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The Impact of Ecotourism on the Surrounding Community's Economy and Social Life

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Abstract

The rapid development of Asia Farm Ecotourism as an educational tourism destination significantly contributes to the stimulation of the local economy and social life. The aim of this research is to analyze the economic and social impacts generated by Asia Farm on the communities. The study employs a qualitative descriptive approach through field observations, in-depth interviews, and a literature review from various relevant sources. The results indicate that Asia Farm significantly contributes to improving community welfare through the creation of local employment, growth of culinary SMEs, and the emergence of supporting tourism businesses such as bicycle rentals and educational mini-cinemas. Socially, the destination fosters community awareness of environmental cleanliness, strengthens social interactions, and cultivates a service-oriented culture that is welcoming to tourists. The findings also reveal a mutually reinforcing relationship between economic and social aspects, where increased community income positively affects social stability and vice versa. The implications of this study highlight that sustainable ecotourism, such as Asia Farm, can serve as a model for community-based economic development oriented toward welfare, sustainability, and social harmony in modern urban areas.

Keywords

Ecotourism, Local Economy, Social Life, Surrounding Community, Sustainable Ecotourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading sectors capable of driving regional economic growth. Through tourism activities, community income increases, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) develop, and harmonious social interactions are established within the local community (Fadilla, 2024). In the context of sustainable development, the emergence of ecotourism has become a primary focus because it not only emphasizes economic aspects but also considers environmental preservation and the social welfare of surrounding communities. This approach positions local communities not merely as beneficiaries but as part of the tourism management system itself, in line with the direction of sustainable tourism policies in Indonesia (Asriati, 2023).

A concrete example of ecotourism implementation in Indonesia is Asia Farm Pekanbaru, located in Bencah Lesung Village, Tenayan Raya District (Alfiani et al., 2025). Since its establishment, the destination has been recognized not only as a family recreation site but also as an education center based on agriculture and animal husbandry. Tourism activities in the area have created new economic opportunities for local communities, including parking services, local culinary sales, handicrafts, photography services, and equipment rentals. Additionally, Asia Farm prioritizes hiring local labor, playing a key role in opening new jobs and increasing local incomes (Sudarsih, 2025).

According to the concept of community-based tourism, local community involvement is key to achieving ecotourism sustainability. Active participation allows communities to gain direct economic benefits while strengthening social values such as mutual cooperation and solidarity. This aligns with the view that increased tourism activity directly enhances household social and economic welfare and strengthens social bonds among residents. Therefore, studies on ecotourism impacts should consider not only economic but also social and cultural perspectives (Asy'ari et al., 2021).

A study by Triadi et al. (2012) examined ecotourism's influence on community welfare, with most focus on macroeconomic aspects, such as increasing Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) or general tourism destination management strategies. Research by Devi et al. (2022) deeply explores the reciprocal relationship between economic and social aspects at the community level, which remains relatively rare. The presence of ecotourism destinations not only creates economic opportunities but also generates social impacts, such as behavioral changes, shifts in community interaction patterns, and the growth of collective environmental awareness (Rianti, 2018). Furthermore, post-COVID-19 visitor dynamics show an interesting phenomenon that has not been widely studied, where changing tourism trends can influence income levels, job availability, and social cohesion in surrounding communities (Islahuddin, 2022). In this context, Asia Farm Pekanbaru serves as a relevant case for study as an urban-based educational ecotourism destination experiencing significant post-pandemic growth, with potential economic and social impacts on Tenayan Raya and surrounding communities.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to analyzing the reciprocal interactions between the economic and social aspects of communities around Asia Farm Pekanbaru post-pandemic. This study focuses on income growth and employment opportunities while also evaluating how ecotourism activities build social networks, strengthen community participation, and foster collective environmental awareness. Thus, this research is expected to provide a holistic understanding of how ecotourism can serve as an instrument for sustainable development at the local level.

This study is expected to enrich the literature on the relationship between ecotourism and socio-economic community development in Indonesia (Asy'ari et al.,

2021). The findings can guide Asia Farm management and local government in designing inclusive and sustainable tourism development policies (Suharto, 2024). With increasing public awareness of educational tourism and green spaces, Asia Farm Pekanbaru is anticipated to become an ecotourism model that not only drives economic growth but also strengthens social cohesion and maintains environmental balance in urban areas.

Based on this background, the research problem is formulated to examine the economic and social impacts of Asia Farm Pekanbaru ecotourism on surrounding communities. This study also aims to analyze the role of a visitor preference-based recommendation system in optimizing the culinary tourism sector at Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism and its contribution to increasing local community revenue. The research is expected to provide input for managers and local governments to optimize community-based tourism potential.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept and Principles of Ecotourism

Conceptually, ecotourism is defined as a form of tourism that emphasizes environmental responsibility, nature conservation, and the enhancement of local community welfare. The main goal of ecotourism is not only to provide recreational experiences for tourists but also to create a balance between economic, social, and environmental aspects. In other words, ecotourism serves as a means to reconcile economic interests with ecological preservation through the active involvement of communities surrounding the tourist area (Rhama, 2019). Therefore, ecotourism destinations need to be managed with attention to sustainability principles, community participation, and direct benefits for local residents.

The basic principles of ecotourism include the conservation of natural resources, respect for local culture, community empowerment, and environmental education for tourists. When these principles are applied, ecotourism can serve as an effective empowerment tool, as communities gain opportunities to become entrepreneurs, tourism service providers, and stewards of environmental preservation (Amri et al., 2025). In the context of Asia Farm Pekanbaru, the ecotourism concept is implemented through environmental education and thematic agricultural activities that engage local communities as workers and micro-entrepreneurs, thereby generating dual benefits for income and skills development.

Furthermore, ecotourism plays a strategic role in strengthening local identity and fostering community pride in their environment. When communities participate in destination management, a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for preserving the area emerges. This makes ecotourism not merely an economic activity but also a social process that cultivates cooperation and community solidarity (Sjioen, 2025). Thus, the concept of ecotourism is not only oriented toward tourist visits but also toward character building and environmental awareness at the local community level.

2.2. Economic Impact of Ecotourism on Local Communities

Ecotourism contributes significantly to improving the economy of communities surrounding tourist destinations. The presence of ecotourism destinations can increase household income by creating new business opportunities, such as culinary ventures, homestays, local transportation, and souvenir sales. This economic effect is known as the multiplier effect, where an increase in the number of tourists directly correlates with growth in local economic activities (Maak et al., 2022). In the context of Asia Farm Pekanbaru, various informal businesses have rapidly developed around the tourist area, generating new jobs and stimulating economic circulation at the neighborhood level.

Beyond job creation, ecotourism also helps expand micro-enterprise networks and encourages community entrepreneurship. Rising tourism activity motivates residents to innovate in producing local products with high economic value, supporting the development of a creative economy based on regional potential (Fadhli, 2025). Examples include the emergence of Pekanbaru specialty food businesses, animal-themed costume rentals for children, and photography services within Asia Farm, illustrating a direct link between the destination and local economic growth.

However, the economic benefits of ecotourism are not always evenly distributed (Siregar & Selwendri, 2024). The distribution of economic gains often depends on the level of community involvement in tourism management. Those who actively participate and possess relevant skills tend to benefit more than passive observers. Therefore, ecotourism management must emphasize inclusivity to ensure that economic benefits are fairly shared among all community members (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018). Asia Farm demonstrates a potential urban community economic empowerment model when community-based management is applied consistently.

2.3. Social Impact of Ecotourism on Surrounding Communities

In addition to economic effects, ecotourism significantly influences the social aspects of local communities. Tourism activities encourage broader social interactions between residents and visitors, enriching cultural experiences and strengthening community identity. According to Wulandari et al. (2022), increased social interactions resulting from tourism can enhance a sense of togetherness, solidarity, and social trust among residents. In the context of Asia Farm Pekanbaru, the surrounding community not only benefits economically but also plays an active role in maintaining the destination's image and sustainability.

Ecotourism also fosters social capital through cooperation, mutual aid, and community participation. When residents feel a shared interest in the sustainability of the tourism destination, they become more engaged in maintaining environmental cleanliness, ensuring safety, and participating in local tourism promotion (Budiningtyas et al., 2025). This involvement creates new social dynamics that strengthen networks among individuals and groups within the community (Rahmaniyah & Rokhani, 2021). At Asia Farm, collaborative activities between management and local residents, such as educational events and agricultural festivals, exemplify the tangible enhancement of social capital.

However, ecotourism development can also present social challenges, including shifts in cultural values, conflicts of interest, and unequal participation. Therefore, adaptive social management strategies are necessary to ensure harmonious social changes. A community-based approach is crucial to keeping local residents as central actors in tourism management, guiding the social impact of Asia Farm Pekanbaru toward an inclusive, participatory, and socially resilient community.

2.4. Role of Ecotourism in Promoting Local Economic & Social Development

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that emphasizes balancing economic benefits, environmental conservation, and the social welfare of local communities. Several sustainable development theories argue that inclusively managed tourism can act as a catalyst for local economic growth. According to the community-based tourism theory, community involvement in tourism activities is crucial for creating shared welfare, as each resident has the opportunity to contribute both as an economic actor and as a steward of the environment (Rohim, 2024). In the case of Asia Farm Pekanbaru, this principle is reflected in local participation in economic activities such as selling local products, offering culinary services, and renting tourism facilities, which ultimately increase household income and expand employment opportunities.

Previous research supports this argument. There is a positive correlation between ecotourism and improved economic indicators, including increased income, the growth of microenterprises, and higher purchasing power (Cossengue et al., 2025). Wulandari et al. (2022) highlighted the social dimension, showing that active community involvement strengthens social cohesion, expands cooperative networks, and builds social capital through participation. Consequently, Asia Farm is assumed to generate dual impacts, enhancing both economic growth and social dynamics in surrounding communities. The relationship between ecotourism and community economic and social outcomes can be explained via the multiplier effect and social capital formation. Tourism stimulates local economic circulation by creating new business and employment opportunities, while social interactions foster participation and a sense of ownership toward the destination (Parmawati, 2022).

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach to analyze in depth the impact of Asia Farm Pekanbaru ecotourism on the economic and social conditions of the surrounding community. This approach was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding through the examination and analysis of various written sources such as journals, books, research reports, scientific articles, and data from relevant institutions (Nurrisa et al., 2025). Through this method, the researcher seeks to interpret existing information to illustrate the relationship between the existence of Asia Farm as an educational ecotourism destination and the economic and social changes in its surrounding area (Fadli, 2021).

The analysis is conducted by reviewing theories on ecotourism, local economic development, and community social dynamics to identify the patterns of influence (Moleong, 2017). The unit of analysis in this study focuses on two main aspects: economic impacts, including job creation, MSME growth, and increased community income, and social impacts, encompassing behavioral changes, social interactions, and environmental awareness among local residents (Sugiyono, 2019). Thus, this qualitative method helps produce a comprehensive depiction of Asia Farm Pekanbaru's contribution as a model of ecotourism that promotes economic welfare while simultaneously strengthening the social structure of the local community.

In this study, the interview transcripts and observational data analyzed are derived from documented qualitative findings reported in previous studies, official reports, and institutional publications, and are therefore treated as secondary data within the library research framework. The data in this study were analyzed using qualitative approaches to capture the economic and social impacts of Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism. Qualitative analysis was applied to interview transcripts and observational data to identify patterns in community employment, MSME growth, social interactions, and environmental awareness. Thematic coding was used to categorize responses from informants such as local residents and business owners, allowing for the interpretation of both economic and social outcomes. Data validation in this study was conducted through source triangulation, comparing information obtained from interviews, field observations, and secondary data sources such as reports, publications, and official statistics. Cross-checking these multiple sources ensured the accuracy and reliability of the findings regarding economic and social impacts. Additionally, consistency in responses from different informants was analyzed to confirm the credibility of qualitative data.

4. Results

4.1. Ecotourism on the Economy and Social Life of Surrounding Communities

Asia Farm Pekanbaru is an educational ecotourism destination that has grown rapidly since its opening in 2020. Its tourism concept, which combines educational attractions, livestock farming, culinary experiences, family recreation, and animal shows, has made it a prominent new tourism icon in Pekanbaru. Visitor data indicate a significant increase over the past five years, particularly after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, when public mobility returned to normal. The number of visitors to Asia Farm Pekanbaru from 2020 to 2025 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Visitors to Asia Farm in the Last 5 Years

Years	Number of Visitors	Source
2020	81,039	(Meilany, 2024)
2021	31,752	
2022	52,361	
2023	60,106	

Asia Farm Pekanbaru ecotourism has generated tangible economic impacts for the surrounding community, particularly through increased local employment. It was found that local residents are employed in roles such as cleaning, security, animal caretaking, ticketing, and restaurant services. This indicates that Asia Farm functions as an economic driver for the Tenayan Raya area by providing direct employment opportunities. This aligns with Putri et al.'s (2022) research, which shows that ecotourism can reduce unemployment and stabilize household income through localized employment. Ecotourism is a labor-intensive industry prioritizing local recruitment (Bhushan et al., 2024). Many residents now enjoy more stable jobs since Asia Farm began operations.

In terms of business development, all three informants indicated that Asia Farm stimulates culinary SMEs and creative enterprises. The presence of culinary outlets such as KFC, ice cream, Korean snacks, ramen, and beverages doubles vendor income on weekends. The high variety of food options ensures consistent earnings, and small local culinary businesses have experienced significant income growth. Increased tourist visits boost local vendor revenue by 30–60% on busy days, and ecotourism promotes local product sales and creative culinary ventures (Wulandari et al., 2022). Asia Farm also encourages auxiliary businesses, such as bicycle rentals and an educational mini-theater, providing additional income for youth and enhancing family visitor experiences (Paramita & Ritonga, 2023).

Socially, Asia Farm fosters positive behavioral changes and stronger community interactions. Improved environmental awareness and tourist friendliness, enhanced family-friendly recreation, and heightened concern for environmental sustainability. These findings are consistent with Rohani and Purwoko (2020) and Devi et al. (2022), demonstrating that ecotourism strengthens social cohesion, community interaction, service culture, and awareness of local culture.

Asia Farm's economic and social impacts are complementary; increased income and business growth support social stability, while stronger social cohesion and environmental awareness reinforce economic sustainability. This pattern aligns with Asriati (2023), showing that economic, social, and environmental aspects interact within a sustainable tourism system. Consequently, Asia Farm represents a dual-impact destination that boosts local economic development and enhances social quality, positioning it as a strategic contributor to Tenayan Raya's emergence as an ecotourism-driven economic hub.

Table 2. Economic and Social Impacts of Ecotourism on Surrounding Communities

No.	Impact Aspects	Impact Description	Forms of Change in Society	Positive Implications
1	Employment	Many local residents were recruited to become cleaners, security, animal guards, and restaurant staff.	Unemployment is reduced, and people have permanent jobs.	Improving the welfare and economic stability of the family.
2	MSME Growth	The emergence of various culinary businesses and local products around the tourist area.	Traders' earnings doubled by the weekend.	Encourage economic independence and community creativity.
3	Tourism Support Businesses	There are bicycle rentals, educational mini cinemas, and educational rides.	Local youth get new business opportunities.	Fostering small business innovation based on tourism services.
4	Social Interaction	Tourist attractions become a gathering and socializing space for residents.	Relations between residents are getting closer and more harmonious.	The formation of social cohesion and a culture of mutual cooperation.
5	Environmental & Cultural Awareness	The community is more concerned about cleanliness and environmental sustainability.	There is a tourism-friendly culture and a sense of belonging to the region.	The development of tourism awareness behavior and the preservation of local culture.

Based on Table 2 above, it can be concluded that the presence of Asia Farm Pekanbaru has a significant and sustainable impact on the economic and social life of the surrounding community. Economically, Asia Farm has created numerous job opportunities for local residents, particularly in tourism-related services, directly helping to reduce unemployment and increase household income. The area also serves as a driver for MSME growth through the development of culinary businesses and local products, while encouraging the emergence of supporting ventures such as bicycle rentals and educational mini-theaters, providing new entrepreneurial opportunities for youth. Socially, Asia Farm strengthens community interactions, fosters a sense of togetherness, and raises awareness about the importance of maintaining cleanliness, environmental conservation, and local cultural heritage. The combination of economic growth and enhanced social quality demonstrates that Asia Farm functions not only as a tourist destination but also as a catalyst for community development oriented toward welfare, sustainability, and social harmony in the Tenayan Raya area.

4.2. Revenue Impact of a Visitor Preference-Based Recommendation System

Based on the study using a user-based collaborative filtering approach, the recommendation system implemented at Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism shows significant potential to support increased community income through the optimization of the culinary tourism sector. Interaction data from 3,200 visitor reviews indicate that culinary offerings are a dominant factor in attracting tourists. This demonstrates that effective management of culinary services in the tourism area directly impacts local product sales and creates new business opportunities for the surrounding community, particularly MSME operators providing traditional foods and creative processed products (Meilany, 2024).

System testing revealed that the recommendation model operates with high accuracy, achieving 94.38% based on MAE and 92.89% based on RMSE. These results indicate that the system can effectively provide culinary recommendations aligned with visitor preferences, enhancing the tourist experience and increasing average spending per visitor. In terms of local economic impact, increased tourist preference and loyalty toward recommended culinary products contribute to the growth of the informal sector, including street vendors, parking service providers, and souvenir craftsmen (Meilany, 2024).

Evaluation results show that local community income around Asia Farm Pekanbaru has increased significantly alongside growing tourist visits and interest in locally recommended culinary options. This confirms that technology- and preference-based destination management can be an effective strategy to strengthen local economic resilience. Therefore, Asia Farm Pekanbaru functions not only as an educational and recreational tourism destination but also as a dynamic microeconomic hub through the empowerment of culinary sectors and tourist interactions. Table 3 shows the summary of revenue analysis.

Table 3. Summary of Revenue Analysis

No.	Analysis Aspect	Key Findings	Impact on Revenue	Implications for Society
1	Visitor Interaction Data	3,200 food reviews rated 1–5	Showing the high interest of tourists in local cuisine	Increase in the turnover of culinary merchants
2	Model Evaluation (MAE & RMSE)	MAE: 0.2250, RMSE: 0.0441	High accuracy (94.38% & 92.89%) increases the effectiveness of recommendations	Travelers are more likely to buy recommended products
3	Most Popular Types of Culinary	Chicken dimsum, ramen noodles, fried rice	Increased demand for popular products increases business diversification	Encouraging culinary innovation of local communities
4	Frequency of Tourist Visits	Post-pandemic increase	Increase in average spending per traveller	Increase economic turnover around destinations
5	Local Economic Impact	Increase in the income of culinary traders and MSMEs	There is a multiplier effect on the economy of the surrounding residents	Strengthening the competitiveness of the local tourism-based economy

The analysis indicates that culinary activities at Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism have a significant impact on increasing local community income. By implementing a visitor preference-based recommendation system, tourists can more easily find foods that match their tastes, boosting transactions and expanding business opportunities within the tourism sector. This approach not only enhances economic productivity but also fosters social balance between tourists and the local community, supporting the development of a sustainable tourism destination.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the presence of Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism has a significant impact on the economic and social improvement of the community in the Tenayan Raya area. As an educational tourism destination that combines elements of farming, recreation, and culinary experiences, Asia Farm plays a strategic role in creating a sustainable local economic ecosystem (Paludi, 2022).

The findings show that since its opening in 2020, Asia Farm has not only become a family recreation center but also functions as an economic driver for the surrounding community. Data indicate an annual increase in visitors, which directly affects the growth of employment opportunities and enhances tourism-based economic activity in the area.

Asia Farm has proven to be a primary source of employment for local residents. Many individuals who previously did not have stable jobs can now work in various sectors such as security, cleaning, ticketing, animal care, and restaurants. This phenomenon aligns with findings by Putri (2022) which emphasize that ecotourism can function as a labor-intensive industry, absorbing large numbers of workers while prioritizing local residents. Field data also show that household incomes have increased significantly in line with the rising number of tourists. Thus, Asia Farm not only expands employment opportunities but also enhances family economic stability through direct local labor absorption.

Furthermore, positive effects are evident in the growth of MSMEs and creative businesses around the tourism area. The emergence of culinary ventures such as local snack stalls, ramen, ice cream, and modern beverages demonstrates that the community capitalizes on economic opportunities arising from increased tourist activity. Interviews with traders indicate that their revenues can double on weekends. This aligns with research by Wulandari (2022), which states that increased tourist visits can raise local business incomes by 30–60%. Additionally, supporting businesses such as bicycle rentals, educational attractions, and family mini-theaters illustrate a multiplier effect that strengthens the local economic structure surrounding Asia Farm.

The presence of Asia Farm also brings positive changes to community behavior and interaction patterns. Residents have become more aware of environmental cleanliness, hospitality toward tourists, and the values of cooperation in managing the tourism area. This shows that Asia Farm has helped foster a service culture at the local level. In line with Rohani and Purwoko (2020), well-managed ecotourism can enhance social cohesion and improve the quality of interpersonal relationships. Additionally, Devi (2022) emphasizes that tourism destinations can strengthen community awareness regarding cultural and environmental preservation as part of local identity. Consequently, Asia Farm impacts not only the economy but also enriches the social and cultural values of the surrounding community.

The study demonstrates that the economic and social impacts of Asia Farm are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Increased community income through the culinary sector and MSMEs contributes to social stability, while enhanced social interaction and environmental awareness further support local economic sustainability. These findings support the sustainable ecotourism theory proposed by Asriati (2023), which states that economic, social, and environmental aspects interact to create a balanced tourism destination. Therefore, it can be concluded that Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism functions not only as a recreational and educational site but also as a catalyst for community development oriented toward welfare, sustainability, and social harmony in the Tenayan Raya area.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and the discussion conducted, it can be concluded that Asia Farm Pekanbaru Ecotourism has a significant and sustainable impact on the economic improvement and social quality of the community in the Tenayan Raya area. From an economic perspective, the presence of Asia Farm has proven capable of creating new job opportunities for the local population, reducing unemployment, and increasing family income through the service, culinary, and tourism-based creative sectors. Community economic activities have also grown with the emergence of various MSMEs and supporting businesses such as bicycle

rentals and educational mini cinemas, which strengthen the local economic structure and create a multiplier effect for surrounding residents. From a social perspective, Asia Farm has succeeded in fostering community awareness of the importance of cleanliness, hospitality, and the preservation of the environment and local culture, ultimately strengthening social bonds, community participation, and service culture at the local level. Thus, Asia Farm not only serves as an educational and family recreational tourism destination but also acts as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable community development, serving as a concrete example of how ecotourism development can holistically support the socio-economic welfare of the community in the Tenayan Raya area.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that Asia Farm Pekanbaru ecotourism has a significant and sustainable impact on both the economic and social dimensions of the surrounding community, enhancing employment, MSME growth, and social cohesion. The findings imply that well-managed ecotourism destinations can serve as catalysts for local economic development while fostering community awareness, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. However, this study is limited by its reliance on qualitative data and secondary sources, which may not capture long-term behavioral and economic trends. Future research could adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches, include larger sample sizes, and explore the effects of technological interventions, such as recommendation systems, on optimizing local income and visitor experiences.

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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