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THE POTENTIALS OF DARK TOURISM IN BANDA ACEH, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Dark tourism is a type of special interest tourism that involves travel to places historically associated with death, disaster, tragedy, and atrocities. Visits to such places not only for the purpose of remembrance but in the name of historical awareness where tourists may learn about violence, sorrow, and pain, in the hope of preventing future savageries and fatal. This paper examines the potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Banda Aceh, which is located in the north-western tip of Sumatra Island, is a city that vulnerable to natural disasters such as the undersea earthquake and tsunami. Dark tourism is largely controversial but through positive points of view, this type of tourism has a lot of potentials to be developed in terms of packages, routes, attractions, and information. Besides, this paper studies the involvement of local communities especially the tsunami survivors in the dark tourism packages as interpreters. Data were gathered from site observations and interviews with tourism officials, travel agents, tour guides, tourism lecturers, and tourism volunteers. The interviews were conducted in Banda Aceh in April 2019 where some of the informants are tsunami survivors. The findings highlight that dark tourism in the city has a lot to explore and exploit. The sorrow's vibes, gloom ambience and the obscure secret of the attractions filled with history, opportunity, and hope that have been hidden throughout these years. In conclusion, dark tourism in Banda Aceh should be proliferated internationally.

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Keywords: Banda Aceh, dark tourism, natural disaster, local interpreters.



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1. Introduction

Visitation to places of death, catastrophe and macabre is known as dark tourism (Foley & Lennon, 1996). Most places of death, disaster, and atrocities negotiate painful pasts, ethically problematic situations, politically oriented discourses on memory and heritage (Godis & Nilsson, 2016). Sometimes, it is known as heritage sites that contributed to death, catastrophe and macabre (Tang, 2018). There are several terms applied to this type of tourism comprising 'grief tourism' (Pezzullo, 2009), 'Thana tourism' (Seaton, 1996), 'black spot tourism' (Rojek, 1993), 'Phoenix tourism' (Causevic & Lynch, 2011), 'atrocious tourism' (Tang, 2018), 'dissonant heritage' (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) and 'morbid tourism' (Blom, 2000). Tourists often attracted to this type of tourism as they feel more curious to learn about natural disaster while respecting the natural environment. Besides that, to understand the importance of peaceful coexistence between human beings, natural disasters, and tourism. In addition, dark tourism relics have appealed to the tourists and attract them to become one of the popular tourists' attractions. For example, the tsunami disaster in Banda Aceh, Indonesia that had killed 170,000 people on 26 December 2004 (Iemura, Takahashi, Pradono, Sukamdo, & Kurniawan, 2006). Through this tsunami event, a lot of relics, buildings, and places around Banda Aceh become the source of attraction which contributed to the positive benefits of dark tourism. Moreover, people can learn the physical and mental experience; sorrow vibes, moral values, the knowledge that is emerging in the past year of the tsunami event through the packages offer, routes were touring to the death locations or any exhibition, attractions, and information. Tourists could acquire motivation and inspiration from the negative event then, increase the awareness towards the natural disaster that contributed towards dark tourism potential. Although dark tourism attractions in Banda Aceh are largely controversial, from a positive point of view, this type of tourism has a lot of potentials for the country.

1.1. Dark tourism

Dark tourism may not be favoured by many tourists but there is something unusually mesmerizing about visiting destinations and sites with a gruesome vibe. There are various dark tourism destinations currently become choices for numerous tourists around the world. For example, the tragic events that happened in 1986 where the Chernobyl power plant become the worst human-made catastrophes ever to befall the planet (Hannam & Yankovska, 2014). Thus, advertising company, HBO has taken the initiatives by documenting the tragic events through marketing on their channel. This resulted in the increasing number of tourists to that place. Besides that, dark tourism's places are interesting because they carry valuable historical information, some of which are not discussed in basic history in education. Visiting an art museum enriches tourists' knowledge meanwhile a trip to war memorial dark tourism destination helps them to understand a little bit about politics and sacrificing for all the senseless killings they endure at that time. For instance, the Seodaemun Prison History Hall in Seoul, South Korea (Shu-Mei Huang & Hyun-Kyung Lee, 2019). The place gives an emotional impact on tourists by walking through its cold and dark hallways. Mannequins were located along the hallways, dressed in prison attire and placed inside some of the cells. At the same time, the place attracts the tourists with audio playback of mournful screams. The sense of wonderment at how much pain the human body and mind can endure also makes this dark tourism interesting. Overall, dark tourism has a lot of potentials that can be explored

through a proper method and strategy such as dark tour package, dark exhibition, dark resting places, and dark shrines or religious places.

1.2. Developing and promoting dark tourism packages and attractions in Banda Aceh

The dark tourism package is one of the potentials that can be developed at a dark destination. To attract different types of visitors, a good business plan must be constructed by studying the feasibilities, trends, finding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, followed by organizing objectives of dark tourism business. The 4Ps marketing mix namely price, place, promotion and people; is crucial (Homburg & Giering, 2001). An action plan to promote dark tourism can be prepared by the government, state authority or tourism business organization. For example, the majority of tour operators bring the tourists to dark tourism destinations for doing business and making money, however, packaging pain for pleasure and trading on dreadful human tragedies is out of moral principles. But, through a proper study, knowledge, and information pertaining to dark tourism can be converted to knowledge for tourists to learn.

Dark exhibitions related to demonstrations and places that potentially can make opportunities for education and learning (Heuermann & Chhabra, 2014). Dark exhibitions might offer some products which are focused on decease, sorrow or the gruesome tale with often variety of message in terms of education and commemoration. Thus, these products obviously reflect the drastic and darker content. For example, the Tsunami Museum, Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*) and Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung I*). These types of places give the information and knowledge about the history of Tsunami through replica, a product that can attract tourists.

Dark resting places refer to the cemetery or graveyard that can play a key role in dark tourism as a potential product (Stone, 2006). Therefore, the cemetery in destination is able to act as a sentimental environment, if it is not considered as macabre. In addition, the cemetery is being used as an instrument to attract visitors and increase the visitation of an area by tourism planners. As well by this way, the integrity of such destinations and their architecture as well as their natural environment could be preserved and sustained. There is a place called Mass Grave (*Perkuburan Massal*) and tsunami victims rested here.

Dark religious places revolve around sites, blend with those who recently deceased and were built in remembrance of them. Hence these places not only are building up within a very short time period of happening the death but they are also close to the sites of decease (Farmaki, 2013). Thus, these places defined as the darker edge of the dark tourism aspect. Moreover, the media agenda can be dominated by these types of events in the short term. For example, the Rahmatullah Mosque and the Baiturrahman Mosque. These places themselves are the buildings that have been reconstructed after the tsunami that give the remembrance's vibe of the tsunami disaster.

2. Problem Statement

In the past years, dark tourism's destination is not popular among tourists. Tourists prefer to visit a destination that spread good vibes without any dark feelings. There are many academic studies on dark tourism. Mostly, the study explains about factors or motivations that attract tourist to visit dark tourism

destination, but there have been only a few studies about the potentials, local communities' involvement and dark tourism especially in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Therefore, this study has been conducted to study:

- The potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia although it is categorized as controversial.
- The benefit from dark tourism through the involvement of local communities.

2.1. The potentials of dark tourism although it is described as controversial

There is a gap exist affiliated between the potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia as a controversial topic.

2.2. The benefit from dark tourism through the involvement of local communities

The methodology approach in this qualitative study will explore the involvement of local communities towards dark tourism potentials in Banda Aceh, Indonesia in terms of benefit.

3. Research Questions

Using the above problem statements regarding the potentials, local communities' involvement and dark tourism, below are the research questions to be answered by this study:

3.1. The potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia

To understand the potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh a research question has been constructed. (a) What is the potential of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, through what medium and aspect?

3.2. Local communities and potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia

In addition, there is another research question that specified the local communities' involvement. (b) Who will get the benefit from dark tourism?

- After defining the dark tourism and finding the potential of dark tourism through the previous study. The methodology will be conducted
- This study will evaluate and transcribe the result, thus will answer the research question above

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper intends to examine the potentials of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia and study the involvement of local communities especially the tsunami survivors in dark tourism as interpreters.

5. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach. Data were gathered from site observations and interviews. Site observations involved places like Mass Grave (*Perkuburan Massal*), Baiturrahman Mosque, Rahmatullah Mosque, Tsunami Museum, Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*) and Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung I*). The ethnography method was conducted, by staying there for

a few days and observed the culture and history of dark tourism from informants to gather the information. The information gathered was recorded in the inventory sheet and some of it was captured as videos and photos by the authors. The interviews involved 2 tourism officials, 2 travel agents, 3 tour guides, 2 tourism lecturers, and 3 local volunteers were conducted in Banda Aceh in April 2019, where some of the informants are tsunami survivors and act as the interpreters. Then, a lot of potentials to be developed in terms of packages, routes, attractions, and information through the ethnography method.

6. Findings

In geographical terms, the dark tourism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia was built around its coastline, with Baiturrahman Mosque as one of the dark religious places located in the centre. This area is packed with dark attractions as well as international tourists, especially those who come from the neighbouring country such as Malaysia. Based on the analyses carried out, the potentials of dark tourism can be allocated according to the information, attractions, routes, and packages.

6.1. Information

Tables 1 and 2 outline the information gathered from the Aceh tourism office and tsunami research centre, respectively. The information obtained stated that most people come to Banda Aceh because of dark tourism.

Table 01. Information from Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Banda Aceh, Indonesia

| Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Banda Aceh, Indonesia |
|--|
| Banda Aceh is focusing on Wisata Halal concept (Halal Tourism) |
| Banda Aceh ranking third as the halal destination that follows Islamic laws |
| Dinas Pariwisata Banda Aceh focus to developed Banda Aceh, Sabang, and Aceh Besar |
| A lot of tourists are from Tanah Melayu (City Tourists), European, United States of America and China |
| Banda Aceh received lots of help in terms of money, people in reconstructing Banda Aceh after tsunami; Malaysia, Turkey, Japan |

Table 02. Information from Tsunami Disaster Mitigation Research Centre Banda Aceh, Indonesia

| Tsunami Disaster Mitigation Research Centre Banda Aceh, Indonesia (TDMRC) |
|---|
| Spread mission about awareness of natural disasters through social media, student volunteer called 'Fatanah'. |
| Escape building is the vertical evacuation for tsunami disaster. Provide safety for people around a certain area. It can occupy about 300 people at one time. There are 4 vertical evacuations including Tsunami Museum. |
| There is also a hill evacuation site near the TDMRC for people living near the sea. It is not enough time for 700km/h to evacuate people to go to the vertical evacuation site, so hill evacuation is the nearer. Besides, the topography of Banda Aceh is very flat, very far from the mountain and below the sea level rise. So, one of the mitigation plans is to build the vertical evacuation site as the TDMRC and give the local communities to use these building as evacuation sites |
| TDMRC recommended the government to strengthen the mosque as the evacuation site |
| Most people coming to Banda Aceh because of Dark Tourism |

6.2. Attractions

The dark attractions around Banda Aceh do not spread the macabre or depressing ambiance. Currently, it is a purely educational visit such as visiting the Tsunami Museum in Banda Aceh located which are the affected locations of the tsunami in 2004. These places also showcasing pictures of the disastrous event and can be organized under dark exhibitions. There is also a replica, monuments, and relics. Thus, it gives a chance to help out the community. This is where dark tourism goes coincide with cultural tourism, a sector that is thriving in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

(1) Baiturrahman Mosque is known as one of the tangible products that is well known among tourists. The mosque represents the struggle that people has faced from the tsunami natural disaster and it was constructed with beautiful Islamic architecture that always fascinates tourists. Speaking of the tragedy that happened during the Tsunami natural disaster, the mosque has helped tsunami victims by providing shelter and accommodation. The mosque has been furnished with a bright white wall and the black dome has been installed to add a sense of aesthetic from the combination of black and white colour.

(2) Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung 1*), located at the centre of the city and weighed around 2,600 tons. The history of the ship stated when the Tsunami swept away the ship from Ulele coast to Punge Blang Cut Village situated at Banda Aceh. The government also took initiatives to attract tourists by constructing an educational park and filled it with information about Tsunami.

(3) Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*) is a 30-meter-long fishing boat remains stuck on the roof of a house in Lampulo village, near the fishing harbour, almost 2 kilometres away from the coast. A plaque below the boat states that the 59 people who sought shelter aboard it that survived in the December 26, 2004 tsunami disaster. There are some pictures of malignancy of disaster displayed in the house that now set as tsunami heritage.

(4) Rahmatullah Mosque is a witness of the tsunami that hit Banda Aceh on December 26th, 2004. Although the surrounding of this mosque has been washed by the tsunami, this mosque is still intact. This mosque is located about 500 meters from the seashore and stays still after being struck by 30 meters tsunami wave. Mosque dome; its weight is 80 tons and is known as Al-Tsunami Mosque.

(5) Jamik Mosque in Lamteungoh Village, Peukan Bada, Aceh Besar. When the tsunami waves hit Aceh in 2004, the entire mosque was damaged and left only the dome of the mosque with a diameter of 4x4 meters. The dome was carried by the current wave as far as 2.5 kilometres and stranded in the village of Gurah.

(6) The next attraction is the Mass Grave (*Perkuburan Massal*) where 46.718 tsunami victims rested here and act as the dark rested place. There are a few monuments that are put up in honour of those who lost their lives to the disaster so that tourists visiting the places can have the remembrance ambiance and become more aware of appreciating human beings and natural disasters.

(7) Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*) and Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung 1*) can be considered as dark exhibits. These places exhibited all 982 names of tsunami victims as the remembrance for tourists who visit the places. On 2004, the place becomes flat because of the tsunami disaster and tsunami waves for about 21 meters occur along the coastline of Banda Aceh on 26 December 2004. Besides that, a few religious places have been saved although a lot of damaged happened at a few parts. These places, without doubt, are the keys to dark tourism visits with the intention to study and to give honour to the victims. These dark tourism places have a lot of potentials as they also provide

education besides the remembrance ambiance to the tourists. This action is also to remind people and to prevent the Tsunami natural disaster. For a better and responsible future, tourists must try to apprehend the past. Nowadays, tangible and intangible knowledge is important, especially about dark tourism. Thus, tourists need to equip themselves with a pre-basic understanding about the history of dark tourism. This is to ensure that they will not forget about the past of dark tourism.

6.3. Packages

Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan provide some packages for tourists, guide books, and tour guides. This is to attract a lot of tourists to come and visit the potential dark tourism places around Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Some of them are birding in Gayo Highland Sumatra, Pulau Banyak - Aceh Singkil Package and Tsunami Heritage Trail. Tsunami Heritage Trail including visiting Mass Grave (*Perkuburan Massal*), Tsunami Museum, Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*), Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung I*), Rahmatullah mosque, Baiturrahman Mosque, other tsunami heritage and shopping souvenir at Aceh Market provided by Dinas.

6.4. Participation of local community

On the basis of observation data as well as information garnered from Tsunami Disaster Mitigation Research Centre Banda Aceh, Indonesia (TDMRC), all the involvement of local community in Banda Aceh is revolving around two groups:

The first group embraces volunteer students (Fatanah), who play a great role in making public awareness through social media in the case of circumstances of natural disaster and readiness of people when a disaster occurs. For instance, since receding the level of the sea, has been found as a warning sign of a tsunami, these volunteer students have been successful in notifying people about this issue.

The second group are those survivors who have a huge passion to get involved in explaining and interpreting the story of tsunami happened at dark attractions. In reality, they are acting as local guides or local interpreters that are able to inject benefits to the tourism industry as well as the local economy. In other word, they can provide a high quality of experience for tourists, a better life for the host community and thriving the local economy as a result. But what must be taken into consideration by authorities, is training such interpreters for the purpose of not only educating them to convey reliable and accurate information to visitors, but also enabling them to speak English properly and having nice communication skills as a result. It is because the majority of interpreters are lack skills in the English language.

6.5. The routes based on observation, recommendation and interviews from the tsunami informants

The recommended route starts from Sultan Iskandar Muda International Airport where tourists will go to the Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan to gather information, continue with the journey to Tsunami Museum, Mass Grave (*Perkuburan Massal*), Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*), Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung I*), Baiturrahman Mosque and Rahmatullah Mosque.

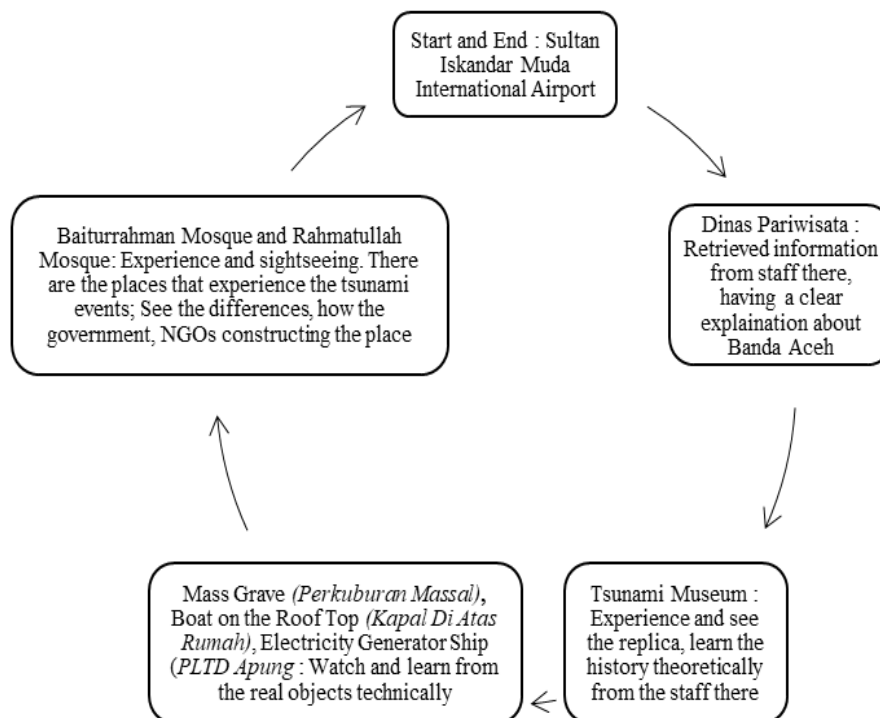


Figure 01. The routes for potential dark tourism destination

7. Conclusion

Traveling patterns are being altered by the fast transformation in the tourism industry among tourists at an international level. Various kinds of tourism products are created due to varying reasons which encourage traveller to travel. Without a doubt, gastronomic tourism, culture-based tourism, wildlife tourism, green tourism, and dark tourism are new products of tourism. All over the world, dark tourism has become more attractive to international tourists. Visiting the areas in which tragedy and death occurred, covers dark tourism (Isaac & Ashworth, 2011; Mahbob, Zahari, Zainuddin, Suhaimi, & Sumarjan, 2013). Dark tourism performs a crucial role in constructing countries' image, identified as a vibrant part of the tourism industry, and as a source or generator of income that cannot be ignored by governments. In addition, it has been considered as a part of the tour companies' program to do business and make money by absorbing tourists to dark sites (Mahbob et al., 2013). The benefit of dark tourism is being able to make an attachment to the past. There is various potential of dark tourism in Banda Aceh, namely attractions, routes and information, that tourist can gain during their travel to Banda Aceh by visiting the Tsunami Museum, Mass Grave (*Perkuburan Massal*), Boat on the Roof Top (*Kapal Di Atas Rumah*), Electricity Generator Ship (*PLTD Apung 1*), Baiturrahman Mosque and Rahmatullah Mosque. Tourists also can use the tourism package provided by the Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Banda Aceh as they provide the packages and tour guides to make their visit easier and connected. Local communities themselves act as the tsunami interpreters and give benefits by helping the tourism industry in Banda Aceh indirectly.

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