

THE INFLUENCE OF TOUR GUIDES ON THE PROGRESS OF TOURISM IN WEST SUMATRA

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Abstract: *West Sumatra is a prominent tourist destination in Indonesia, known for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. This study investigates the role of tour guides in enhancing tourist satisfaction and advancing tourism development in the region. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving surveys with 200 tourists and interviews with 20 professional tour guides. The results indicate high tourist satisfaction levels, with 91% expressing overall satisfaction and 89% appreciating the quality of cultural information. However, challenges such as language barriers, lack of training, and limited technological access were identified as significant issues faced by tour guides. Key tourism indicators, including tourist arrivals, hotel occupancy rates, and average stay durations, showed steady growth from 2021 to 2024, highlighting the positive impact of tour guide services. The study underscores the need for targeted professional development, improved promotional strategies, and technological integration to address these challenges and sustain tourism growth. Recommendations for future research and practical strategies to enhance the role of tour guides are provided.*

Keywords: *Tourist Satisfaction, Tour Guides, Tourism Development, Cultural Heritage, West Sumatra*

A. Introduction

West Sumatra, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, has experienced significant fluctuations in tourism metrics in 2024. In January, the province welcomed 4,689 foreign tourists through Minangkabau International Airport, with a hotel occupancy rate of 33.56% and an average stay of 1.21 days (Payakumbuhkota, 2024). By June, arrivals increased to 4,631, occupancy rose to 42.81%, and the average stay slightly decreased to 1.26 days (Limapuluhkotakab, 2024). Notably, foreign tourist visits peaked in September at 8,232, with a hotel occupancy of 48.34% and an average stay of 1.34 nights (Sawahluntokota, 2024).

Tour guides enhance tourists' experiences by providing insightful information and fostering cultural understanding. Their contributions are crucial in promoting sustainable tourism practices and ensuring visitor satisfaction (Güzel et al., 2020). Despite the evident importance of tour guides, challenges persist in the tourism sector of West Sumatra. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited guide training opportunities, and environmental concerns pose significant obstacles to sustainable tourism development (Prakash & Chowdhary, 2010).

This study aims to examine the influence of tour guides on the progression of tourism in West Sumatra. The objectives are:

1. To assess the role of tour guides in enhancing tourist satisfaction and promoting sustainable tourism practices.
2. To identify the challenges tour guides face in West Sumatra's tourism industry.
3. To provide recommendations for improving the effectiveness of tour guides in contributing to the region's tourism development.

Understanding the impact of tour guides is essential for formulating strategies that leverage their potential to boost West Sumatra's tourism sector. By addressing existing challenges and enhancing the capabilities of tour guides, the province can better position itself as a premier tourist destination.

Literature Review

Tour guides play a pivotal role in tourism, acting as intermediaries between destinations and visitors. Their responsibilities encompass providing information, ensuring safety, and enhancing the tourist experience. According to a study by Bayram et al. (2022), tour guides significantly contribute to the recovery and development of cultural tourism, especially in the post-COVID-19 period. Various factors influence the effectiveness of tour guides, including their skills, knowledge, and the challenges they encounter. Ferreira and Villares (2023) highlight that tour guides face new challenges in literary tourism, necessitating continuous adaptation and training to meet evolving tourist expectations.

Furthermore, integrating technology into tourism presents opportunities and challenges for tour guides. Jayawardena et al. (2022) discuss the complexities of technology adoption in the Asian tourism industry, emphasizing the need for tour guides to adapt to technological advancements to remain effective. Stakeholder expectations also play a crucial role in shaping the functions of tour guides. Shailja Sharma and Nimit Chowdhary (2014) noted that tour guides must liaise closely with various stakeholders across the tourism industry, balancing the expectations of tourists, employers, and regulatory bodies.

In summary, the literature underscores the multifaceted role of tour guides in tourism development, the challenges they face due to evolving tourist demands and technological advancements, and the importance of continuous professional development to meet stakeholder expectations.

B. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to comprehensively assess the influence of tour guides on the progression of tourism in West Sumatra. The mixed-methods approach is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena by combining numerical data and contextual insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The mixed-methods design ensures a holistic understanding of the research problem and provides both breadth and depth in the analysis (Bryman, 2016).

Research Design

The mixed-methods design involves concurrently collecting quantitative and qualitative data to validate findings through triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design is particularly effective in tourism research as it captures statistical trends and rich, descriptive insights from participants (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection

1. A structured survey was administered to 200 tourists who visited West Sumatra between January and June 2024. The survey included Likert-scale questions to assess tourist satisfaction, perceptions of cultural understanding, and overall experience with tour guides.
2. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 professional tour guides in West Sumatra. These semi-structured interviews explored their roles, challenges, and recommendations for improving tourism services. The interviews provided nuanced insights into the daily practices and challenges tour guides face (Flick, 2018).

Population and Sampling

For this study, the target population for the quantitative component was comprised of international and domestic tourists who engaged with tour guides. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with recent experience interacting with tour guides, ensuring data

relevance (Babbie, 1969). For the qualitative component, experienced tour guides with a minimum of five years in the industry were selected, allowing for rich and detailed responses (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

1. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of tourist satisfaction, while regression analysis examined the relationship between guide services and overall experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
2. Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts, following the framework of (Bryman, 2016). Data was coded to identify recurring themes, providing deeper insight into the challenges and contributions of tour guides (Flick, 2018).

This study summarizes the sequential steps of its methodology in Figure 1, which visually represents the research process from design to data analysis.

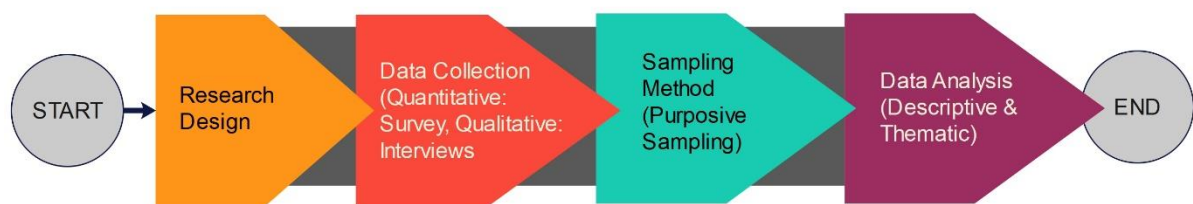


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

By employing this comprehensive methodology, the study aims to provide robust insights into the pivotal role of tour guides in enhancing tourist experiences and advancing the tourism sector in West Sumatra.

C. Results and Discussion

The tourist satisfaction survey revealed positive feedback across multiple dimensions of tour guide services, as shown in Figure 2. A significant majority of respondents (91%) reported satisfaction with the overall services provided by tour guides. Additionally, 89% appreciated the quality of cultural information, while 85% expressed a willingness to revisit the region. Storytelling, an essential element of engaging tourists, received a high rating of 88%. These results highlight the important role of tour guides in enhancing the overall travel experience and promoting cultural understanding.

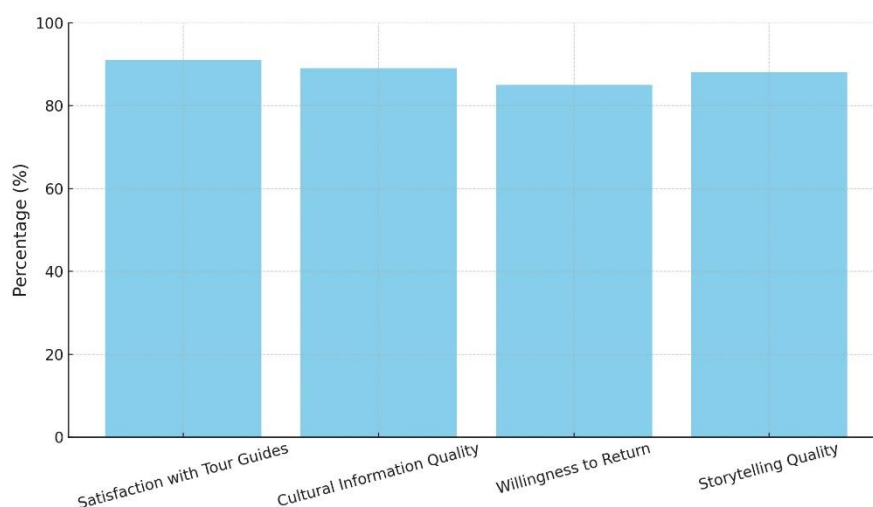


Figure 2. Tourist Satisfaction Survey Results

Tour guides in West Sumatra face various challenges, as depicted in Figure 3. The most pressing issue identified was the lack of training opportunities (33.3%), followed by insufficient destination promotion (27.8%). Language barriers (22.2%) and limited access to

technology (16.7%) were also significant challenges. These findings suggest a need for targeted interventions to support tour guides, such as professional development programs and increased investment in technological resources.

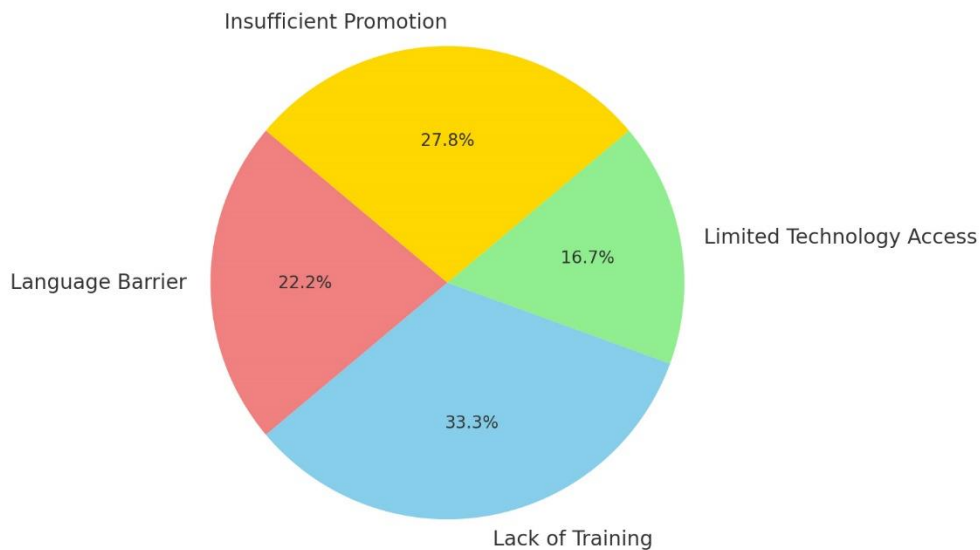


Figure 3. Challenges Faced by Tour Guides

The profiles of tour guides in West Sumatra, illustrated in Figure 4, reveal a well-qualified workforce. Fifty percent of tour guides have completed high school, 40% hold a bachelor's degree, and 10% possess a master's degree. Additionally, 80% of the guides are professionally certified. Despite this strong foundation, there is room for further training to meet international tourists' needs and keep pace with global tourism trends.

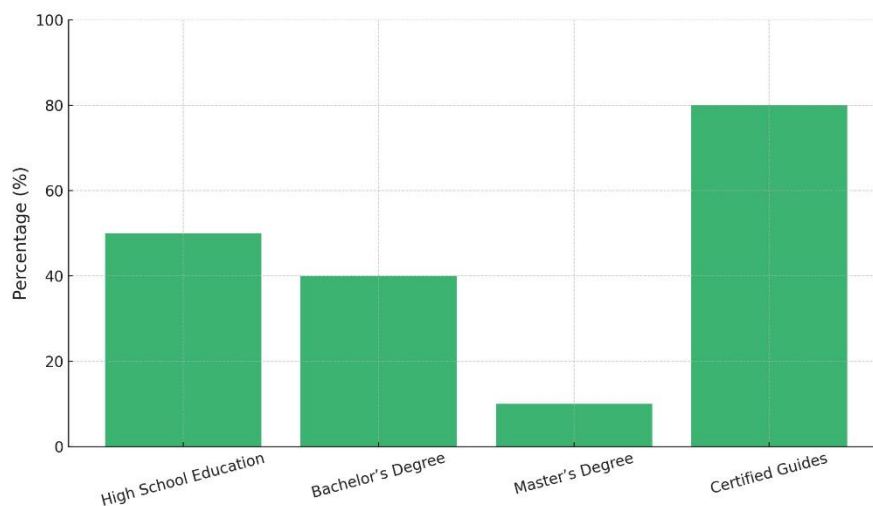


Figure 4. Tour Guide Profiles in West Sumatra

Figure 5 highlights tourists' perceptions of tour guides in four key areas: understanding local culture, friendliness, clarity of information, and enhancing the travel experience. The highest rating (92%) was for the guides' friendly attitude, followed by their ability to convey precise information (89%) and enhance overall travel experiences (87%). These positive perceptions reflect the effectiveness of tour guides in fostering memorable and culturally enriching visits.

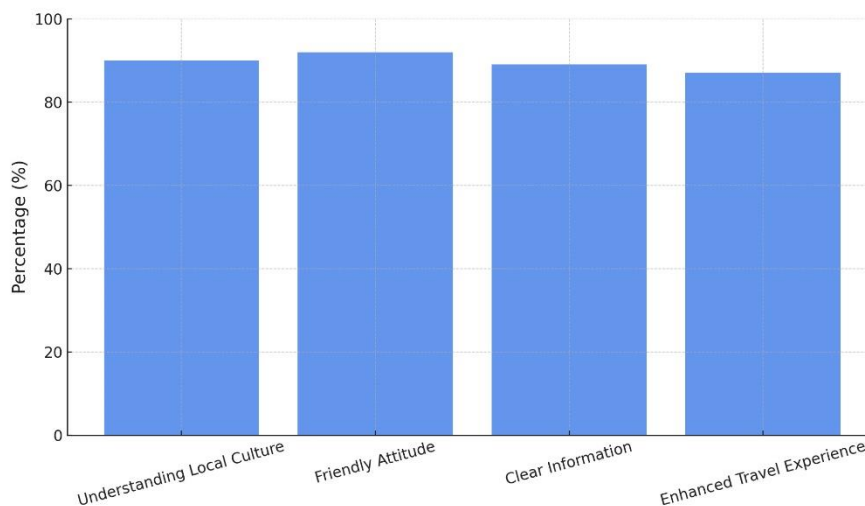


Figure 5. Tourist Perceptions of Tour Guides

The growth of West Sumatra's tourism sector is evident in the key indicators presented in Figure 6. Tourist arrivals increased from 320,000 in 2021 to 470,000 in 2024, while hotel occupancy rates rose from 34.2% to 46.5%. The average length of stay also increased from 3.0 days in 2021 to 4.0 days in 2024. These trends suggest that efforts to improve tourism infrastructure and services, including the use of professional tour guides, are contributing to the region's growing popularity among tourists.

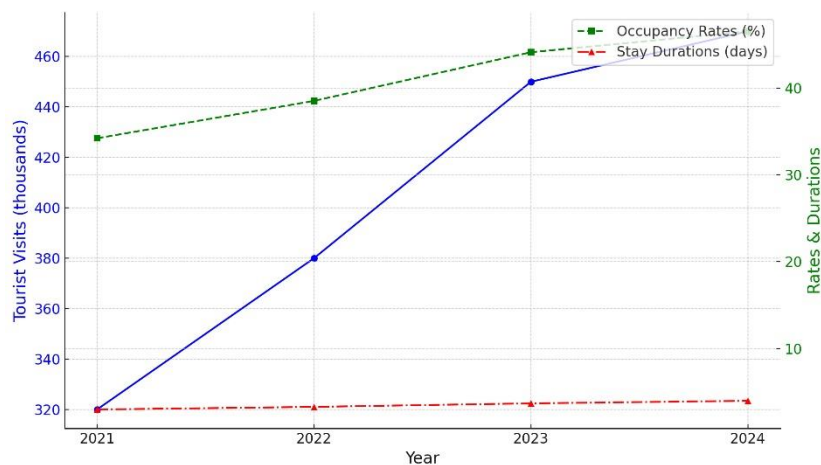


Figure 6. Key Tourism Indicators

Figure 7 provides a comprehensive visualization of fluctuations in tourist visits, hotel occupancy rates, and average stay durations in 2024. Tourist arrivals peaked in September, coinciding with the highest hotel occupancy rate of 48.34% and the most prolonged average stay of 1.34 days. These trends demonstrate the seasonality of tourism in West Sumatra and the importance of strategic planning to manage peak tourist seasons effectively.

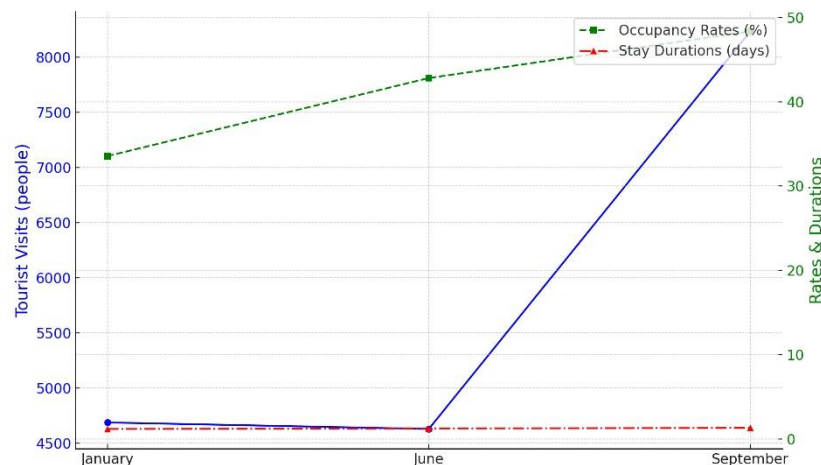


Figure 7. Tourist Visits, Occupancy Rates, and Stay Durations

The results of this study underline the pivotal role of tour guides in tourism growth in West Sumatra. While satisfaction levels are high, addressing the challenges identified—such as the lack of training and language barriers—will be crucial for sustaining and enhancing the tourism experience. Moreover, leveraging the strengths of the current workforce through targeted training and technological integration can further solidify West Sumatra's position as a leading tourist destination.

D. Conclusion

This study highlights the essential role of tour guides in enhancing tourist satisfaction and promoting cultural understanding in West Sumatra. The findings show that tour guides significantly contribute to tourism development by providing high-quality services and enriching the travel experience. High satisfaction levels across all measured dimensions indicate their effectiveness in meeting visitor expectations. The steady growth in key tourism indicators, such as tourist arrivals, hotel occupancy rates, and average stay durations, further underscores their positive impact on the sector. Continuous professional development for tour guides is necessary to address challenges such as language barriers, insufficient training, and limited access to technology. By equipping guides with the required skills and tools, West Sumatra can maintain its competitive edge as a leading cultural and natural destination. Future efforts should prioritize targeted training, technological integration, and enhanced destination promotion through digital campaigns to ensure sustainable tourism growth. While this study offers valuable insights, it is limited to data from 2024 and specific locations within West Sumatra. Future research could explore broader geographical contexts and examine the long-term effects of professional development on tour guide performance and tourism growth.

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