

Utilization of Folklore in Optimizing Ngarai Sianok Tourist Destination in Bukittinggi West Sumatra Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to provide recommendations for folklore branding strategies for the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination in Bukittinggi as an effort to restore tourism in Bukittinggi. The research method used is descriptive qualitative by conducting a literature review of folklore and data relating to the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination as the primary data. Supporting data is in the form of data obtained from scientific articles and popular articles, as well as interviews with relevant subjects, such as the Tourism Office, Tour and Travel Agents, and tour guides. Data analysis uses the storynomics theory by Robert Mcee and Thomas Gerace by focusing on stories as a strategy to improve the economy, in this case through tourist destinations. The results of this study are that folklore has a positive influence to be developed as a branding strategy for Ngarai Sianok tourist destinations. Folklore can become narratives of tour guides and narratives of tourism promotion at this destination. In addition, folklore can be an inspiration for making souvenirs that can improve the community's creative economy around tourist destinations. Utilizing folklore can enhance the reputation of the Ngarai Sianok and become a medium for character education in a fun way. The dissemination of the Legend of Ngarai Sianok can also be an effort to preserve the folklore of Bukittinggi and support the realization of Indonesian tourism based on local wisdom.

Keywords

Branding Strategy; Folklore; Literary Tourism; Storynomics.



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INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector in West Sumatra Province is one of the sectors experiencing a decrease in performance during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, when the Covid-19 virus first entered Indonesia, the tourism sector in West Sumatra still survived, with the number of tourist visits reaching 8,052,742 tourists, with details of 10,874 foreign tourists and 8,041,868 domestic tourists. However, the number of tourist visits was also affected by the pandemic that was felt throughout the world. Based on data from the West Sumatra Central Statistics Office, in 2021, the number of tourist visits in West Sumatra decreased drastically by almost half: 4,785,886 tourists (Badan Pusat Statistik Sumatera Barat, t.t.). These tourists were only domestic tourists, with zero foreign tourists because the international airport was closed to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The decrease in tourist visits impacts the community's economy, especially the people around tourist destinations. This phenomenon is a problem that the tourism sector must face. Until the Covid-19 pandemic ended, the tourism sector was still trying to recover and restore the number of tourist visits. In 2022, the Tourism Office recorded 6,024,169 tourists visiting West Sumatra, with details of 6,020,055 domestic tourists and 4114 foreign tourists (Badan Pusat Statistik Sumatera Barat, t.t.). The Head of the Marketing Strategy Section of the West Sumatra Provincial Tourism Office, Fajri Hidayat, stated that the Tourism Office had yet to reach the target of restoring West Sumatra tourist visits by June 2023. Recovering the number of tourist arrivals is urgently needed to achieve the West Sumatra tourism recovery target. These goals require supporting efforts, such as developing tourist destinations and increasing tourism promotion efforts.

Bukittinggi is one of the areas that contributes the highest number of tourism visits in West Sumatra, making it a leading tourist destination. In 2020, domestic tourists visiting the City of Bukittinggi reached 1,471,542 tourists. However, in 2021, this number has dropped drastically by half due to the Covid-19 pandemic to 748,074 tourists only (Badan Pusat Statistik Sumatera Barat, t.t.). This decrease in tourist visits is a problem for the City of Bukittinggi, where most people depend on tourism activities. Most people trade to meet their living needs, and the decrease in tourists also reduces the number of consumers, which also impacts the income of the people of Bukittinggi City. Tourism activities affect the community's economy, especially those around tourist destinations.

One of the tourist destinations affected by the decline in tourist visits to Bukittinggi is Ngarai Sianok. Ngarai Sianok is located in Panorama Park, also the Lobang Jepang entrance. Ngarai Sianok is one of the leading tourist destinations in Bukittinggi, but other tourist destinations related to

history are more interesting. Sianok Canyon is known only as a tourist destination with beautiful views without any story behind it.

One strategy that can be an effort to recover tourism is using a branding strategy with stories. The use of stories to improve the economy is known as Storynomics. The Storynomics theory by (McKee & Gerace, 2018) focuses on using stories (narratives) for economic gain. In the tourism context, Storynomics is used to construct stories about cultural and tourism assets into narratives of living culture as the pulse of tourist destinations. The use of stories for tourism development is a new direction from the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Sukmadewi, 2021). Storynomics can be a foundation for branding Indonesian tourism with an exciting story so that it becomes an attractive tourist destination.

The use of stories in the tourism sector can use literary works related to tourist destinations so that tourism recovery efforts can use a tourism literature approach. Tourism literature is an interdisciplinary field between literature and tourism. Tourism literature studies are based on two things: tourism studies make literature a tourist attraction, and literary studies related to tourism are carried out by borrowing tourism as a supporting science (Putra, 2019). Tourism literature is reciprocal; tourism inspires the writing of literary works; conversely, literary works can promote tourism. This mutualistic relationship between literature and tourism can help as an effort to increase tourism promotion for the recovery of the tourism sector, especially in West Sumatra.

West Sumatra is a province rich in oral literature, especially folklore. Almost all regions in the province have their own stories, so these stories can help develop each region. Folklore functions as a character, identity, and symbol of the community and the area inhabited by that community (Kartodirdjo, 1986). Therefore, folklore can become an identity because it is attached to a particular place, including tourist destinations related to folklore. This function allows folklore to develop into a tourism branding strategy to advance the destination.

Folklore in tourist destinations has been used in Indonesia, such as Tangkuban Parahu in West Java. The research entitled *Storynomics Tourism as an Effective Marketing Strategy on Tourism Destination (Case Study on Tangkuban Parahu, West Java-Indonesia)*, written by (Kartika & Riana, 2020), explains how Sangkuriang folklore becomes the branding of the Tangkuban Parahu tourist destination. The use of Storynomics theory in this research makes this research one of the studies that provide the latest studies in the field of tourism literature. Furthermore, *Analisis SWOT terhadap Storynomics Tourism sebagai Strategi Promosi Pariwisata (Studi Kasus Kawasan Wisata Kali Cisadane, Kota*

Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia) carried out by (Kartini, 2021); and *Storynomics Tourism: Kualitas Wisata Desa Tenganan Pegringsingan* which was studied by (Sukmadewi, 2021) are researches that are also contributed on the relationship between folklore and tourist destinations.

These studies shift from the image of folklore, which only contains moral messages synonymous with moral education, to something that can develop and is related to economic value (Sari, 2022a). Folklore can be unique to a destination and become the attraction of that destination. The uniqueness of folklore gives folklore the power to promote tourist destinations, impacting the community's creative economy (Arini, 2022). The promotion of tourist destinations will have a good impact on the community and regional income.

West Sumatra has a track record of success in developing tourist destinations based on folklore. The legend of Malin Kundang was popular even at the national and international levels, which later became the main attraction for Air Manis Beach. West Sumatra's wealth in folklore and the closeness of the Minangkabau people to their folklore makes folklore an opportunity to be developed as a tourism branding strategy in other tourist destinations in West Sumatra. Therefore, this study aims to recommend folklore related to the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination in Bukittinggi as the next tourist destination that can be utilized in promoting this tourist destination. Apart from that, it is hoped that this research can support tourism development and the creative economy based on local wisdom.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method that begins with a literature review of folklore related to the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination in Bukittinggi City, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Data collection also comes from scientific articles and popular articles related to the research object. Research is also carried out by observing tourist destinations and interviewing relevant subjects, such as the Tourism Office, tour and travel business owners, and tour guides in this tourist destination to enrich research data.

At the data processing stage, the research uses a tourism literature approach and Storynomics theory to analyze the data. At this stage, the research analyzes the relationship between folklore and tourist destinations and what opportunities can develop in optimizing tourism and the creative economy of society, especially communities around tourist destinations. Data processing also highlights how folklore can be the center of tourism promotion, as the Storynomics theory

emphasizes "the story-centric business that drives fiscal results" (McKee & Gerace, 2018). This theory explains that creating exciting stories can make consumers make purchasing decisions in the business world. The preparation of the story must also be planned to produce an orderly narrative that can amaze potential buyers (McKee & Gerace, 2018). At the data presentation stage, folklore must be written excitingly and pay attention to every detail concerning the tourist destination. So, stories can become an identity that impresses tourists because of their uniqueness. The preparation of the story is also refined with supporting data obtained from information related to folklore and tourist destinations, which in this case is Ngarai Sianok.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Bukittinggi City is one of the historical cities in West Sumatra. This city even has its history in the state building of Indonesia. From 1948 to 1949, Bukittinggi City was the capital of Indonesia (Damayanti, 2022). One of Indonesia's proclaimers, Bung Hatta, was also born in this city. This city, which is very close to history, certainly has traces that can still be seen today, such as *Jam Gadang* (The Clock Tower), Bung Hatta House, and *Lobang Jepang*. These two places have now become the leading tourist destinations of the City of Bukittinggi, so this city has become identical with historical tourism. Therefore, other tourist attractions in Bukittinggi are less popular and receive less attention from tourists visiting the city. Other tourist destinations are under the shadow of the big names *Jam Gadang* and *Lobang Jepang*. Apart from historical tourism, Bukittinggi can also develop with cultural tourism and literary tourism.

Table 1. Tourist Destination in Bukittinggi

No	Tourist Destination	Type of Tourist Destination
1	Jam Gadang	Historical Tourism
2	Lobang Jepang	Historical Tourism
3	Bung Hatta Birthplace Museum	Historical Tourism
4	Fort De Kock	Historical Tourism
5	Ngarai Sianok	Recreational Tourism (Potential for Literary Tourism)

Lack of tourist information on cultural and literary works can be a factor causing tourist destinations related to culture and literature not to develop in the City of Bukittinggi. Many people need to learn the folklore of Bukittinggi. Only some older people still remember the folklore. The City of Bukittinggi also has fascinating folklore, like other areas in West Sumatra. Folklore is a story

that lives among the people, so everyone knows the story (Djamaris, 2001). Like other oral literature, folklore is passed down from generation to generation. The lack of interest of the younger generation in folklore is a new challenge that the people of Bukittinggi City must face.

Unlike the folklore from Padang City, the Legend of Malin Kundang, which was previously popular, the folklore of Bukittinggi City has yet to be widely known to the broader public. The written and digital documentation by the Legend of Malin Kundang makes this folklore easier to spread. The transfer of the Malin Kundang Legend means this story is still alive among the people. Apart from that, the factor that has the most impact on preserving the Malin Kundang Legend is how this story has become the identity of the Air Manis Beach tourist destination in Padang City. The condition of Bukittinggi folklore, which still needs to be developed as the Malin Kundang Legend, makes this story less popular. The effort to brand folklore in tourist destinations can be the start of preserving the folklore of Bukittinggi City as a tourist city. The realization of literary tourism can be the most potential effort because literary tourism can increase the growth of tourist visits (O'Connor & Kim, 2014).

Discussion

The use of folklore in tourist destinations has a back-and-forth relationship. Apart from creating literary works inspired by tourist attractions, tourist attractions can also be inspired by literary works. Literature can promote tourist destinations, and tourism can preserve literature. This relationship makes literature a branding strategy for tourist destinations to increase tourism promotion. Adapting stories from regions in Indonesia can help introduce the culture of that region. Folklore can be a tool with great potential to reach this goal.

One of the tourist destinations in the City of Bukittinggi, which has folklore attached to tourist destinations, is the Ngarai Sianok. Folklore consists of three types: legends, myths, and fairy tales (Bascom, 2006). At the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination, a legend has developed in the community around the canyon. The folklore is the Legend of Ngarai Sianok (*Legenda Ngarai Sianok*). A legend is a folk tale considered to have happened with the addition of elements of magic and supernatural powers from its characters (Dananjaya, 2015). The elements in legends attract story listeners because people are very interested in mysteries and things that do not make sense. The location of the Ngarai Sianok is in the Bukittinggi Panorama Park and has the same yard as *Lobang Jepang*.

The story's composition is crucial in achieving the goal of excellent listeners, especially to make Ngarai Sianok stand out so that it is no longer hidden in the shadow of the Lobang Jepang. The concept of Storynomics, which focuses on stories as a promotional medium, really supports the effort to brand folklore for this Ngarai Sianok tourist destination. Existing legends can be composed into interesting stories by showing the beautiful nature of these tourist destinations. The advantage of this destination is that the Legend of Ngarai Sianok focuses on how the canyon was formed so that tourists will get two exciting things: a beautiful landscape and an attractive, informative story. In addition, the story in the legend also conveys information that supports tourist destinations because of these elements of reality, such as streams of water that flow as a source of livelihood for the people around the canyon, medicinal plants that grow around the streams, and beautiful landscapes that unify the community (Sari, 2022b).

This research shows two versions of the Legend of Ngarai Sianok: the extended version of the story and the short version. Considering the condition of tourists with limited time, a short version of the story was chosen to be implemented in this tourist destination. This abridged version of the story can be a narrative for a tour guide in conveying information about the Ngarai Sianok. The use of folklore as a tourist guide's narrative is beneficial because until now, there has been no narrative explaining Ngarai Sianok. Supporting information can also enrich the tour guide's narrative, such as a brief narrative of the scientific version of the canyon formation and the fact that Ngarai Sianok was once one of the images on the Indonesian currency, Rp. 1000,- in 1980 and Rp. 2000,- in 2022. Storytelling is essential in guiding tours because tourists want unique experiences (Mei dkk., 2018). The tour guide at Bukittinggi Panorama Park, Ivan, stated that the tour guide's narrative focuses on historical tourism, *Lobang Jepang*. Tourists who visit the Bukittinggi Panorama Park only get information regarding *Lobang Jepang* and no information regarding Ngarai Sianok. When tourists want to visit *Lobang Jepang*, they must pass through Ngarai Sianok first. However, tourists only enjoy the views and photo moments without exciting information.

This short version of the Legend of Ngarai Sianok can also be developed into a tourism promotion narrative. As per the Storynomics concept, an exciting story will make an impression on tourists so that tourists will be interested in spreading their travel experiences through word of mouth. In this modern era, tourists can also spread these experiences through social media, significantly impacting the promotional sector. Tourism usually provides memorable and unusual experiences, which moves tourists to immortalize these memories and spread them through social

media (Wood, 2019). The government, especially the Bukittinggi City Tourism Office, can also use social media to promote the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination as has been done by the West Sumatra Provincial Tourism Office, which has previously carried out branding of the *Si Boko* folklore towards tourist destinations in Nagari Sembilan, Padang City, through its official YouTube channel. Promotion through social media has proven to make tourist destinations in Nagari Sembilan one of the leading tourist destinations in the city of Padang. Folklore has the power to give uniqueness to a place. This uniqueness can be an attraction and increase competitiveness between tourist destinations. This uniqueness can be a feature of the place and has economic value so that it will impact the livelihoods of those in that place (Astriyantika, 2022).

The uniqueness of tourist destinations that have folklore can be an inspiration for the community in developing the creative economy. The Ngarai Sianok tourist destination in Taman Panorama has a group of traders who gather and sell in its yard. Most vendors sell souvenirs related to Bukittinggi, such as critical chains for Jam Gadang, Lobang Jepang, and Ngarai Sianok. There are also shirts with pictures of the three tourist destinations. With the folklore branding at the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination, traders can also develop souvenir products with illustrations from the folklore. Traders can develop their creativity by making paintings or postcards related to folklore.

In addition to the merchant association, at Ngarai Sianok tourist destination, there is a stage that can be used as a place for performances. The venue for the performance is called *Medan Nan Bapaneh Ngarai Sianok*. The existence of these facilities is very beneficial for the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination. These facilities can be the capital for performing arts related to folklore, such as The Legend of Ngarai Sianok. Using performance venue facilities can support folklore branding for tourist destinations and spread folklore to the broader community, especially tourists and locals who watch the performing arts. This performing arts performance can be a medium for preserving Minangkabau oral literature and culture as one of the government's missions to preserve local wisdom. Apart from that, this folklore-based performing art can provide a unique experience that amazes tourists. Through performing arts, festivals, traditional souvenirs, and oral traditions, tourist destinations provide places and tools that contribute to understanding and enriching local history and identity. Apart from entertaining and providing a memorable experience with performing arts and folklore narratives, tourist activities become informative and educational.

Folklore, related to character education, can be a good choice for parents who want to provide valuable activities for their children. Tourism activities are not only for playing but can also

educate children in a fun way. The use of folklore in tourist destinations gives a good impression so that it can increase the reputation of the destination. Apart from scenery, cultural attractions, accommodation, and culinary delights, enjoyable activities also measure a tourist destination's reputation (Wang dkk., 2021). Tourist destinations must have these factors to have a good reputation. A good reputation will increase the number of tourist visits because tourists often pay attention to these things before deciding to visit a place.

CONCLUSION

The Ngarai Sianok tourist destination has the potential to have the best reputation. Efforts to advance tourist destinations by focusing on stories as tourist attractions can be a mainstay in increasing tourist visits. This folklore branding also positively impacts the place's identity; Ngarai Sianok is one of the prime tourist destinations of Bukittinggi City. This identity means that Ngarai Sianok is no longer under the shadow of Jam Gadang and Lobang Jepang, with its uniqueness and specialness. This folklore branding can visit Ngarai Sianok, literary tourism, thus adding to the variety of types of tourism in Bukittinggi City. Utilizing folklore is an effort to preserve folklore as community wealth and promote tourism based on local wisdom.

Folklore can be helpful as a completion of the narration of tour guides in the Bukittinggi Panorama Park. The Legend of Ngarai Sianok can also be a social media promotional narrative for tourist destinations. Social media has also become essential in disseminating tourist experiences when visiting Ngarai Sianok. The unique experience that tourists get through the tour guide's explanations and performing arts about folklore amazes tourists and provides a memorable experience, so it has the opportunity to be immortalized and shared via social media. Likewise, with souvenirs inspired by folklore, tourists will be interested in buying these memorable souvenirs. The growth in tourist visits will have a positive impact on the community's creative economy, primarily by increasing the number of entrance tickets and the number of consumers buying souvenirs from traders at the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination, which will ultimately have a positive impact on regional income in Bukittinggi City. This growth in tourist visits can also be beneficial in preserving oral literature because it continues to spread to the broader community. Apart from that, folklore can also improve the reputation of the Ngarai Sianok tourist destination as an informative and educational tourist destination because, with folklore, tourists will get character education in a fun way.

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