

ANALYSIS OF THE ATTRACTIVENESS AND SATISFACTION OF VISITORS TO KASANG KULIM ZOO AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT: Tourism is a strategic sector that contributes significantly to economic growth and regional development, but the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on tourism activities, including educational and conservation-based tourist destinations. This study aims to analyze the tourist attraction and visitor satisfaction at Kasang Kulim Zoo (KKZ), Kampar Regency, Riau Province, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results show that the appeal of KKZ is shaped by the diversity of its animal collection, educational and conservation values, natural environment, and family tourism experiences. Post-pandemic visitor satisfaction is influenced by the quality of facilities, cleanliness, comfort, safety, and the alignment between expectations and tourism experiences. Although visitor numbers show a recovery trend, challenges remain in terms of accessibility and facility management. Additionally, the presence of KKZ has a positive impact on the economic recovery of local MSMEs, making sustainable tourism management key to post-pandemic destination development.

Keywords: *Tourist Attractions, Visitor Satisfaction, Kasang Kulim Zoo*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a strategic sector that plays an important role in driving national and global economic growth. Its contribution is not only seen in increased community income and foreign exchange earnings, but also in job creation and regional development. However, unsustainable tourism development has the potential to cause negative impacts on the environment, such as ecosystem degradation and damage to natural habitats, which are the main attractions of tourist destinations [1-3].

Natural beauty and the uniqueness of destinations are the main factors that encourage tourists to travel. On the other hand, increased tourism activity also increases pressure on the environment and natural resources. Therefore, the concept of sustainable tourism is an important foundation in the development of modern tourist destinations, emphasizing a balance between economic benefits, environmental sustainability, and the social welfare of local communities [4-6].

Indonesia's tourism sector showed significant growth before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has had a major impact on this sector globally [4-8]. Policies restricting mobility, closing tourist destinations, and limiting public activities have had a direct impact on the decline in tourist visits and the income of tourism businesses [9][10].

All tourism subsectors, including travel, hospitality, transportation, and educational tourist destinations such as zoos [11][12]. One of the affected destinations is Kasang Kulim Zoo in Kampar Regency, Riau Province. During the pandemic, this destination experienced a significant decline in visitor numbers and revenue. This situation has affected not only the management, but also the surrounding community whose livelihoods depend on tourism activities. With the easing of restrictions and the improvement in public health, Kasang Kulim Zoo is beginning to show signs of recovery, marked by an increase in tourist visits, in line with the global

trend of post-pandemic tourism recovery [13][14].

The recovery of the tourism sector after the pandemic is not only measured by the increase in the number of visits, but also by the quality of the tourist experience felt by visitors. Visitor satisfaction is an important indicator of the success of destination management because it influences the intention to return and word-of-mouth recommendations [6][15-17]. Previous studies have shown that visitor satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including tourist attractions, service quality, facilities, and the condition of the destination environment [17-18]. After the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist behavior has changed significantly. Hygiene, safety, comfort, and the implementation of health protocols have become key considerations in determining travel destinations [15][19-20]. At educational tourist destinations such as zoos, visitor satisfaction is also influenced by educational value, wildlife conservation efforts, and perceptions of animal welfare and the destination's environment [21-24]. This shows that the appeal of zoos as tourist destinations is not only recreational but also educational and conservationist.

Although various studies have discussed visitor satisfaction and tourist attraction, studies that specifically examine the relationship between these two variables in educational tourist destinations after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in local zoos, are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of tourist attraction on visitor satisfaction at Kasang Kulim Zoo after the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of post-pandemic tourism studies, as well as practically to destination managers in formulating strategies to improve the quality of management and sustainability of conservation-based tourism.

2. METHODS

This study was conducted at Kasang Kulim Zoo, located in Siak Hulu District, Kampar Regency, Riau Province. The research location was selected purposively because Kasang Kulim Zoo is one of the largest educational and wildlife conservation destinations in Riau Province and plays a strategic role in the development of regional tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this destination shows an interesting dynamic between wildlife conservation efforts and tourism activities involving human interaction with the natural environment, making it relevant to study in the context of sustainable tourism after the pandemic [21][23]. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive

method. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the perceptions, experiences, and meanings constructed by visitors and stakeholders regarding tourist attractions and visitor satisfaction at the research location. This approach allows researchers to explore social and environmental phenomena in a natural context [1][11][19][24]. The descriptive method is used to describe the actual conditions of tourist attractions and visitor satisfaction after the pandemic without manipulating variables [2][4][25]. Research informants included the manager of Kasang Kulim Zoo, officials from the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA), visitors, and local communities directly or indirectly involved in tourism activities in the area. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that they had knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the management and utilization of tourist destinations [12][24].

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis. The analysis process took place simultaneously from the data collection stage to the writing of the research results. Data analysis was carried out in three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing [9]. In the data reduction stage, researchers select and focus on data relevant to the research objectives. The data presentation stage is carried out by compiling information in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative to describe the conditions and dynamics of tourist attractions and visitor satisfaction. Next, the conclusion drawing stage is carried out by interpreting the meaning of the data to understand the relationship between tourist attractions and visitor satisfaction in the context of the post-COVID-19 pandemic [5][10]. The analysis was conducted contextually and holistically by placing the researcher as the main instrument of the research. The direct involvement of researchers in the field is important to understand the phenomenon of tourism naturally and holistically, especially in complex social and environmental studies such as conservation-based tourism [3][22].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The history of Kasang Kulim Zoo reflects the development of a tourist destination based on a love of animals and concern for conservation. Since its inauguration in the early 1990s, KKZ has grown to become the only zoo in Riau Province that serves a dual function as a center for recreation, education, and animal conservation. This identity is an important asset in building sustainable tourist appeal [1][3][19][21]. The diversity of its animal collection, the size of its

area, and its status as an official conservation institution reinforce the destination's authenticity. International literature confirms that conservation and education-based tourist destinations have become increasingly attractive after the pandemic, as tourists tend to seek meaningful, safe, and educational experiences, especially for family vacations [2][7]. Thus, the history and conservation character of KKZ play an important role in building positive perceptions and increasing tourist interest.

The availability of accommodation and health facilities around the KKZ contributes positively to the comfort of tourists, especially visitors from outside the region. The proximity of lodging and health services has been shown to improve the quality of the tourism experience and a sense of security after the pandemic [4][20]. However, the limited public transportation to the KKZ area is a major obstacle in destination development. The reliance on private vehicles and online transportation shows that accessibility is not yet fully inclusive. These findings are in line with international research that confirms that transportation accessibility is a key component of the tourism system that influences visitation decisions and the equitable distribution of economic benefits [24-25]. Therefore, improving accessibility is a strategic factor in strengthening visitor appeal and satisfaction in a sustainable manner.

Tourist facilities at Kasang Kulim Zoo, such as playgrounds, worship facilities, toilets, and animal education areas, are generally capable of supporting family tourism activities. Children's rides and direct interaction with animals are the elements most appreciated by visitors because they provide both recreational and educational experiences [11-12][22]. However, field findings also show that visitors have negative perceptions regarding the cleanliness and tidiness of the facilities. In the post-pandemic context, the aspects of cleanliness and environmental comfort are crucial factors because they are directly related to perceptions of health risks [15][20]. Therefore, the quality of facility management is a major determinant in maintaining visitor satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits.

Post-COVID-19 Pandemic

The decline in visitor numbers during the pandemic to around 50 percent reflects the significant impact of the global health crisis on the tourism sector [7-8]. Restrictions on activities and public concerns about health risks were the main factors behind this decline. Conversely, the increase in visitor numbers after the pandemic, especially on weekends and holidays, indicates a

recovery in public confidence in tourism activities. Visitor satisfaction after the pandemic is not only influenced by entertainment aspects, but also by a sense of safety, comfort, and the alignment between expectations and actual experiences [10][12]. These findings indicate that KKZ is able to adapt to changes in tourist preferences after the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the sustainability of MSMEs around KKZ. The decline in the number of visitors has directly caused a decline in income and forced some businesses to temporarily cease operations, as has also happened in other tourist destinations globally [12][23]. The recovery of KKZ tourism activities after the pandemic has had a positive impact on the economic revival of MSMEs. The increase in the number of visitors has directly contributed to an increase in the income of local businesses, strengthening the role of tourism as an economic multiplier for the community's economy [2][19]. Thus, the sustainability of KKZ tourism has strategic implications for local economic resilience.

Visitor perceptions of KKZ are generally positive, particularly as a family and educational tourist destination. Direct interaction with animals provides contextual learning experiences that support informal education and raise awareness of conservation from an early age [6][17][21]. However, visitor criticism regarding cleanliness and facility management indicates room for improvement. Perceptions of destination quality have been shown to directly influence satisfaction and intention to revisit [6][17]. Therefore, improving the physical and managerial environment is an important prerequisite for the social and economic sustainability of the destination. Overall, the appeal of Kasang Kulim Zoo after the COVID-19 pandemic is built on a combination of animal diversity, educational value, natural environment, and family tourism experiences. Visitor satisfaction has increased along with the recovery of tourism activities, although challenges remain in terms of facilities and accessibility.

This study reinforces previous research findings on the relationship between tourist attraction and visitor satisfaction [6][17][21], while also providing new empirical contributions in the context of post-pandemic conservation-based educational tourism at the local level [13][14]. These findings have theoretical implications for the development of post-pandemic tourism studies as well as practical implications for destination managers, local governments, and communities in building sustainable and inclusive tourism.

4. CONCLUSION

Kasang Kulim Zoo (KKZ) has strong tourist appeal as a conservation and education-based destination in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This appeal is shaped by its long history of management, diverse animal collection, spacious grounds, and its role as a family recreation and environmental learning space. These characteristics reinforce KKZ's image as an educational tourist destination that is relevant to the changing preferences of tourists after the pandemic. The results of the study also reveal that visitor satisfaction at KKZ is influenced by the quality of facilities, comfort, sense of security, and the match between expectations and the tourist experience. Although the available facilities are relatively supportive of family tourism activities, limitations were still found in terms of cleanliness, tidiness, and public transportation accessibility, which have the potential to hinder the optimization of tourist

satisfaction and repeat visits. In the post-pandemic context, these factors have become increasingly important as tourists have become more sensitive to environmental quality and service. In addition, tourism activities in KKZ have been proven to have a significant socioeconomic impact on the surrounding community, especially MSME players who depend on tourist visits for their income. The recovery in visitor numbers after the pandemic has directly contributed to the revival of the local economy and confirmed the strategic role of tourism as a driver of community development. Thus, sustainable, inclusive, and adaptive management of KKZ in response to changes in tourist behavior is key to increasing visitor attraction and satisfaction while strengthening the contribution of tourism to community welfare after the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. REFERENCES

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