

Research Article

# Exploring the Development of Eco-Wellness Tourism Through Local Perspective: Qualitative Study in Gunung Dempo Tourism Area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Development of *eco-wellness Tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra is an effort to combine the concept of ecotourism with health tourism. The Gunung Dempo tourist area has extraordinary natural potential and strongly supports the implementation of the *eco-wellness concept. tourism*. This study aims to describe the role of *eco-wellness tourism* in the development of the Mount Dempo tourist area and analyzing the development of *eco-wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area in Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive approach through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that the main potential for developing *eco-wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area includes the beauty of various Gunung Dempo tourist attractions, and health-based tourism activities such as cycling, *jogging*, therapy at Tangga 2001, *camping activities* at the Dempo Botanical Gardens tourist attraction and the Dempo Skyline tour, breathing fresh air while seeing the view of the expanse of tea plantations and the towering Mount Dempo at the Bukit Tungguan Gunung Dempo tour, *trekking* at the peak of Mount Dempo, and other activities. There are obstacles such as lack of maintenance in facilities, human resources that have not been competent, lack of knowledge about *eco-wellness tourism*, and accessibility going to object tourism that needs to be improved to make it easier traveler visit area tour Mountain Dempo. The development strategy involves collaboration between the government, community, and private sector in improving tourism facilities, environmental sustainability, and digital-based promotion.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Health Tourism, Mount Dempo, Pagar Alam

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Health tourism or *wellness tourism* has experienced significant development in many regions of the world. This category of tourism not only emphasizes physical experiences but also involves mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. It provides opportunities for travelers to gain health benefits through integrated activities such as spa treatments, yoga, meditation, physical therapy, and other activities that support physical and mental health. Health tourism is often referred to as *wellness Tourism* is a type of travel that aims to maintain and improve an individual's overall health, including mental, spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual health. Auliya & Future, (2024) *wellness Tourism* is a form of tourism that is oriented towards improving the quality of life and health of visitors with various activities that support physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being.

*Wellness tourism* is a rapidly growing part of the tourism industry and has significant potential. They revealed that wellness tourism today includes various types of travel that provide a holistic experience, which is not only focused on the physical but also on the mental and emotional dimensions of the traveler. Activities such as yoga, meditation, body treatments and enjoying healthy cuisine are all important elements in the *wellness experience. tourism*. According to Izzati & Dewi dalam Lestari (2021) wellness Tourism is tourism that

aims to improve the quality of health and fitness through physical, emotional and mental activities .

Tourism potential is the potential that includes all elements in a location that can be processed into an attraction for tourists. Tourism potential is a variety of resources in an area or location that can be developed into a tourist attraction that can be utilized for economic interests while still paying attention to other aspects. The potential that can be utilized consists of art, culture both nationally and regionally, natural beauty, flora and fauna, and other things that need to be preserved. Therefore, the Mount Dempo tourist area with its natural beauty, cool mountain air, and rich local cultural potential, Mount Dempo and the surrounding area provide great opportunities to develop *wellness tourism* . The balance between physical, spiritual and mental activities in this place will offer a complete experience for visitors. By utilizing a number of natural resources such as natural hot springs, tropical forests and stunning views, *wellness Tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area of Pagar Alam City can provide an experience that enriches the body, mind, and soul of visitors when traveling to this place.

Pagar Alam City is a city that has many interesting and charming natural tourist attractions. This city is located in South Sumatra and was once one of the powerful cities in Lahat Regency. The distance between Pagar Alam City and Palembang City is about 298 km , while the distance between Pagar Alam City and Lahat Regency is about 60 km to the southwest. Pagar Alam City has a high mountain called Mount Dempo with a height of 3178 meters above sea level , which allows visitors to enjoy fresh robusta coffee and comfortable temperatures during the day. In addition to being known for its mountains, tea plantation atmosphere, lakes, Pagar Alam City also holds other beauty, especially in the form of waterfalls with unique characteristics. In addition to natural attractions, Pagar Alam City also has an archaeological site with at least 33 waterfalls and 26 megalithic sites.

Mount Dempo is one of the main tourist destinations for visitors to the city of Pagar Alam and this mountain has a height of 3178 meters above sea level. Mount Dempo is part of the Bukit Barisan mountain range that stretches across Sumatra, like a large shield that separates South Sumatra from Bengkulu. Mount Dempo is included in the category of active volcanoes and has two peaks. There is a crater on one of them. This crater is a magnet for climbers. The reason is, the surface of the crater can create various patterns, from green, light blue, to gray. Gray is one of the colors often encountered by climbers when exploring Mount Dempo. The preserved natural beauty and fresh mountain air greatly support various activities that are oriented towards health and well-being.

The Mount Dempo tourist area is one of the areas with great potential for developing the concept of ecotourism with health tourism. The Mount Dempo tourist area has natural wealth such as the towering Mount Dempo, the air is still preserved, the expanse of beautiful tea gardens, tourist attractions that have their own charm, vegetable and fruit plantations, therapy places, various waterfalls with their own characteristics, *camping activities* and *trekking* to the peak of Mount Dempo, and other health activities. This combination provides an opportunity to offer a comprehensive tourism experience. While in the Mount Dempo tourist area, tourists can relieve stress and refresh themselves with various activities in the Mount Dempo tourist area. Based on this background, there is a formulation of the problem in this study such as What is the role of *eco- wellness tourism* in the development of the Gunung Dempo tourist area in Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra, and how to develop *eco- wellness tourism* in the Mount Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra.

The purpose of this study is to describe the role of *eco- wellness tourism* in the development of the Gunung Dempo tourist area in Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra and analyzing the development of *eco- wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra. The scope of the study is focused on the geographical area of the Gunung Dempo tourist area and its surroundings, and discusses tourism activities that support physical and mental health such as natural therapy at Tangga 2001, cycling, *camping activities* , *trekking* at the top of Mount Dempo, breathing fresh air while enjoying the view of the expanse of tea gardens, several other health activities, and interaction with local communities, as well as culture-based activities.

The benefits of the research are divided into three categories: theoretically, this research can contribute to the development of science related to the development of *eco-wellness tourism* in tourist locations, especially in the Gunung Dempo tourist area in Pagar Alam City. Practically, the benefits for the author of this research are one of the requirements to fulfill the thesis assignment and can expand knowledge related to the development of *eco-wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, for academics, research is expected to be able to add ideas for managers of the Gunung Dempo tourist area and be useful for readers, as well as for the community, this research is expected to be able to offer solutions in the development of *eco-wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra, and encourage the community to participate in contributing to maintaining and preserving the beauty of nature, especially in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City. This study is also expected to be able to increase the number of visitors to the Gunung Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City. This study also confirms its authenticity by comparing a number of relevant previous studies, and confirms that there has been no study that specifically and in-depth discusses the development of *eco-wellness tourism* in the Mount Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Harira (2020) tourism is an activity carried out by local and foreign tourists and refers to activities related to travel that occurs in certain locations and outside a person's usual environment. According to the Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism, tourism includes various tourism activities supported by various facilities and services provided by the community, entrepreneurs, as well as the government and regional governments.

Tourism includes any journey, whether done intentionally or not, that provides an opportunity for visitors to experience firsthand and create an impression (Nur Syamsu et al., 2024). In addition, tourism is an activity that provides products and results from the tourism industry that can create a travel experience for tourists. The main factor that shapes the travel experience for tourists is the existence of attractions from a place or tourist location (Damiasih & Yunita, 2017).

Tourism development is part of economic development to create economic growth in a country, thereby creating jobs for the community which can increase income and community welfare (Sutiarso, 2018 dalam Syamsu, M. N. et, al., 2024).

Ecotourism is an effective approach to addressing the problem of land abandonment by presenting sustainable economic activities in creating a relationship between conservation and empowerment (Inati, U., 2022). Ecotourism is a type of tourism that aims to increase environmental and cultural awareness, reduce negative impacts, offer positive experiences, and empower local communities (Tamelan et al., 2019).

*Wellness* is seen as a lifestyle that aims to present a healthy body, mind, and soul through positive interventions based on the understanding gained to achieve harmony between body, mind, and soul (Wulandari, 2024). *Wellness* or well-being has evolved into a more comprehensive issue than just physical health, but includes various aspects involving the balance between physical, mental, emotional, and social interactions in the healthy life of the individual.

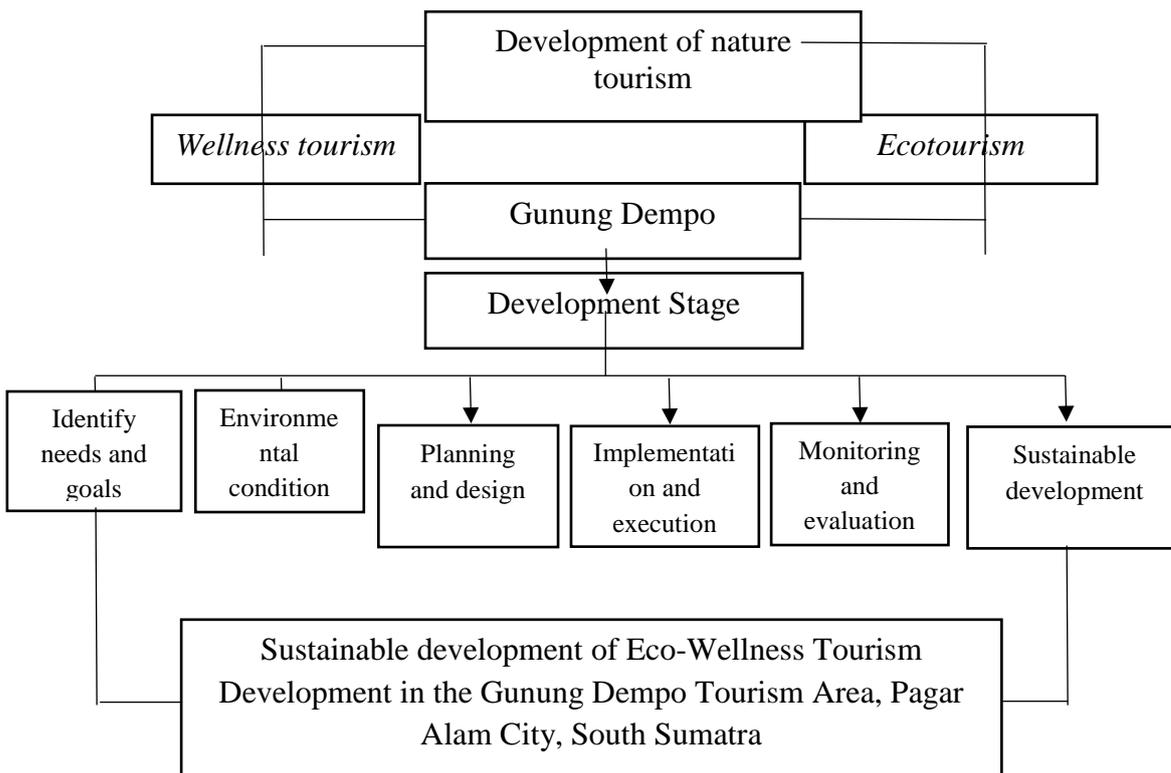
*Wellness tourism* is a journey related to various efforts to maintain or improve the quality of life of individuals. Health tourism is basically more focused on increasing health awareness for tourists, and does not emphasize the business aspect (Wulandari, 2024). *Wellness industry Tourism* is growing rapidly with more and more visitors choosing places to refresh their bodies and minds. Visitors choose destinations or services that provide facilities and experiences that support a healthy lifestyle, such as spas , physical therapy, meditation, yoga, good diet, and stress management.

*Eco-wellness tourism* is a type of tourism that combines wellness tourism goals. *tourism* ) with interactive activities that are directly connected to nature, and integrate the cultural wisdom of local fitness practices with a commitment to preserving the environment. Activities interacting with nature can help visitors improve self-acceptance, life direction,

personal autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and individual development for health well-being (Wulandari, L.W., 2024).

There are six main dimensions of *wellness tourism* that is explained in detail: physical (physical activities such as trekking and reflection), mental (meditation and breathing fresh air), emotional (strengthening social ties and controlling emotions), spiritual (contemplation and searching for the meaning of life), socio-cultural (interaction with local culture), and environmental (ecological awareness and participation in nature conservation). The potential of the Mount Dempo area greatly supports the development of these six dimensions because of the natural and cultural wealth it has. A review of previous research shows that although many studies discuss wellness or ecotourism, not many have combined the two concepts specifically in the context of Mount Dempo.

The Mount Dempo tourist area in Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra is a tourist destination with potential for *ecotourism* , where visitors do not just come to enjoy the natural beauty, but also to support various *eco-wellness activities. tourism* . Providing a variety of experiences that focus on well-being, ecotourism areas related to health tourism help tourists achieve physical and mental balance. So it can be predicted that *eco-wellness tourism* will continue to grow along with the increasing demand for tourists and can attract the interest of tourist visits, both local tourists and tourists who are outside the city of Pagar Alam. To facilitate researchers in conducting research on the Development of *Eco - Wellness Tourism* in the Gunung Dempo Tourism Area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra, the researcher created a framework of thinking as a guide so that the objectives of the study so that this study can run or be achieved properly.



Source: Researcher

### 3. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, the research location is in the Gunung Dempo area, Pagar Alam City, with implementation time in March and April 2025. Data was analyzed to identify supporting and inhibiting patterns in the development of *eco-wellness tourism*. The research stages start from determining the topic and formulating the problem, collecting references through literature studies, compiling research methods, conducting observations and interviews, to data analysis and drawing conclusions. The types of data used consist of primary data, namely data obtained directly from field observations and interviews with informants such as tourism managers, tourism offices, tourists, and local communities. While secondary data is obtained through documentation, books, scientific articles, and information from social media or other digital sources.

Data collection techniques include three main methods: direct observation to determine the condition of the area and tourism activities, interviews to obtain the perspectives of tourism actors and visitors, and documentation in the form of field notes and photos as complementary materials for analysis. Informants were selected based on their level of involvement in the development and understanding of the Gunung Dempo tourism area in Pagar Alam City. The data analysis method applied in this study refers to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. Miles and Huberman introduced a general framework of analysis that follows the interactive model, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/data verification.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Mount Dempo area has advantages that greatly support the development of *eco-wellness tourism* from the results of observations and interviews with informants conducted directly to the location of the Gunung Dempo tourist area, researchers found that the Gunung Dempo tourist area has fresh air, beautiful natural scenery, extensive tea gardens, and a calm atmosphere that is very supportive of health-based tourism activities such as cycling, *jogging*, *therapy at Tangga 2001*, *camping* activities at the Dempo Botanical Gardens tourist attraction and the Dempo Skyline tour, breathing fresh air while seeing the view of the expanse of tea gardens and the towering Mount Dempo at the Bukit Tunggau Gunung Dempo tour, *trekking* at the top of Mount Dempo, and other activities.

However, the study also found a number of obstacles that hamper the development of the area. Among them are the lack of infrastructure such as damaged roads, minimal facilities such as trash bins and public toilets, and the neglect of several tourist facilities. Another challenge is the low understanding of the community and tourism actors regarding the concept of *eco-wellness tourism*, and the absence of educational or training programs to develop professional human resources such as yoga instructors, therapists natural spa, or *eco-wellness tour guide tourism*. Recommended development strategies include community training, social media-based digital promotion, development of health tourism packages, and collaboration with academics and travel agents to expand market reach.

### CONCLUSION

*Eco-wellness development tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area of Pagar Alam City is a strategic step to combine the concept of ecotourism with health tourism. The Gunung Dempo tourist area has amazing natural attractions, such as beautiful mountain views, vast expanses of tea plantations, various waterfalls with unique characteristics, tourist attractions that provide camping activities and climbing the peak of Mount Dempo, various health activities, and fresh air that supports *eco-based tourism*. *wellness tourism*. According to the research results, the Gunung Dempo tourist area has various potentials in *eco-wellness tourism*, both the community and tourists feel it, even the activities and potential have existed for a long time. However, the community and visitors do not realize that it is an activity related to *eco-wellness tourism*, and lack of understanding about *eco-wellness tourism* makes them not understand what *eco-wellness is tourism*.

The potential for *eco-wellness Tourism* in this area not only increases the number of tourist visits, but also supports community welfare through improving the local economy and environmental preservation. However, this effort also faces various challenges, especially related to understanding *eco-wellness tourism*, environmental management, community involvement, and the resilience of supporting infrastructure. Various crucial things in the development of *eco-wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area includes the importance of preserving nature by implementing the principles of sustainable tourism. This includes waste management and monitoring the negative impacts caused by tourism activities. Providing tourism activities that support health, such as *trekking*, yoga in the open air, natural therapy, more complete health facilities both indoors and outdoors, and utilizing herbal resources available in the Gunung Dempo tourist area.

Involvement of local communities in tourism management through training, economic empowerment, and cultural preservation as an authentic tourist attraction. In addition, creating creative products inspired by nature, such as organic food, crafts, and tour guide services that understand *eco-wellness tourism*, as well as the importance of having a comprehensive policy involving local government, local communities, academics, and tourism sector actors in the planning and development of the Mount Dempo tourism area.

Based on the results of the discussion and conclusions, it is stated that there are several suggestions from researchers in the process of developing *eco-wellness tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, Pagar Alam City, South Sumatra and is expected to be a benchmark for parties involved in the management of the Gunung Dempo tourist area. To support the success of *eco-wellness development tourism* in the Gunung Dempo tourist area, several strategic steps must be implemented, such as improving the quality of infrastructure and accessibility which is very important. This includes improving access roads and providing environmentally friendly public facilities such as adding trash bins so that trash is not scattered, clean toilets, rest areas, and safe *trekking paths*. This will increase comfort and safety for tourists. Improving the capabilities of local communities through training on *eco-wellness tourism* and tourism-based micro-enterprise development are very important. Community involvement in tourism management, guiding, and processing of local products such as healthy food and handicrafts can improve their financial well-being.

Sustainable environmental management needs to be implemented consistently. For example, limiting the number of people coming at a certain time, using sustainable technology in waste management. Digital promotion should be enhanced with special branding that displays the Gunung Dempo tourist area as an *eco-wellness destination tourism*. The use of social media, official websites, and cooperation with nature and health lovers communities can increase the popularity of the Gunung Dempo tourist area. In addition, collaboration between various stakeholders such as government, community, academics, and tourism industry players is very necessary to build a sustainable tourism forum. This forum can be used to discuss, coordinate, and monitor the sustainability of the Gunung Dempo tourist area program.

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