

### "Toilet Matters":

# Qualitative Study About the Importance of Toilet in Decision Making in The Context of Nature-Based Tourism

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#### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose-** This study aims to explore the importance of toilets in decision making from the tourists' perspectives in the context of nature-based tourism in Indonesia. Various studies suggest that facilities are an important thing to consider in tourism development. However, prior research is still limited, specifically in discussing toilets as part of the facilities that would affect the tourists' behavior in tourism, which includes the decision making section. **Method-** The research was conducted qualitatively by FGD and in depth interviews to several participants that were selected by purposive sampling method. **Results-** The results of research indicate that among several factors, the age of tourists and expectation of the tourism destinations are the top factors affecting the consideration of toilets as something important in nature-based tourism. The research also indicates that the existence of toilets can also affect tourist behavior in exploring or enjoying nature-based tourism. Moreover, experiences related to toilets as a source of disease for tourists are significantly affecting the tourism decision. **Conclusion-** Toilets have been a significant consideration for certain tourists in making decisions, especially for tourists which are highly concerned with comfort and health. In addition, toilets have a significant role in decision making for several tourists in executing a tourism decision, either for a first visit, how to behave during the tour, revisit, and even to recommend a tourism destination.

Keywords: Toilet, Tourism, Nature-based tourism, Decision making, Tourist behaviour, Indonesia.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is one that is continuously managed by various countries due to its contribution to the country's image and economy, including Indonesia. Various attempts were made by the Indonesian government in order to achieve the established foreign exchange target. One of them is the development strategy of "New Bali" or new tourist destinations in Indonesia which are expected to develop like Bali [14].

In developing tourist destinations, there are several factors that need to be analyzed. One of the frameworks that can be used in the analysis is the 6A framework which includes attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities, and ancillary services [1]. For tourism development in Indonesia, the Indonesian government adopted the framework but only focused on 3A, namely attractions, amenities, and accessibility [2]. Of the three factors, amenity is one of the factors considered important in the development of tourism in Indonesia. Amenity itself can be defined as a variety of

facilities that support tourist activities, such as accommodation, cafes, entertainment, and other facilities, including toilets.

In Indonesia, awareness of the importance of toilets has been discussed several times in the media over the past few years, especially from the government perspective. One of them, on the media Liputan6.com on April 27, 2016, there was a statement "Never dream of Indonesia becoming number one in the world in terms of tourist visits if looking for toilets is still very difficult," said the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs at that time. This point of awareness was then followed up by the government with various efforts to repair its toilets, but until 2020 there is still a statement about the toilet problem from the Minister of Tourism as released in travel.detik.com on April 9, 2020 which stated, "...the basics of tourism are not always infrastructure but cleanliness, like a clean toilet [17]. How can foreign tourists feel at home, when in fact our people (local tourists) are not comfortable..." These statements show that toilets are relevant to be

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investigated in the context of developing tourist destinations.

In a broader context, several countries have realized the importance of toilets in relation to tourism. China has started the toilet revolution project since 2015 and released several studies about its impact on tourism and social development [3]. Other countries, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, have even developed toilet maps that provide information about toilets in the country's territory through government-run websites [15] [16]. Moreover, ASEAN, as the regional group for most of the Southeast Asia countries, has released guidelines on public toilets because toilets are considered important in relation to tourism [4], although this does not necessarily make various tourist destinations have decent toilets.

In the research context, previously there have been studies relating to toilets, but there are only a few studies that specifically discuss the important role of toilets in decision making in the context of nature-based tourism, though toilet in nature-based tourism is interesting to be discussed since in nature-based tourism, the nature itself is the main attraction but also supported by the infrastructure, including toilets. [5].

One of the studies that have been conducted relating to the needs of toilets for tourists shows that one of the factors considered important for families going on vacation, especially those carrying children, is the existence of baby toilet seats [6]. Parents tend to choose accommodation that has baby toilet seats because it is considered as a daily necessity for their children. In addition, there is another study on sustainable tourism discussing the availability of infrastructure and the importance of information and enrichment to local residents in the context of tourism. In the study there is a statement about the existence of minimal toilets in one of the tourist destinations, which should also be one of main concerns in developing infrastructure in the context of tourism [7]. This is also related to the satisfaction of tourists in visiting a destination. Tourist satisfaction is one of the important things as it is related to the sustainability of the destination as a choice for travel. When someone feels satisfied, there might be a revisit and good recommendation about the destination [8].

In more detail, toilets can give a lasting impression or experience for tourists which can influence the decision and in the long run affect the development of a tourist destination. This is related to another research which proves that tourist emotions positively affect the image of a tourist destination; the image affects satisfaction; and that satisfaction influences the decision to revisit and recommend [8]. However, the study did not specifically discuss toilets as objects that influence them.

Based on this background, this research would like to discuss deeply how important the toilet is in the context of nature-based tourism, especially on tourist decision making in the context of nature-based tourism in Indonesia. Nature-based tourism is an interesting object to discuss because until now, the Indonesian government still focuses on developing nature-based tourism destinations. This can be seen from the super priority destinations set by the Indonesian government in 2019. Four of the five tourist destinations designated as super priority destinations (Labuan Bajo, KEK Mandalika, Lake Toba, Likupang) are tourism whose main object is the natural beauty itself. Not infrequently the development of nature-based tourism is not supported by good facilities, including clean and decent toilets.

This research is expected to be useful to provide a new perspective on toilets as one of the important factors in tourism, as well as how toilets can influence tourists' decision making on trips, especially in the context of nature-based tourism in Indonesia. To investigate this, a qualitative approach is used in order to obtain exploratory data, so that in-depth information on this research topic can be obtained.

#### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section highlights several literatures that support the understanding regarding this research.

#### 2.1. Nature-based Tourism in Indonesia

Nature-based tourism can be defined as the tourism in which tourists get pleasure through the existence of the natural environment [9]. The types of natural attractions themselves range from waterfalls, mountains, snowy locations, and so forth. In the context of nature-based tourism in Indonesia, the numbers also vary since this country has more than 17,000 islands that offer different natural characteristics. Many locations have been developed strategically as tourist destinations by several parties, including four of the five tourist destinations designated as super priority destinations for the New Bali strategy launched by the government, which are Lake Toba, Labuan Bajo, Mandalika, and Likupang [18].

#### 2.2. Decision Making in the Tourism Context

In the context of tourism, decision making involves various stages, ranging from determining whether a tourist destination is interesting to visit, whether visiting the tourist destination is satisfying, to whether the tourist destination is worth to be revisited and recommended to others [8]. In this regard, the parties who develop tourist destinations try to build a good image of the tourist destinations. In creating this image, there are some elements (including expectation,



experience, and satisfaction) that influence the image of the destination and also the development of the destination [10]. The image is also related to the results of research from Shama and Nayak (2018) which proves that tourist emotions positively affect the image of a tourist destination; the image affects satisfaction; and that satisfaction influences the decision to revisit and recommend [8].

#### 2.3. Toilets in the Tourism Context

A toilet is an infrastructure that is needed by everyone because it is one of the basic human needs. In the tourism context, the awareness of toilets as a vital object can be seen by the released ASEAN Public Toilet Standard (2016). In this standard, it is stated that public toilets refer to the space used by the public for the needs of urination and defecation. The space consists of one or more closets and/ or squatting pans that are connected or not connected with waste pipes and flushing devices. This standard emphasizes on public toilets that are frequently visited by tourists, both at tourist attractions, transit points, and shopping areas. Under this standard, four main criteria are set about how a toilet should be treated in a tourism destination. The four criteria consist of: 1) design and environmental management system; 2) amenities and facilities (such as the availability of trash equipment, hand-dryers, tissues, soap, mirrors, etc); 3) cleanliness; and 4) safety.

#### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is an empirical type of research based on the reality or experience of participants with an exploratory objective. According to Sekaran and Bougie [11], explorative research is essential when there are facts that are generally known, but in-depth information is needed, so that a theoretical framework can be developed from the results of the studies regarding the phenomena that occur. In relation to this study, the fact that toilets are important in tourism may have become a well-known fact, but this study explores more on how important the toilet is in tourism, especially in the context of how it can influence the decision of tourists in enjoying nature-based tourism in Indonesia. In achieving this objective, a qualitative approach is used in this study.

#### 3.1. Data Collection Methods

In this study, the data collected were sourced from primary and secondary data. Primary data obtained through FGD (focus group discussion) and in depth interviews with several participants. In addition, data collection is also done by collecting secondary data obtained from journals, internet, books and other sources related to the topic. In obtaining primary data, FGD and interviews were conducted from March to

April 2020. The FGD was conducted to filter information from various participants regarding the perception of the importance of toilets in tourism. The FGD process took place involving 4 participants with different characteristics in order to give different perspectives regarding the discussion topic [12]. The FGD lasted for approximately 20 minutes which ended after the researcher obtained several critical points that would be explored deeper through interviews.

The results of the FGD were then processed and evaluated, aiming for determining the questions and types of participants to be interviewed. In the FGD as well as in the interviews, several questions were arranged as a guideline for conducting interviews. The guideline is semi-structured, allowing spontaneous further exploration by researchers during the FGD process and interviews. Overall, the guideline consists of a) general questions about the characteristics of the participant in relation to travel, for example travel companions, budgets, and so on; b) questions related to amenity to check whether the toilet is one thing that is considered important; c) questions to gather information about how important the role of toilets in tourism in influencing the decision making in tourism.

Interviews were conducted with 5 different types of people. These types will be explained further in the next section regarding the method of selecting participants. The interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes per participant. Interviews were conducted face to face through online media due to the physical distancing movement during the data collection period. Although interviews are conducted face-to-face via online media, various methods are used to ensure that the answers obtained by researchers are valid and reliable. One way is to reconfirm the answers given by participants, either through direct conversation during the online face-to-face session or through text (chat), which are based on validity and reliability testing method [13].

#### 3.2. Methods for Selecting Participants

The participants in this study were selected by purposive sampling technique, in which the participants are selected based on certain characteristics determined by researchers [11]. This is done by selecting participants based on prior information that is known from the participant in order to obtain information in accordance with the objectives of this study. There are some criteria determined for the participants to be selected, which is individuals (age 15-64 years) travelling to nature-based destinations in Indonesia at least once in the current year.

In regards to selecting participants with purposive sampling technique, several participants are distinguished based on the special characteristic for each participant, such as participant which is likely to travel



with family, friends, or solo traveling; whether there are children who take part in the trips; whether the person travels for leisure or adventure; whether the person strictly consider toilet as that important or not; as well as other several characteristics. This is done to enrich the information needed to answer the research question.

#### 3.3. Data Processing and Method of Analysis

Categorization is used as the method to process and analyze the data in this study. The participants were categorized based on age, experience of traveling in nature-based tourism, tourism preferences, travel companion, and the existence of certain experiences regarding toilets during their lives. This categorization is needed to see the different types of participants and to analyze whether there are differences between the types of participants with one another. In addition to categorizing participants, categorization of the answers obtained from the results of the FGD and interviews was also carried out. The categorization is done by capturing some of the same answers mentioned from different participants regarding a particular topic. The category is then explained further through a few sentences displayed in the research results section. In processing and analyzing this data, the verbatim or scripts are made from the results of the FGD and interviews. On the other hand, the verbatim or scripts of the FGD and interviews are also used as evidence of the information gathered from the participants.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As explained in the previous section, participants in this study were selected through a purposive sampling method. From the data collection that has been done, selected several participants with the following details shown in Table 4.1.

In grouping the participants, there are several indicators of grouping that are used as can be seen in table 4.1 like age, gender, marital status, and type of travel motivation. These indicators are considered to be able to provide variations during information gathering through the FGD process and interviews. Regarding the information shown in Table 4.1, there are several other indicators that were asked during the interview, for example with whom each participant usually traveled. Of all the participants, most started traveling with friends or family. Then, for the type of natural attractions usually visited, some answers that appear include beaches, mountains, fields with natural scenery, and waterfalls. Furthermore, there are also several types of activities carried out by the participants while enjoying the natural atmosphere, including taking photos, snorkeling, hiking, watching shows (for example the Kecak Dance performance on the beach), and so on.

### 4.1. The Importance of Toilet in Nature-Based Tourism Context

This section explains the importance of toilets as an aspect of tourism, specifically in the context of naturebased tourism in Indonesia. Exploration of information about this matter begins with open-ended questions to the participants by asking what factors are considered important in nature travel. This relates to the preexisting framework of 6A factors that are considered important in developing tourism [1]. From the results of the FGD and interviews, various answers were obtained related to these questions. After categorizing, the majority of participants answered that in nature-based tourism, natural scenery itself becomes a major factor to travel. In addition, the facilities around these natural attractions are also important. In this case, the majority of facilities mentioned as important are accommodation and toilets. From this information, the exploration deepens about how important the toilet is as one of the facilities that support the participants in travelling to nature-based tourism. The following are some statements related to the importance of toilets in the context of nature-based tourism.

"... the cleanliness of a place can be measured by the cleanliness of the toilet. If the toilet is clean, it is possible ... everything else will be clean, too. " - MH

"(toilet is) very important ... because it is one of the basic needs and ... I am also not a typical person who can defecate carelessly ...". - ZN

"... the toilet is a big deciding factor. How can we travel but uncomfortable for using the toilet... meanwhile you will definitely take a shower and go to the toilet. Especially what I have been experiencing... (toilet) with mosquito larvae (causing my family sick with dengue haemorrhagic fever/DHF). Do we still want to live in (travel to) a place like that? " - EP

From the statements of participants, several indicators can be grouped that affect the importance of toilets as presented in Table 4.2. Based on these indicators, the majority of points conveyed is that the age of tourists, especially children or elder people, who come to the natural destination will determine the importance of the toilet which is also related to the decision making in travelling. The importance of toilets for children or elder people is vital because tourists at that age tend to urinate more often. In addition, it tends to be more difficult for them to resist the urge to urinate due to the body organ function. For this reason, toilets are very important for this age group. Other indicators and its relation to the decision making will be explained further in the next section.



## 4.2. Toilet as a factor affecting tourism decision- making

This section discusses the results of research on tourist decisions influenced by toilets in the context of nature-based tourism. Based on the interviews conducted, decisions taken relating to toilets in tourism destinations can be divided based on the time the decision was made, which can be classified to decisions taken before traveling, decisions taken when tourists are visiting a tourist location, and decisions taken after visiting tourist sites.

#### 4.2.1. Decisions before travelling

First, several participants stated that the expected condition of toilets in the destination might influence the decision to travel or not to travel. One of them is caused by a traumatic experience related to toilets in tourist destinations in which the toilet has been a source of disease. For tourists who experienced this, toilets are important to consider in decision making. Moreover, tourists' expectations of the toilet in the destination also relate to the motivation of tourists who will visit, whether including the type of tourists who are looking for leisure or adventure, and the hygienic characteristic of the tourist. Second, another decision taken before traveling in relation to the toilet is with whom someone will go on a trip. In this case, the toilet becomes a consideration because the needs of the toilet are different for each of the characteristics of tourists. These results are identified from the following statements.

"Yes, sure (before visiting I will check the condition of the toilet)... I would ask for a photo (of the toilet)....maybe because there was a trauma (from past tours), my child and husband got dengue fever...so, if staying at home is better... why should I travel?" – EP

- "... if I was invited to travel to the mountain, in my opinion it was extreme ... I already knew (what to expect)... that the toilet facilities are not okay... usually I do not participate". ZN
- "... if you travel by yourself maybe it is fine if the toilet is not that good, but if you go with family, especially if you have small children ...the amenities should be proper". –CHUR

#### 4.2.2. Decisions when visiting travel destinations

This section explains how toilets in tourism destinations affect the decision making process when the tourists come to the destination and have to deal with the condition of the toilet. One of the decisions made is how much time will be spent on exploring a destination. This can be identified from the following statements.

- "... I have visited a natural bath... but we did not even dare to open the toilet because of the smell of urine from the outside...we immediately lost our enthusiasm to be there... even though the place is good..., we better look for another place..." MH
- "... if we are coming to a beach...but there is no toilet on the beach ... we will just spend a little time and not bath on the beach (not even touch the water)..." SP

From these statements, it can be seen that improper toilets or unavailability of toilets make participants not able to enjoy the natural attractions they are visiting, which then influence the decision to spend only a short time at the destination, even though the natural conditions were worth enjoying. Besides that, the toilet conditions can also influence tourist behavior, especially in making decisions about activities to be carried out in the destination. Moreover, it shows that the condition of the toilet can affect the image of a tourist destination which in the future can also affect tourist decisions to revisit the tourist destination or not.

#### 4.2.3. Decisions After Travelling

According to the interviews conducted, several decisions taken after the tour were also identified, including the decision to revisit and recommend tourist destinations to others. In connection with the decision to revisit a tourist destination, there were several statements from participants stating the same thing that a poor toilet experience caused the tourist to decide not to revisit the destination he visited until there was information that the toilets in the destination had been repaired as stated below.

"... I have been to a tourist destination in which access to water is difficult...I can still live, but it was really uncomfortable... so if someone invites me to go to that kind of place again, I will definitely ask about the toilet, if it is not repaired, I will not go there anymore ". - ZN

Then, the next decision identified from the results of the interview is the decision to recommend a tourist destination to others. In terms of recommendations, it was found that tourists tend to provide recommendations about a toilet in a tourist destination if the condition of the toilets is very impressive or extreme, especially if it is extremely poor since it is more memorable.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that in the context of nature-based tourism, toilets are critically important but specific to certain tourists, like tourists who travel with children or the elderly due to their intensity to use the toilet and the need to use a



proper toilet. It supports previous research that emphasized the needs of proper toilets for children [6] and the elderly [14]. In addition, toilets are also important for tourists whose characteristics are hygienic and highly concerned about health, especially for tourists that have experienced trauma regarding diseases caused by unclean toilets. Overall, it can be said that toilets are important in nature-based tourism for tourists who are concerned with comfort and health.

Then, in the context of decision making, it was found that toilets do not only affect the decision to revisit or recommend a natural destination, but also the decision before the tour. Bad experiences with toilets from the past tour, for instance toilets that were once becoming a source of disease, can cause tourists to decide not to travel. Moreover, expectations about toilets at tourist sites can also cause a person not to visit a natural tourist destination. Then, the condition and the existence of toilets can also affect the behavior of tourists in spending time to explore a tourist destination.

To conclude, toilets have a role in influencing tourist behavior and decision making with different levels for each tourist. Although influenced by other factors, such as characteristics, hygiene, age, expectations, the type of destination being addressed, experience, etc., for tourists who are highly concerned with comfort and health aspects, toilets are critically important and highly influence the decision making in travel.

#### 6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

From the research conducted, several things were found that can help various parties in developing tourism, especially nature-based tourism in Indonesia. First, in the case of clean toilet management, some participants stated that toilets in tourism destinations managed by the private sector are better than the one managed by the government or local residents. In analyzing this statement, participants realized the need of certain funds in order to manage a clean and proper toilet, especially to hire someone with specific jobs to clean the toilets. Some participants stated that they are willing to pay a certain price in order to use the proper toilet. Regarding this, management would consider the allocation of expense to the ticket fund offered to the tourist, which has included the allocation to maintain a clean and proper toilet.

Second, the perception of an ideal toilet is different for each person, but there are similarities in several things, such as the need for running water, a clean and dry floor, and the existence of a functioning toilet. In addition, it should be noted also the importance of minimal contact between the fluid from the body of a toilet user with one another. This can be taken into consideration regarding the main things that need to be considered in developing toilets in tourist destinations.

Third, in promoting natural tourist destinations, especially destinations that have just developed its infrastructure, it is also necessary to update the condition of the toilet that have been improved, so that tourists who already have a bad image of the destination (either because of personal experience or recommendations) can have the desire to revisit the destination.

### 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, there are several limitations, one of which is that the perspective was captured from local tourists only, meanwhile there are several other parties with different perspectives about toilets in tourist destinations, such as the government, foreign tourists, managers of tourist sites, etc. It can be captured for future research in developing this research. In addition, research can also be conducted on comparisons between the perspectives of local and foreign tourists. Moreover, data collection in this study was carried out by FGD and interviews after tourists experienced the events in the past. Observation was not made during the time tourists are in the tourist destinations and making decisions related to the toilet at the tourism destination. Although there are some limitations about this study, this research has contributed to enrich the literature for academics in the fields of tourism management.

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