

Does a Memorable Experience Exist During the Covid-19 Pandemic? a Natural Attraction Study

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Abstract

During Pandemic Covid-19, natural attractions have become one of the favourite places to visit even though there are various restrictions on movement and activities. Most of the visitors try to explore unforgettable visiting experiences during their visit. The research aims to understand whether visitors can access a memorable experience during the Covid-19 pandemic at natural tourist attractions. This research applied quantitative methods by using descriptive analysis from an online survey of 100 respondents who visited Situ Patenggang as one of the natural attractions from May to July 2021. As a result, visitors can still access several memorable experiences but lack several others. The highest dimension turns out to be refreshment from daily activities, then hedonism experience and uniqueness in novelty. They were then followed by interaction with local communities. In contrast, the third-lowest dimension is involved with activities, meaningfulness, and knowledge.

Keywords: memorable, tourism experiences, natural attraction, refreshment, novelty, meaningfulness.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 virus pandemic has caused a decline in gross domestic income from tourism globally to 3.7 per cent in 2021 (WTTC, 2021). Covid-19 is predicted to be with humans for a long time, and therefore it seems that tourism activities will not be the same for the time being (Andrianto et al., 2021). One example is the use of technology that reduces physical touch to reduce the impact of the spread (Suhaeni et al., 2022) and is believed to be able to create a different travel experience during the Covid-19 pandemic (Mateescu et al., 2020). Another example is the limitation of the number of visitors and the activities that can be done to reduce people's movement. In order to survive, most countries invent or modify new policies to adjust to the pandemic situation.

The Indonesian government has improved the policy from bringing in many tourists to improving the quality of the tourists themselves. One that the government of Indonesia is promoting is a quality travel experience by diversifying products/ services as competent implementers (Prabowo, 2021). Visitor satisfaction is determined by the experience they feel when visiting attractions (Yeh et al., 2019). A high-quality travel experience is essential for satisfying visitors, so destination operators need to improve the product/ services (Suhartanto et al., 2021). Even before Covid-19 creating memorable experiences was a positive challenge for destination operators (Subramaniam et al., 2019). The unique experience visitors feel will be unforgettable and leave a memorable experience in their minds (Sthapit, 2017).

Based on the concept of memorable tourism experience (MTE), the experience felt by visitors will impact other visit experiences in the future. Unforgettable experiences will still be remembered even after the tourist activities are completed, and this concept is also called MTE (Memorable Tourism Experiences) (Anggraeni, 2019). Currently, based on previous research, there are seven dimensions in the concept of MTE that need to be considered, namely 1) hedonism, 2) refreshment, 3) novelty, 4) local culture, 5) meaningfulness, 6)

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involvement, and 7) knowledge (Kim et al., 2021). The authors believed that the seven dimensions of MTE have not changed both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

Based on the issues above, a big question arose "whether a memorable experience still exists during the Covid-19 pandemic". This research uses a case study of a natural attraction called Situ Patenggang, a natural tourist attraction in Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Natural tourist attractions include using natural resources in the scenery and water resources with vegetation and nature (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996). During Pandemic Covid-19, the natural attraction becomes one favourite place for visitors to do therapy after experiencing a lockdown (Ramadhian, 2020). One of the reasons is that visitors can minimize the spreading while they are outside in nature-based attractions (Dzulfa Putri Luthfiya et al., 2021; Lebrun et al., 2021).

Moreover, in 2020, there are still 471.329 people who visit nature-based attractions in West Java province (BPS, 2021). Situ Patenggang is a lake located in the highlands with an altitude of 1,600 above sea level and 60,000 hectares (Jabarprov.go.id, 2022). This lake is 47 km to the south of Bandung City, with a driving time of about 60-90 minutes (Jabarprov.go.id, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Natural-based Attraction

In general, natural attraction or nature-based tourism is a tourist activity that utilizes natural resources with relatively more minor development (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996). Nature tourism allows interaction between humans and nature (Y. Kim et al., 2019). In line with this, (Wolf et al., 2019) describe that interaction activities containing an understanding between humans and the ecosystem where there are plants or animals from their visit are nature tourism. Natural sources that form the basis of natural-based attraction are divided into two factors, namely, physical and environmental. Among the physical factors present, namely water, mountains or animals, and vegetation, environmental factors include security, comfort, etc. (Deng et al., 2002). Based on this definition, Situ Pattengang, a natural lake with mountainous air, is one of the natural tourist attractions suitable as a case study in this research.

Memorable Tourism Experiences

The idea of memorable experience was first proposed by Pine and Gilmore in 1999 and is considered one of sustainable competitive value in the future (Yu et al., 2019), and memorable experiences may bring a good perception for the individuals (Luca, 2018). This concept was developed later by (J.-H. Kim et al., 2012), defining memorable tourism experiences (MTE) as things that will always be remembered after a tourist visit. On the other hand, (Schmitt, 1997) stated that consumers are looking for experiences that can encourage them to interact personally, touch their hearts and invite them to think. Even MTE is considered to be able to help historic preferences so that they can invite visitors to come back (Sthapit, 2017).

(J.-H. Kim et al., 2012) conducted the first study by measuring MTE quantitatively in more detail. The seven dimensions measured by (J.-H. Kim et al., 2012) are 1) hedonism, 2) refreshment, 3) local culture, 4) meaningfulness, 5) knowledge, 6) involvement, and 7) novelty. The Authors believed that all the seven dimensions are still related in pandemic situations and can be implemented in natural attractions such as Situ Patenggang. Below are also briefly described the definition of each of the seven dimensions of the MTE.

First is hedonism, as a dimension that refers to experiences that involve pleasure with multiple sensors from tourists/visitors, such as imaginative and emotional sensors (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). The second is a novelty, a dimension that refers to something new that cannot be experienced at the visitor's place of origin (J.-H. Kim et al., 2012). Examples of this dimension are new experiences and the feeling of being pampered that can evoke the visitor's travel experience (H. Kim et al., 2019).

The third is the local culture. The experience of interacting between visitors and the local community is a unique and memorable activity. This experience refers to visitors experiencing or carrying out a local culture during a tourist visit. Fourth is refreshment, which refers to travel activities to relaxation, freedom, ease mood, relieving psychological stress by accumulating pleasant experiences. Fifth is meaningfulness as a dimension

related to the tendency of visitors to seek special experiences for self-development, learn new perspectives and learn about cultures in various places (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017).

Sixth is involvement. According to Kim (J.-H. Kim et al., 2012) in (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017), the involvement dimension can be interpreted as the involvement of visitors in tourism activities that can awaken a person's ability to remember an experience. The last is knowledge. The knowledge dimension can be interpreted as knowledge gained by visitors during their travels, and both special and general knowledge related to attractions can be in the form of history, culture, habits, traditional cuisine, and architecture (Kuusimäki, 2018).

From the literature review discussion above, this research intends to see whether visitors can still find one or the seven dimensions of MTE at Situ Pattengang during the Covid-19 pandemic. No research focuses on examining whether one of the seven dimensions of MTE still exists during the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODS

This study aims to understand whether visitors can still find MTE during the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on taking a study on a natural tourist attraction in West Java, namely Situ Patenggang. Situ Patengan was selected as an example because the attraction was still open during the pandemic number of tourists visiting during the data collection in June - July 2021. This study uses a quantitative method by conducting an online survey during the Covid-19 pandemic. Quantitative methods are structured research that transforms data into numbers to be relatively easier to interpret (Sugiyono, 2014). According to (Rasjidi, 2017), the selection of research methods is to find goals for the answers to the problems found. This study uses descriptive analysis to illustrate the data found without trying to generalize the data (Jaya, 2019).

The research instrument reveals the seven dimensions of Kim et al. (J.-H. Kim et al., 2012), discussed in the previous section. The research instrument consisted of 16 questions distributed online. This study got answers from 100 respondents who visitors to Situ Patenggang in June and July 2021. Before distributing the research instrument, it went through the stages of testing the validity and reliability of the initial 30 respondents. Based on this test, the r table is at the significant level of 0.361, with the lowest validity being 0.525 and the highest being 0.844. After getting answers from 100 respondents, the validity test was again carried out. The result is a lower r table value of 0.195, with the lowest r count being 0.691 and the highest being 0.837. These two tests concluded that the research instrument was considered valid and reliable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Table. 1 Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Highest Frequency	Highest Percentage
Ages	17-25 years old	54 %
Level Education	High School	67 %
Occupancy	Students	50%
Income	< 1 million (Rp.)	52%
Originating Area	Bandung area	67%
Total	100	100.0

The table above shows that the profile of most respondents is women with a high school education level. Respondents have the most jobs, namely students with the most income from respondents of under one million rupiahs. Both of these things are supported by research from (Mahdzar, 2019), (Utama, 2019), and (Verinita, 2016) that women mostly make the average tourist visit at a young age range. (Verinita, 2016) stated that 40% of visitors to Situ Pategang are students and have an income of less than 1 million. As for the originating area, this result supports the concept of distance decay, in which the closest area will dominate, only to gradually

decrease based on the distance (Hooper, 2015; McKercher, 2008). It can be seen that Bandung Raya, as the closest area is the origin of the most prominent visitors. Overall, this table illustrates that most visitors to Situ Patenggang are relatively young, with status as students and relatively small incomes. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, these visitors tend to be more accessible and less worried about imposed restrictions.

Memorable Tourism Experiences

In discussing whether MTE still exists during the Covid-19 pandemic in a natural tourist attraction, this paper asks directly from seven dimensions with a total of 16 questions which are briefly described in the table below.

Table 2. Seven Dimensions of MTE

No	Statement	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Hedonism	3.09	.568
2	Novelty	3.06	.575
3	Local Culture	3.06	.558
4	Refreshment	3.20	.613
5	Meaningfulness	2.93	.585
6	Involvement	2.93	.664
7	Knowledges	3.05	.672

Based on the first dimension, namely hedonism, the number shows 3.09 with a standard deviation of .568. This means that visitors have a pleasant experience of having new experiences, one of which is enjoying the natural scenery and community activities in Situ Patenggang. Here visitors still get positive energy on the sidelines of movement restrictions during the pandemic. It could be that this pleasant experience was triggered by their limited activities, such as the lack of opportunities for visitors to carry out tourism activities directly during the pandemic. The same thing also happened in the second dimension, namely novelty, with a mean of 3.06 and a standard deviation of .575. This means that visitors can feel they have a unique experience that is not felt outside of a pandemic. One of them is by travelling while implementing health protocols. Visitors also get another experience by interacting with residents during the pandemic. Glancing at the research before the Covid 19 pandemic from (Yu et al., 2019) on natural tourist attractions in China, on average, visitors also get fun (hedonism) and unique (novel) experiences when visiting these natural tourist attractions.

The third dimension also relates to the COVID-19 phenomenon, namely local culture. This dimension is relatively high because, during the Covid-19 pandemic, visitors rarely interact directly with other people, even new people during the pandemic. The ability to interact becomes weak enough to interact with residents becomes very impressive for visitors. Viewed from the side of this refreshment, it is very related because physical limitations to avoid viruses give an excellent impression to visitors. Visitors can release fatigue and get new energy to carry out daily routine activities during this COVID-19 pandemic. Natural characteristics with beautiful lake views and cool weather support the refreshment dimension of daily activities. Visitors also feel that they get peace of mind. The results obtained are the same as (Verinita, 2016)016) research regarding measuring the MTE's scale in the Rantih Tourism village, West Sumatra; visitors get a memorable experience when interacting with local culture.

Judging from the meaningfulness dimension that gets the smallest value, visitors feel they can develop themselves from the visit results. This is quite different from research from Utama (Utama, 2019) in the tourist village of Sumber Maron, in which this dimension gets a high score above the average. Even though visitors feel they can strengthen their relationship with their family and their relationship with each other when they visit, they cannot carry out more profound activities during the Covid-19 Pandemic. These findings are almost similar to the latest study from (Hosseini et al., 2021) that the MTEs impact how tourists behave and create intentions to visit again by participating in activities including promotions on their own.

The data are pretty supportive but somewhat different from previous research, which is seen in the dimensions of involvement and knowledge. Even though the pandemic lasted quite a long, the high spread

level still made visitors want to do tourism activities and get involved in it. The average result of the involvement dimension is still in the high category. It could be because nature tourism has become a favourite destination so that visitors' involvement and information are eagerly awaited. In contrast to previous studies, which had a very high mean, it could be due to restrictions and the application of health protocols, and there were not many activities that could involve visitors, and the information obtained changed rapidly and varied greatly.

CONCLUSION

In general, the results of this study answer the research objectives discussed from the beginning that MTEs at natural tourist attractions still exist during the Covid-19 pandemic through studies related to Situ Patenggang. In other words, visitors who have visited the natural tourist attraction of Situ Patenggang show a high enough memorable tourism experience. Especially from the refreshment dimension, visitors need to carry out stimulating activities during the Covid-19 pandemic by complying with health protocols. The second highest dimension, namely hedonism, and novelty, for their other experiences are pretty different from the previous one. In addition, interaction with local culture/communities and activity involvement becomes the next dimension. The last two, namely meaningfulness and knowledge, became the lowest due to differences in experience gained before and during the pandemic with the changes and diversity of information obtained during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Theoretically, the results of this study confirm previous research that tourism activities in natural tourist attractions provide high memorable tourism experiences seen from the seven dimensions. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, visitors can still get the MTE despite different conditions, such as new experiences related to travelling on the sidelines of restrictions and the implementation of health protocols. The tendency of visitors who are bored with regulatory restrictions during a pandemic encourages visitors to travel, even though it may be different from what they experienced before. Attraction managers should be able to innovate to create new ways to attract visitors by sharing information such as technology and virtual reality experiences (Suhaeni et al., 2022).

This research cannot be generalized to other tourist attractions but can be used to refer to the concept of memorable tourism experiences in supporting tourism sustainability from an experience perspective. One emerging topic is MTE in dark tourism or ecological-related tourism setting (Hosseini et al., 2021). Another weakness of this paper is that it only uses one lake tourist attraction as a case study and only discusses it from the visitor's point of view. Other researchers can compare several types of natural tourist attractions and pay attention to the answers from the management or tourism business actors to enrich the answers from various sides.

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