

# ECOTOURISM IN SIMATUPANG VILLAGE: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

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## Abstract

Simatupang Village is a village located in Muara Sub-district, North Tapanuli Regency.. Simatupang Village has great potential for the application of the ecotourism concept because of its abundant natural resources and strong culture, but it is not well managed. The purpose of this research is to find out the concept of ecotourism in Simatupang Village and to find out the development of sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village. The research method used is a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and literature study, and the data analysis technique used was descriptive qualitative analysis. The concept of ecotourism in Simatupang Village is an ecotourism concept based on nature conservation and utilizing the environment and culture inherent in the community as a tourist destination that can increase income and prosper the community.

**Keywords** : Ecotourism, Nature Conservation, Sustainable Tourism

## 1. Introduction

North Tapanuli is a district in the province of North Sumatra, Indonesia whose capital is in Tarutung sub-district. North Tapanuli has quite a lot of tourism objects, ranging from natural tourism, historical tourism and religious tourism. So this district makes the tourism sector a potential source of Regional Original Income.

Simatupang Village is a village located in Muara District, North Tapanuli Regency, North Sumatra Province. This village was formed in 1947. Simatupang Village has a total area of 420 Ha, of which 120 Ha is rice fields, 51 Ha is plantation land, 236 Ha is uncultivated hills, and the remaining 13 Ha is residential areas. Simatupang village originates from the ancestors of the Simatupang clan and their descendants who are still residents of Simatupang, namely the Togatorop clan, the Sianturi clan and the Siburian clan. Simatupang Village has a lot of natural resources which are supported by large areas of land and fertile soil, such as rice, corn, onions, cocoa, coffee, palm trees and so on. Apart from that, Simatupang Village has many historical sites left by oppung or ancestors which have many unique features and different stories.

A tourist village is a form of integration between attractions, accommodation and supporting facilities presented in a structure of community life that is integrated with applicable procedures and traditions. Simatupang Village has not yet become an official tourist village through the Regent's Decree. Simatupang Village is a village that will be pioneered as a tourist village because of its abundant natural potential, strong culture and interesting historical stories. This is an added value to elevate Simatupang Village to become a tourist village. The Ministry of Tourism explains that the criteria for determining which village will be used as a tourist village is that it has tourism potential that can be used as a tourist attraction, has accessibility, and has tourist activities. In accordance with the criteria above, it can be concluded that Simatupang Village has high potential to become an attractive tourist village.

Ecotourism is an environmentally friendly tourism activity that is responsible for the welfare of local communities and preserving the natural environment. Ecotourism Simatupang Village has high potential as ecotourism because of its abundant natural products, fertile soil conditions and a beautiful village environment, and a very strong culture

and strong history attached to Simatupang Village. With ecotourism the village economy can improve. The environment in Simatupang Village lacks maintenance and the existing natural products are not managed well. Ecotourism in Simatupang Village is an effort to preserve nature.

Sustainable tourism focuses on local communities who should be involved in various tourism activities. Sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village can develop well and can be used to provide welfare for the community both from natural and cultural products. However, there is still a lack of good management by the local government and local communities which makes Simatupang Village less advanced and undeveloped.

Therefore, the author took research with the title "Sustainable Tourism Development Through Ecotourism in Simatupang Village, North Tapanuli Regency". The problem formulation of this research is what the ecotourism concept is in Simatupang Village and how to develop sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village. The aim of this research is to determine the concept of ecotourism in Simatupang Village and to determine the development of sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village.

Ecotourism is a sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism concept that differentiates it from other tourist attractions, such as environmentally friendly tourism, tourism that plays a role in strengthening the economy of local communities, and tourism that respects nature. Ecotourism activities have a very broad influence, especially in efforts to maintain existing environmental conditions and improve the economy of local communities. The following are ecotourism concepts, including:

1. Nature conservation. Conservation is preservation, managing natural resources and sustainably so as to create a balance between diversity in an environment. Ecotourism is used as nature conservation, namely by preserving nature so that it has high use value in society. The use value of nature conservation can make the environment a foreign exchange earner.
2. Empowerment of local communities. Community empowerment is an effort to solve problems in the community by making them independent and utilizing existing local wisdom. In this case, local communities living around tourist areas must be independent and increase their ability to utilize existing local resources and wisdom.
3. Environmental awareness. Environmental awareness is an action or attitude to understand the importance of a healthy, clean environment, and so on. Environmental awareness means paying attention to the actions of local people and the actions of visitors. These two elements must equally pay attention to the beauty of the environment where the tourist attraction stands.

The success of ecotourism depends on several things, which can be divided into several factors, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors can be classified as regional potential for ecotourism development, ecotourism knowledge about environmental conservation and participation of local residents. Meanwhile, external factors are key factors that come from outside the ecotourism location, such as tourist awareness of environmental sustainability, research activities in ecotourism areas for the benefit of environmental sustainability and local communities.

According to Ministerial Regulation no. 14 of 2016 concerning Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Destinations states that sustainable tourism is tourism that takes into account current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, meets the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and local communities and can be applied to all forms of tourism activities in all types of tourist destinations. , including mass tourism and various other types of tourist activities.

Demonstrates how ecotourism can be a solution to improve the well-being of local communities and conserve the environment in Simatupang Village. Here are some descriptions and explanations:

**Enhancing Local Community Well-being: Job Creation:** Ecotourism can create new jobs for local people as tour guides, homestay managers, souvenir craftsmen, and food and

beverage vendors. Income Generation: Ecotourism can increase local people's income by selling products and services to tourists. Skill Development: Ecotourism can encourage local people to develop new skills in hospitality, foreign languages, and financial management. Community Empowerment: Ecotourism can provide opportunities for local people to participate in the decision-making process and management of ecotourism in their village. Conserving the Environment: Nature Conservation: Ecotourism can promote nature conservation by raising awareness about the importance of protecting the environment and biodiversity. Sustainable Use: Ecotourism can promote the sustainable and environmentally friendly use of natural resources. Local Culture Preservation: Ecotourism can help preserve local culture by promoting traditions and customs to tourists. Implementation Examples in Simatupang Village: Homestay Development: Local people are trained to provide homestays for tourists while maintaining local wisdom and cultural authenticity. Farmer Group Empowerment: Farmer groups are assisted in developing organic products and marketing them to tourists, increasing farmers' income and well-being. Tour Guide Training: Local people are trained to become reliable tour guides with knowledge of Simatupang Village's nature and culture. Tour Package Development: Educational and nature tour packages are designed to attract tourists and provide a memorable experience. Waste Management: A good waste management system is implemented to maintain environmental cleanliness and prevent pollution.

Sustainable tourism is the development of a travel concept that can have a long-term impact, both on the environment, social, cultural and economic for local communities and tourists. The goal of sustainable tourism is to reduce the impact of tourism on local communities and the environment by optimally utilizing resources and preserving culture and customs. Sustainable tourism is very important to implement because it can improve community welfare and protect cultural heritage.

In Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism, it is stated that tourism development must be carried out based on sustainable principles. Tourism development aims to preserve nature, the environment and resources which is realized through the implementation of tourism development plans by taking into account the diversity, uniqueness and specificity of culture and nature, as well as human needs for travel.

Sustainable tourism development pays great attention to balance, both the balance of the time dimension, namely the present and the future, as well as the balance of goals or interests, namely the interests of sustainability from economic, natural environmental and socio-cultural aspects. Ecotourism in Simatupang Village can be a solution to improving the well-being of local communities and conserving the environment. With proper and sustainable implementation, ecotourism can provide long-term benefits for Simatupang Village and become a model for other villages in Indonesia.

## 2. Method

The method used in this research is a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. According to (Moloeng, 2016), explains that qualitative research is research with the aim of understanding the phenomenon of what the research subject experiences as a whole by means of descriptions in the form of words and language, in the specific context experienced and by utilizing various scientific methods. The data collection techniques used in this research were interviews, observation and literature study.

### 1. Interview

According to (Sugiyono, 2018), an interview is a meeting of two people to exchange information and ideas through questions and answers, so that meaning can be constructed on a particular topic. The author conducted interviews to collect data by interviewing the Village Head, Pokdarwis, and the local community. The author conducted interviews using a cellphone to record all conversations and a camera to take pictures while the author was conducting interviews with sources.

2. Observation

According to (Sugiyono,2018), observation is a data processing technique that has specific characteristics when compared with other techniques. The author made observations by directly visiting every object point in Simatupang Village.

3. Literature Study

According to (Sugiyono,2018), literature study is related to theoretical studies and other references related to the values, culture and norms that develop in the social situation being studied. The author collected data based on literature studies sourced from books, journals and blogs.

The data analysis technique used is a qualitative descriptive analysis method. While in the field, the author conducted interviews with three samples, namely, the Village Head, Pokdarwis, and the local community. According to (Sugiyono, 2018), descriptive research is research conducted to determine the value of independent variables, either one or more variables (independent) without making comparisons, or connecting them with other variables. This research describes an object, phenomenon, or something that will be stated in narrative writing. This means that in writing the data and facts collected are in the form of words or images rather than numbers. When writing a qualitative research report, it contains quotations from data revealed in the field to provide support for what is presented in the report.

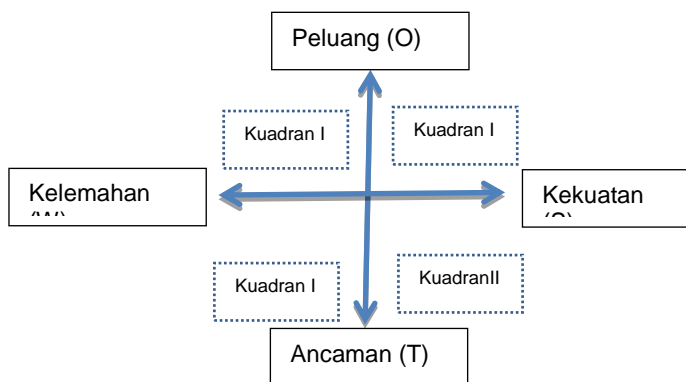


Diagram Matriks SWOT Analysis

### 3. Results and Discussion

Ecotourism is environmentally friendly tourism that is useful for improving the community's economy. This tourism also protects and maintains the authenticity of nature and the environment, maintains the authenticity of art and culture, customs, creates tranquility, maintains flora and fauna, so as to create a balance between human life and the natural surroundings. Ecotourism can also reduce the negative impacts of development that destroys nature. Ecotourism is also important in involving the community so that it can improve the level of welfare without ignoring local social and cultural values.

The concept of ecotourism is development into an environmentally friendly tourist destination by utilizing the potential resources and culture of the local community. Ecotourism development is not only aimed at generating economic benefits, but on the other hand must also be taken into account.

The following are the results of the author's observations of ecotourism in Simatupang Village using SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threats) matrix analysis. SWOT matrix analysis is an analysis based on logic that can maximize strengths and opportunities, but at the same time can minimize weaknesses and threats that exist in an individual or organization.

**Table 1.** SWOT Matrix Analysis Of Simatupang Village Ecotourism

S (strength)	W (weakness)	O (opportunity)	T (threats)
<p>Abundant natural resources.  Many historical sites remain.  Beautiful views and beautiful environment.  Friendly people.</p>	<p>Human resources still have minimal knowledge about tourism.  People who do not understand how to manage natural products.  Access to Simatupang Village is still limited, especially public transportation.  There are no road signs at any historical sites.  There is still a lack of amenities and tourist attractions</p>	<p>Simatupang Village can become a religious tourism village based on ecotourism because it has many historical relics with interesting stories.  Simatupang Village has abundant natural resources and the results can become MSME products.  Simatupang Village has a large area of land that has not been cultivated and can be used as a park or tourist attraction as an additional tourist attraction.</p>	<p>Historical sites are not well maintained which end up being neglected.  It is prone to landslides because it is close to a mountainous area.</p>

Source : Author's Process, 2024

**Table 2.** Simatupang Village Ecotourism IFAS Matrix Analysis

Internal Factors				
NO	Strength	Value	Rate	Score
1	Natural and cultural potential	0,13	5	0,48
2	Suitability place	0,12	2	0,35
3	Historical heritage site	0,13	4	0,20
4	Community friendliness	0,12	3	0,47
<b>Amount</b>		<b>0,50</b>		<b>1,50</b>
NO	Weakness	Value	Rate	Score
1	Knowledge of ecotourism is weak	0,11	3	0,40
2	Little community participation	0,08	2	0,30
3	Accessibility is inadequate	0,10	2	0,22
4	Lack of amenities and attractions	0,11	1	0,38
5	Lack of understanding of natural product management	0,10	2	0,20
<b>Amount</b>		<b>0,50</b>		<b>1,50</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,00</b>		<b>3,00</b>

Source : Author's Process, 2024

**Table 3.** Simatupang Village Ecotourism EFAS Matrix Analysis

<b>External Factors</b>				
<b>NO</b>	<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	Can be a religious tourism	0,14	4	0,45
2	Natural product can become MSME products	0,12	2	0,38
3	Uncultivated land as an additional tourist attraction	0,11	3	0,27
4	As a new tourism alternative	0,13	5	0,40
<b>Amount</b>		0,50		1,50
<b>NO</b>	<b>Threats</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	Prone to natural disasters	0,08	2	0,40
2	Abandoned Site	0,10	2	0,32
3	Illegal Logging	0,11	2	0,27
4	Trash	0,11	1	0,33
5	Corrosion	0,10	3	0,18
<b>Amount</b>		0,50		1,50
<b>Total</b>		1,00		3,00

Source : Author's Process, 2024

**Table 4.** SWOT Weighting Matrix

<b>Strength</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Weakness</b>	<b>Score</b>
Natural and cultural potential	0,48	Knowledge of ecotourism is weak	0,40
Suitability place	0,35	Little community participation	0,30
Historical heritage site	0,20	Accesibility is inadequate	0,22
Community friendliness	0,47	Lack of amenities and attractions	0,38
		Lack of understanding of natural product management	0,20
<b>Amount</b>	1,50	<b>Amount</b>	1,50
<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Threats</b>	<b>Score</b>
Can be a religious tourism	0,45	Prone to natural disasters	0,40
Natural product can become MSME products	0,38	Abandoned Site	0,32
Uncultivated land as an additional tourist attraction	0,27	Illegal Logging	0,27
As a new tourism alternative	0,40	Trash	0,33
		Corrosion	0,18
<b>Amount</b>	1,50	<b>Amount</b>	1,50

Source : Author's Process, 2024

Based on the results of the SWOT matrix analysis in table 1, the strengths of Simatupang Village are its abundant natural resources, the beautiful village environment offering beautiful views, the many historical sites, and the friendliness of the community.

The environment as a strength of Simatupang Village is filled with lots of plants and plantations. Existing plantation land belongs to the community and is distributed unevenly and covers every tourist attraction point. The land is distributed unevenly because each community grows various fruits and vegetables and has rice fields. People prefer to plant around their houses and also around the roadside.

Simatupang Village ecotourism has potential for its abundant natural products. The natural products of Simatupang Village can be one of the ecotourism areas that attracts visitors. Natural products in the form of coffee, durian, corn, chocolate, candlenuts, onions,

can be managed well which will generate income for local communities. The existing natural products can become typical products and characteristics of Simatupang Village. However, local people do not understand how to manage natural products properly, and choose to export them out of the village.

The many historical sites with unique stories and strong culture can also be one of the ecotourism potentials in Simatupang Village. Introducing culture to tourists can make existing culture more widely known. However, several historical sites in Simatupang Village are not well maintained and one of them is the Togatorop Monument. The large number of wild plants growing tall means that access to the Togatorop Monument historical site is closed.

The Togatorop Monument is a monument that symbolizes one of the descendants or children of the Simatupang clan. This monument was built in 1973 and inaugurated in 1978. The Togatorop monument has 13 undur-undur or circles which means that when this monument was built, the oldest Togatorop clan was the 13th generation. At the bottom there is a large circle which means the success of the children of the Togatorop clan. At the very top of the monument there is a gold image called "Sipolpon Gold" which was given to a girl named Nababan.



**Figure 1.** Accessibility to Togatorop Monument in Simatupang Village  
Source: Researcher, 2024

Sustainable tourism development is very important for long-term tourism development. Sustainable tourism is an important factor in building a tourist destination that prioritizes the potential of the environment and local communities. Sustainable tourism is also believed to be the key to tourism in the future. Sustainable tourism development is intended so that there is no longer any development of tourist destinations that only focuses on attracting as many visitors as possible, without taking into account the impacts caused.

With sustainable tourism, Simatupang Village can maintain natural conditions well and can reduce the negative impact of development that damages the surrounding nature and can improve the welfare of the community. Local communities can also participate in village development based on sustainable tourism. People can start to open their own businesses that can benefit the village and themselves. With sustainable tourism, the culture inherent in Simatupang Village can be introduced to tourists.

Sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village has great potential but there is a lack of good management from village officials and the local community. Tourism will not run well if there is a lack of support, especially from the community. The existing natural conditions are poorly maintained and the community still has minimal knowledge about tourism.

According to the research results and SWOT matrix analysis above, it can be seen that the most appropriate ecotourism concept in Simatupang Village is nature conservation with nature conservation efforts. Nature conservation is the preservation of nature and the environment to maintain the survival of flora and fauna in order to maintain natural ecosystems.

By conserving nature, the environment, culture and village customs can be well maintained. A well-maintained and maintained environment can provide income for the community through ecotourism. The concept of ecotourism with nature conservation can

develop tourist destinations that are environmentally friendly. The potential for natural and cultural resources can generate economic benefits while maintaining, caring for and preserving the environment.

Ecotourism in Simatupang Village has high potential, especially for natural resources, but there is a lack of good management by the local community and village officials. Based on the SWOT matrix analysis, the weakness is that the community still has minimal knowledge about tourism and how to utilize and process natural products. People prefer to sell raw or unprocessed natural products outside the village. It should be better for people to make processed products first that will have high value. For example, rice that has been processed into branded rice products, packaged coffee that is ready to be brewed, palm sugar, durian fruit or chocolate in the form of processed cakes, and many more.

The historical site with its unique story and culture attached to Simatupang Village is interesting enough to be introduced to tourists as an ecotourism potential. The monuments in Simatupang Village have a unique shape and have stories and are also full of meaning. However, there is a lack of maintenance at several historical sites in Simatupang Village. Several historical sites are covered by wild plants, there is a lot of rubbish around the monument and there are no rubbish bins available, there is community agricultural land around the monument and there are no road signs to the historical site.

One of them is at the Togatorop Monument. Access to the Togatorop Monument in the form of a ladder is not visible because it is covered with many wild plants that grow in abundance and height around the stairs leading to the monument and there are no signs leading to the monument. Around the monument there is also a lot of rubbish strewn about and there are no trash bins available and there are also corn farming fields surrounding the monument.



**Figure 2.** Corn farming land around the Togatorop Monument  
Source: Researcher, 2024

According to the research results above, it can be seen that the development of sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village is classified as poor. This is due to a lack of support from the local community. Apart from that, local governments also have their respective responsibilities in accordance with the principle that sustainable tourism development must also pay attention to negative impacts that may arise. Sustainable tourism development must provide guidelines so that it can be enjoyed optimally by all parties and negative impacts can also be minimized.

The community still lacks participation in development and also lacks knowledge about tourism. Sustainable tourism is tourism that has a long-term impact, both on the environment, social, cultural and economic aspects of local communities. Sustainable tourism must make optimal use of existing environmental resources because they are key in developing tourism, maintaining the process and helping to preserve natural resources and respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of the community, preserving the culture and traditional values that were built, providing a viable long-term economy. In accordance with the meaning of sustainable tourism, it would be better for local governments and local communities to further optimize all valuable potential both economically and at historical sites, such as better maintaining and advancing existing historical sites.

With natural products, people can make special products or foods that can become a characteristic of the village. Natural products such as corn can be a food product that is quite popular, such as Corn Milk Cheese or better known as JASUKE. There are many other potential natural products that have not been optimized. This product can become one of the MSMEs in Simatupang Village which has the potential to improve the economy of Simatupang Village and also the village community.



Figure 3. Jasuke as a Product of Simatupang Village  
Source: Researcher, 2024

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the concept of ecotourism in Simatupang Village is nature conservation with nature conservation efforts that utilize the village environment and local culture as ecotourism that can improve the welfare of the community. The development of sustainable tourism in Simatupang Village has great potential with natural and cultural resources but is not managed well by village officials and the local community.

It is hoped that village officials and the entire Simatupang Village community will be able to better protect and care for the village environment and historical sites that have the potential for ecotourism and learn how to process natural products. It is hoped that Simatupang Village officials will develop tourism in the village so that it becomes better sustainable tourism by involving the community more.

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