences to potential visitors worldwide, helping to keep local tourism alive during travel restrictions. Digital marketing campaigns, such as social media promotions and email newsletters, have been used to showcase the beauty of Indonesian destinations and encourage future travel

- plans, even during the most challenging periods of the pandemic. These digital strategies have not only preserved community involvement in tourism but have also strengthened the sector's resilience by diversifying revenue streams and staying connected with travelers in a digitally-driven world.
- 2 **Community Support Networks** (Budhi et al., 2022; Jumadi, 2021; Purwaningsih et al., 2021; Saufi et al., 2023; Sumarto et al., 2021; Yamin et al., 2021)
 

Communities reliant on tourism have united to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. For instance, in a coastal village heavily dependent on tourism, local homestay owners facing a decline in guests due to the pandemic came together to form a support network. They pooled resources such as cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure the safety of their guests. Additionally, they collaborated on marketing efforts, creating a joint online presence and sharing the costs of advertising their accommodations.

Likewise, local artisans who relied on selling their crafts to tourists joined forces to set up a collective online platform where they could showcase and sell their products. This allowed them to reach a broader audience and compensate for the loss of income from the absence of tourists visiting in person.

Furthermore, tour guides from various regions coordinated efforts to share information about safety protocols, travel restrictions, and updated tourist attractions with each other. This not only ensured that tourists had accurate information but also helped these guides adapt to changing circumstances and offer unique, off-the-beaten-path experiences to those who did visit. In each of these cases, the collaborative approach within Community Support Networks has not only helped these communities to sustain their livelihoods during the COVID-19 crisis but has also fostered stronger social bonds and a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of their tourism-dependent communities.
  - 3 **Health and Safety Adaptations** (Jumadi, 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2022; Susanti, 2022; Titisari et al., n.d.; Wahyuni, 2021; Yamin et al., 2021)
 

Stringent health and safety measures have been implemented to reassure travelers. Accommodation providers, transport services, and tourist attractions have adhered to guidelines to ensure visitors' safety. These steps are critical in rebuilding tourist confidence. These measures have played an important role in reassuring tourists and revitalizing the tourism sector. For example, almost all accommodation providers throughout Indonesia have introduced intensive cleaning protocols on a regular basis. A contactless check-in/check-out process is implemented to minimize physical contact and the risk of transmitting infectious viruses. They also invested in personal protective equipment (PPE) for their staff and provided guest room hand sanitizer.

Airlines, bus companies and ship operators, and other transportation services have implemented strict hygiene standards. Passengers and staff are required to wear masks and have their temperature checked before boarding. Reduced passenger capacity to allow for social distancing. They have also improved air filtration systems to ensure better ventilation.

Tourist attractions and destinations have adapted by limiting the number of visitors, implementing timed entry slots, and maintaining social distancing markers. Additionally, some places have introduced advanced booking systems and online ticketing to reduce physical contact during the ticket purchasing process. These health and safety adaptations have been crucial in rebuilding trust among tourists, assuring them that their well-being is a top priority. As a result, travelers are more likely to choose destinations and services that prioritize their health and safety, contributing to the resilience and recovery of Indonesian tourism during the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19.
  - 4 **Government Collaborations** (Budhi et al., 2022; Jumadi, 2021; Rianty et al., 2022; Sumarto et al., 2021; Wahyuni, 2021)
 

Government agencies have collaborated with private enterprises to devise strategies for tourism recovery. Initiatives such as stimulus packages, training programs, and destination marketing campaigns have been introduced to rejuvenate the sector. Public-private partnerships have been instrumental in fostering resilience. For instance, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy collaborated with major hotel chains and airlines to launch stimulus packages aimed at reviving the tourism sector. Provide travel and accommodation discounts, incentivize domestic and international travelers, and support the struggling hospitality industry.

Additionally, government agencies and tourism businesses collaborate to organize training programs to ensure health and safety protocols are strictly adhered to. The aim is to increase visitor confidence and help maintain a safe and resilient tourism environment. Another important aspect of this collaboration is the destination marketing campaign. The government is promoting Indonesian destinations as safe and attractive places to visit during the pandemic in collaboration with tourism stakeholders by utilizing digital marketing strategies and social media platforms to reach a wider audience.

In summary, the collaboration between the Indonesian government and private enterprises through initiatives such as stimulus packages, training programs, and destination marketing campaigns has played a vital role in sustaining community engagement in tourism and bolstering resilience against the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Source: Survey Result (2023)

In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, Indonesia has implemented a comprehensive set of strategies to sustain its involvement in tourism and enhance resilience. These strategies encompassed digital transformation, fostering community support networks, implementing rigorous health and safety measures, and forging fruitful collaborations between the government and private enterprises. By embracing digital technologies, communities united to support each other, prioritizing visitor safety, and engaging in impactful public-private partnerships, Indonesia has not only preserved its tourism sector but has also laid the foundation for a more resilient and thriving industry in the post-pandemic world.

Furthermore, the following table shows several community-based approaches that are contributing to the long-term recovery and sustainability of Indonesia's tourism sector amidst COVID-19.

**Table 2.** Community-based approaches that are contributing to the long-term recovery and sustainability of Indonesia's tourism sector amidst COVID-19

No	Community-Based Approaches	Contribution
1	Community Engagement (Budhi et al., 2022; Jumadi, 2021; Krisnawati, 2021; Rasyidah & Zamzamy, 2023; Sumarto et al., 2021; Wahyuni, 2021)	Communities have taken a central role in shaping the recovery trajectory of the tourism sector. Grassroots efforts, such as community-led tourism projects and cultural festivals, have not only generated income but have also bolstered a sense of ownership and pride among locals. This inclusive approach has enhanced the attractiveness of destinations and built resilience against external shocks.
2	Cultural Preservation (Gunawan et al., 2022; Laksmidewi, 2022; Parwata et al., 2021; Sumarto et al., 2021; Titisari et al., n.d.; Yulliana, 2021)	Indonesia's rich cultural heritage is a significant draw for tourists. Communities have leveraged this cultural capital by offering authentic experiences, workshops, and heritage tours. By preserving and promoting local traditions, communities have attracted culturally curious travelers while safeguarding their unique identity.
3	Ecotourism Initiatives (Asmoro & Yusrizal, 2021; Daulay et al., 2022; Gunawan et al., 2022; Hastuti et al., 2023; Kiswanto et al., 2022; Rasyidah & Zamzamy, 2023; Yestri et al., 2022)	The pandemic has spotlighted the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism. Community-based ecotourism initiatives have emerged as successful models that align with environmental conservation and economic viability. Local communities have become stewards of natural resources, offering eco-friendly experiences that resonate with environmentally conscious travelers.
4	Social Entrepreneurship (Andrea & Yudhiasta, 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2022; Jumadi, 2021; Sofianto & Risandewi, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2021)	During times of crisis, community-based social enterprises such as handicraft production, culinary experiences and guided tours have proven resilient and able to generate additional income for diversified and sustainable communities. The immersive and meaningful interactions created by the community for tourists have contributed to the long-term recovery and sustainability of Indonesia's tourism sector amidst COVID-19

Source: Survey Result (2023)

Various community-based approaches have been taken to ensure the long-term recovery and sustainability of Indonesia's tourism sector in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Community empowerment has played a critical role in shaping the sector's recovery, fostering a sense of ownership and increasing the attractiveness of the destination. Cultural preservation efforts by utilizing cultural heritage to attract tourists while maintaining local traditions. Community-based ecotourism initiatives have emerged as a model of sustainability, environmental preservation, and economic viability. Community-based social entrepreneurship has provided additional income and diversified income streams, thereby strengthening the resilience of the sector. A holistic, community-based approach is essential to navigating the challenges of the pandemic and ensuring the long-term success of Indonesia's tourism sector.

This study's findings underscore the critical role of community engagement and resilience in addressing COVID-19's disruptions to Indonesian tourism. The results align with previous research highlighting local communities' vital position in tourism recovery (Gúčik et al., 2021; Nair & Mathew, 2022). However, this research provides deeper qualitative insights into the innovations and experiences of Indonesian communities specifically, enabling contextualized understanding. This research finds that Indonesian tourism destinations rely heavily on the active participation and leadership of local community members to adapt during COVID-19. For example, in Bali, village committees helped develop health protocols such as mask use and social distancing so that safer local ceremonies and events could proceed responsibly. Additionally, the community creatively modified the tour offering, such as creating a cycling tour to avoid vehicle crowding, illustrating robust innovation. The qualitative data collected reveals how communal solidarity, generosity, and empowerment are at the core of many initiatives supporting the revival of tourism.

By comparing these findings with existing literature, it becomes apparent that collaborative networks are a common resilience strategy globally, not just in Indonesia (Bandyopadhyay & Zipfel, 2020;

Kapera, 2018). However, this study offers a granular perspective on how community networks manifest locally through initiatives like collective marketing and mutual aid. Mutual aid is an Indonesian concept which means collaborative community action. This research emphasizes that top-down policies alone are not enough. The involvement of grassroots communities and the ingenuity of the Indonesian people themselves is an integral part of the sustainable revival of tourism.

Furthermore, this research enriches discussions on digital transformation, outlining how Indonesian communities have adapted specific digital tools to their contextual needs. Their ability to rapidly adopt new technologies like digital marketing platforms and virtual tours demonstrates resilience in the face of crisis (Rihova et al., 2015). For example, communities in Bali quickly moved to create virtual tours and digital content to attract international tourists who were restricted from traveling due to COVID-19. Participants noted how they relied on smartphones, social media, and free online software, creatively adapting platforms to their needs and limited resources. However, the study reveals uneven access and adoption of digital tools based on factors like location, resources, and technological literacy (Chieng et al., 2021). Rural communities with limited infrastructure and skills face barriers in participating in digital opportunities. For example, remote areas struggle with poor internet connectivity and a lack of digital skills, as well as an inability to utilize online tools. Urban and rural disparities highlight the need for approaches that increase access and training in the appropriate use of digital technologies in a variety of contexts. This research emphasizes that while digital transformation provides opportunities, inclusive solutions that consider local resources and capacities are essential for ethical and sustainable development. More research is needed to understand these digital divide implications in order to create inclusive, ethical solutions.

While this research touches on challenges like digital divides, fully examining these complex issues requires integrative analysis of political, economic, and social variables (Chieng et al., 2021; Kasemsap, 2021). Further interdisciplinary research could uncover nuanced community perspectives on tensions between tradition and modernity. Diving deeper into theories of community engagement and resilience would strengthen scholarly understanding of these concepts within tourism studies (Cheer, J. & M., Cole, 2021; Santha et al., 2021).

The findings also underscore the emergence of collaborative community networks as a unifying force during the pandemic. By sharing resources, information, and capabilities, these networks enabled collective resilience (Nair & Mathew, 2022). However, tensions can arise within these collaborations due to power imbalances between actors like small businesses and large corporations. Further exploration of these community dynamics through in-depth interviews could provide nuanced insights into building mutually empowering partnerships.

Additionally, this research describes different health adaptations to research documenting basic health protocols (Pratiwi et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021), this research elucidates the motivations and perceived effectiveness behind communities' varied adaptations. Examining the motivations and perceived efficacy of these measures could offer meaningful perspectives. Surveys and focus groups with tourism providers would shed light on whether actions were primarily financially driven or spurred by concern for community wellbeing. Furthermore, analyzing challenges in implementing health protocols could guide more realistic policies and support systems. It reveals how actions were driven by both easing visitor concerns and protecting local wellbeing. Moreover, it identifies specific challenges in implementation based on location, resources, and existing infrastructure.

This research brings to the forefront communities' critical role as stewards of culture and nature within sustainable tourism development (Ateljevic, 2020). However, complex questions remain regarding how to balance economic viability, cultural heritage preservation, and eco-conscious practices. A systems thinking approach integrating local values and knowledge with economic and environmental impact data could help construct holistic frameworks to guide tourism's post-pandemic transformation.

Significantly, these findings can inform practical strategies for tourism practitioners seeking to bolster community engagement and resilience. Facilitating collaborative forums can enable mutually beneficial exchanges between stakeholders (Bandyopadhyay & Zipfel, 2020). The dynamics of partnership and cooperation among stakeholders should prioritize long-term community welfare, ensuring that the benefits of recovery efforts are widespread and sustainable.

The study reveals how technologies were harnessed to maintain connections, collective action bolstered social capital, and traditions were leveraged to retain cultural identity. Training programs on digital tools and online marketing can assist communities in harnessing technologies appropriate for their contexts. Importantly, tourism development must prioritize community needs and local perspectives, rather than impose external solutions (Ateljevic, 2020).

This study provides tailored insights into strategies like social entrepreneurship and eco-tourism spearheaded by Indonesian communities (Gunawan et al., 2022; Yestri et al., 2022). It explains how these built on indigenous practices and leveraged local resources. This research explains community-led

sustainable tourism strategies in Indonesia by highlighting specific initiatives in ecotourism and social entrepreneurship. For example, this research describes how villagers organize tours with local guides to provide income while protecting their resources, and drawing on traditional ecological knowledge. This shows how the concept of sustainability was adapted to utilize the unique resources and practices of Indonesia's indigenous communities rather than applying a universal model. Although existing literature examines sustainable tourism broadly, the qualitative insights of this study offer a detailed and contextual understanding of how these ideas are realized in Indonesian villages. These findings reveal how communities are reorganizing the local tourism sector based on their needs and strengths. This detailed knowledge makes a meaningful contribution, filling an important gap by showing what sustainable, grassroots-based tourism development implemented in Indonesia could look like. Compared to broader discussions on reimagining tourism (Ateljevic, 2020), findings offer grounded examples of what community-centric sustainable development looks like in the Indonesian context.

Overall, while this research surfaces crucial insights from Indonesian communities, further scholarly exploration integrating diverse lenses is needed to fully encapsulate the complexity of enhancing tourism's sustainability and resilience in the post-COVID era.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research reveals how digital transformation, collaborative networks, health protocols, cultural preservation, and sustainable practices were embraced by Indonesian communities to demonstrate remarkable resilience amidst COVID-19's challenges to the tourism sector. The findings showcase strategies that centered local voices, knowledge, and participation to sustain industry involvement and strengthen communities. To build on this community-driven resilience, specific policies and interventions can be implemented, including: training programs and infrastructure to address digital inequality; participatory forums for equitable stakeholder collaboration; tailored health/safety guidelines balancing visitor confidence and community wellbeing; legal frameworks and funding to catalyze grassroots initiatives in cultural preservation, eco-tourism and social entrepreneurship. As Indonesia's tourism sector works towards recovery and sustainability, community-centric approaches will be instrumental in catalyzing a just, regenerative and participatory paradigm. Additionally, to accelerate recovery, equitable distribution of tourism recovery funds across stakeholders is crucial, along with proactive legislative measures fostering an ecosystem of collaboration, innovation and inclusivity. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems can empower policies to be adjustable and impactful. Overall, collaboration between government, industry, and community partners that centers inclusive, sustainable solutions will be vital for tourism to rebuild successfully. Moving forward, research should explore inclusive policies and interventions to reinforce community-driven resilience within sustainable tourism development. Areas for investigation include digital capacity building in rural regions, participatory decision-making frameworks, tailored health protocols balancing visitor and community needs, legal and financial mechanisms to support grassroots initiatives, and monitoring systems to evaluate community-level impact over time. Studies examining strategies to foster greater alignment across government tourism policies and ministries, along with innovative funding models that catalyze investment into regenerative tourism, could provide actionable insights. Overall, research centering equitable, community-based solutions through collaborative methodologies will be key to advancing knowledge on strengthening resilience and upholding local agency in Indonesia's tourism sector recovery.

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