The provision of travel advice to tourists visiting disaster area: The case of Banda Aceh

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Abstract. Banda Aceh has much revived and transformed into a better degree from the devastating tsunami disaster in 2004. Structural, infrastructure and social transformation have led to the economic growth of the city. One of the contributing factors to the growth is tourism. The number of tourists visiting Banda Aceh has increased progressively every year, with the most significant number coming from neighbouring countries such as Malaysia. To support the tourism development sector, Aceh needs a sufficient infrastructure, high-quality services and complete information about the disaster mitigation preparedness since most of the places of interest, namely the tsunami historical sites, are located in the tsunami-prone area. Lack of official information about the disaster mitigation preparedness becomes one of the critical issues that need to be provided by the government. This paper evaluates the readiness of Banda Aceh Government and its agencies in providing disaster mitigation information to tourists. Data was gathered from a series of interviews conducted with travel agents (tour guide) and Malaysian tourists in April 2019. This paper argues that in the emergence of special interest tourism called 'disaster tourism' or 'dark tourism' in Aceh's tsunami-prone area, the availability of disaster mitigation guides or travel advice for tourists are still lacking and need urgent solutions. This paper addresses some practical recommendations for Banda Aceh Government to undertake the issues.

1. Introduction

Most cities in Indonesia are at risk of disaster, both nature and human-induced. Banda Aceh, as the capital of Aceh Province, has arisen as a tourist destination from the earthquake and tsunami that struck in 2004. Although these disasters have devastated the city and killed more than 100,000 people, the city has now become one of the destinations for "disaster tourism" in Indonesia. Various infrastructures have been built followed by structural and social transformation, especially tourism support facilities, to gain more tourist visits to the areas that were destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami 16 years ago. The increasing number of tourists has led to the economic growth of the city wherein the tourism economy of Banda Aceh has been recognized globally as one of the important sector for the city. As one of the economic factors, tourism sector in Banda Aceh is growing faster than the tourism sector in other parts of the world, in terms of export, output, value-added, capital investment and employment. Tourism is an essential economic factor, especially as an export, to industrialized and developing nations. Tourism has become the second-highest significant contributor to foreign exchange. Despite being at risk, it is still believed that the tourism sector could bring positive development as well as rapid progress for
Banda Aceh city in the future. The tsunami wreckage, which was converted into a tourism destination, has a significant effect on the tourism sector in Banda Aceh city.

The tourism industry was formed by the demand to travel (tourism actors), the availability of supporting infrastructure, the existence of tourism objects and attractions that are supported by a promotion system and good marketing and service to actor’s travel (supply). After the tsunami that struck Aceh in 2004, besides the historical and leisure tourism attraction, the Aceh government is now also focusing on the ‘special interest tourism’ like disaster tourism and dark tourism as the most demanding tourism attraction in Banda Aceh. This type of tourism has naturally been developed in Banda Aceh after the 2004 tsunami due to the interest and scrutiny of tourists to understand the event on a deeper level. The community has also demanded to establish the disaster areas as tourism destination in order to preserve the value and the historical moments of the disaster (Ginting, Fahmi, & Ginting, 2018). This increasing demand and interest has led Banda Aceh Government to take initiatives to establish a few disaster areas including tsunami mass grave, tsunami museum, PLTD Apung, ship on the house, Baiturrahman Grand Mosque, Baiturrahim Mosque, Flying Dome of the mosque, Rahmatullah mosque, and Lampuuk beach, as tourism spots in Banda Aceh city.

These tourism spots are mostly located within the red zone, which is a high disaster-prone area. Information on the disaster-prone area must be widespread to awake the awareness of disaster mitigation in the disaster area. It should be easily accessed by all levels, especially tourists who visit Aceh. Comprehensive information consisting of a mitigation plan, including the escape route from place of attraction to nearby evacuation building or open space, is needed to inform tourists as part of the disaster mitigation awareness.

The Aceh Disaster Management Agency (Badan Penanggulangan Bencana Aceh, BPBA) has released a map of the tsunami wave and tsunami zone in Aceh Development Agency website. However, it only draws the tsunami wave zone. Therefore, comprehensive information about the location of tourist attraction, the tsunami zone and mitigation building/saver area nearby, must be mapped, to educate the tourists visiting Aceh about its presence in the disaster area and information about mitigation plans. This information can be seen in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. MAP of tourism attraction and tsunami hazard](https://bappeda.bandaacehkota.go.id/katalog/modified)

The tsunami sites that scattered on the coast of Banda Aceh have become a “magnet” for tourist, both domestic and foreign, visiting the city. The escalating number of tourists visiting Aceh has helped the city to increase their income. Previously, in 2004, only 83 tourists came to visit Aceh and significantly
increased year after year until it reached 76,452 tourists in 2016 (figure 2). In 2017, the tourism sector contributed IDR 10.87 Trillion to Aceh’s Economy. Even though tourism has been proliferating after the tsunami and will continue its dynamic growth into the future, it does not mean the industry will grow smoothly. In some cases, as mentioned by Edgell, et al. (2008) there is inadequate understanding of governments regarding the importance of economic, environmental, and social aspects in tourism. Moreover, there is limited access to current information focusing on tourism affairs.

There is a common aim to protect tourist-consumer by providing a safe, satisfying, and fulfilling experience for visitors (Velasco, 2016). The government should be a central actor in providing access to information about the disaster area to tourist. Under the aegis of the government, it is a concern to have a framework of tourism policy (disaster management plan) and accessible information about mitigation for tourists in a disaster-prone area. It is a must to ensure tourists, as the population of the vulnerable groups, to have the access to the information on disaster management plan and be able to communicate with the related stakeholders so that they can be collaborative in all phases of the disaster (Scarpino and Gretzel in Ritchie and Campiranon, 2015). Therefore adequate information should be provided by the government, to keep tourism afloat in areas that experience natural disasters (Hillingdon, 2017).

![Figure 2. The number of Tourist Visiting Aceh Source: Aceh Statistic Board, 2013 -2018](image)

2. Literature Review
A definition of tourism is mentioned by Mathieson & Wall (1982) that “tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities were undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater their needs”. As stated under Indonesian Law No.10 of 2009 about tourism, tourism is “various kinds of activities and supported by various facilities and services provided by the community, business people, government, and regional governments”. It shows that tourism is highly integrated with many stakeholders. Several plans, programs and directions for tourism are formed and regulated in a tourism policy that consists of various essential aspects to achieve the goal set by the government. One of arising niche tourism types is dark tourism or also called as disaster tourism.

The term of dark tourism has been discussed by Foley and Lennon (1996) and they mentioned that this term is used to describe “……the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Foley and Lennon, 1996, p. 198). Visitation from family and friends were not considered as dark tourism, but it is included in
dark tourism if the tourists visit the destination due to the serendipity, planned trip by the tour agents or company, and also because of the curiosity of the people who happen to be in the surrounding area of the destination (Foley & Lennon, 1996). Dark tourism has become an interesting topic for the scholars to study the reasons behind the tourists’ desires, motivations, and interest to visit a destination that is associated with death (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2009). This paper focuses on Banda Aceh, Indonesia, which has become a tourist attraction due to earthquake and tsunami that has struck the city in 2004. The number of tourists has increased naturally since the disasters struck. Due to this increasing number of tourists, the Banda Aceh local authorities have developed tourism policy to better manage the tourists.

Many scholars have defined the meaning of tourism policy. Goeldner & Ritchie (2006) defines tourism policy “a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, and development/promotion goals and strategies that provide a framework in which collective and individual decisions directly influence the development of long-term tourism and daily activities in a destination”. The similar definition was also mentioned by Edgell, et al (2008), that tourism policy is “a progressive course of actions, guidelines, directives, principles, and procedures set in an ethical framework that is issues-focused and best represent the intent of a community (or nation) to effectively meet its planning, development, product, service, marketing, and sustainability goals and objectives for the future growth of tourism”. The same meaning of tourism policy also defines by Velasco (2016), as “a set of discourses, decisions, and practices driven by governments, sometimes in collaboration with private or social actors, to achieve diverse objectives related to tourism”. Meanwhile, Biederman (2007) stated that tourism policy is “the direction of action to be taken by a country, region, locality, or individual destination when developing or promoting tourism”.

From tourism policies mentioned above, it is clear that fundamentally, the tourism policy should emphasize a set, of course, guideline, directives and planning goals and a course of action for decision making. Tourism policy is ‘dynamic’. It should be future-oriented, balanced, comprehensive and flexible enough to allow adjustments and refinements when the occasion arises since it incorporates the interests of the tourism stakeholders.

It is a common aim to protect tourism-consumer, since tourism is an experience or service that is consumed by people, by providing a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors. A Policy Instruments for Tourism Policy should be catered in knowledge and information division in particular as a provision and diffusion of knowledge and information, which is communication instruments is one out of five categories of instrument that can be used by the government (Velasco, 2016). The use of any platform of media and application, as communication tools, could be both for raising awareness of specific values, as hospitality, and for supporting promotional campaigns of tourism destinations.

3. Methodology
This study employed a qualitative approach. This study is based on the perspective of tourists. Data were gathered from a series of interviews. The interviews involved two focus groups which are travel agents (tour guide) and Malaysian tourists. Since Malaysian tourists occupy the highest rank and the ease of meeting Malaysian tourists in Banda Aceh city, therefore the Malaysians tourists are chosen as the respondents. About nine deep interviewees conducted in Banda Aceh in April 2019. During the interview, the interviewees were asked about the purpose of their trip to Banda Aceh, their awareness on the safety procedures that need to be taken if disasters struck, and their opinions on the natural disaster management plans prepared in Banda Aceh. Voice recorder was used to record the conversation. After the interview sessions, the voice recorder was transcribed to verbatim. Then, the data had been analyzed using thematic analysis.

4. Analysis and Result
According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six useful steps in conducting a thematic analysis. The steps include to become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes,
define themes, and write-up. First of all, identifying the codes had been done from the answer given by interviewees (Table 4.1).

**Table 1. Theme and Codes of the Interview Content**

| THEME                                                                 | CODES                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Banda Aceh as a safe holiday destination.                           | ➢ It could be a safe destination provided that travellers become familiar with natural disaster and its risk                     |
|                                                                      | ➢ A warm welcome of the people & acceptable public transportation to move around                                                   |
|                                                                      | ➢ Signages of safety procedures are visible in most places.                                                                         |
|                                                                      | ➢ It is safe if the safety precautions and disaster warning has been predicted with scientific researches.                          |
|                                                                      | ➢ Aceh implements Syariah Law, so the crime rate is low.                                                                             |
| Action is taken if a disaster (e.g. tsunami and earthquake) strike. | ➢ Unclear instruction regarding the actions that must be taken when a disaster occurs.                                             |
|                                                                      | ➢ Evacuating coastal area if the destination is in danger of a tsunami                                                               |
|                                                                      | ➢ Run towards a high place                                                                                                          |
|                                                                      | ➢ Find the higher ground                                                                                                            |
|                                                                      | ➢ Not of hand but evacuation measures are displayed in hotels and other tourist spots which might help tourists in deciding what to do. |
|                                                                      | ➢ Transfer to the safe place provided by the authority and follow the emergency route.                                                |
|                                                                      | ➢ There is no clear procedure given.                                                                                               |
| Place seek for help if a disaster (e.g. tsunami and earthquake) strike. | ➢ Malaysia embassy, Mitigation Centre.                                                                                            |
|                                                                      | ➢ Seeking sanctuary in escape building constructed in the highlands as well as rescue stations                                     |
|                                                                      | ➢ Tsunami Disaster Mitigation Resource Centre, police, embassy                                                                       |
|                                                                      | ➢ Malaysia ambassador                                                                                                               |
|                                                                      | ➢ Look for appropriate organization related to the disaster.                                                                         |
|                                                                      | ➢ It is unclear how to contact assistance for help.                                                                                  |
|                                                                      | ➢ Any Banda Aceh authority.                                                                                                          |
| The most reliable platform or medium to retrieve disaster-related information. | ➢ Mitigation Centre                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                      | ➢ TV                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                      | ➢ Radio                                                                                                                            |
|                                                                      | ➢ Social media                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                      | ➢ Internet                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                      | ➢ Tourist spots should be equipped with the site office of disaster units.                                                        |
|                                                                      | ➢ News broadcasting and newspaper.                                                                                                |
| Governments’ natural disaster management plan for its residents and visitors. | ➢ They must have a perfect plan for both groups.                                                                                 |
|                                                                      | ➢ In another state in Padang Sumatera, the government put up signs on evacuation along the main road.                                 |
|                                                                      | ➢ It is unclear to the tourists. Aside from the evacuation procedure signages, other plans are not visible                           |
|                                                                      | ➢ The government has a plan only to local people, not to visitors.                                                                   |
| Reason of requirement information regarding mitigation information system for tourists | ➢ The number of tourists in Banda Aceh increase every year.                                                                         |
|                                                                      | ➢ Many people always come to visit Banda Aceh                                                                                  |
|                                                                      | ➢ Tourist visiting Banda Aceh who is never experiencing the earthquake or tsunami.                                                   |
Ø Tourist/public will be alert on what is happening & quickly get the evacuation info
Ø Compulsory information is given to tourists when arriving through travel agents and other related agencies.
Ø Prevention and preparedness are better than cure.

The codes are reviewed based on the interviewee information. Five of the interviewees went to Banda Aceh for a holiday trip. Another four visited Banda Aceh for their class workshop. The workshop involved the discussion with the researchers from TDMRC about the awareness among the tourists about the mitigation plan in Banda Aceh and also a short visit to Syiah Kuala University. Before they visit Banda Aceh, they are already aware that Banda Aceh is located at the disaster-prone area, especially tsunami. The respondents who went to Banda Aceh for a holiday agreed that Banda Aceh is a safe holiday destination as they felt welcomed while in Banda Aceh and an acceptable public transportation system makes it easier for them to move around. One of them said that he could see the safety procedures signages in most places that he visited. The respondents also said that Banda Aceh could be a safer destination holiday if the travellers are familiarized with natural disaster and its risks before visiting Banda Aceh. Adequate safety precautions and disaster warning should also be done by doing scientific researches on the natural disaster. However, the rest of the respondents did not agree that Banda Aceh is a safe destination to visit.

Majority of the respondents were aware of the safety procedures that need to be taken and the agencies that they should refer to if the natural disaster strikes Banda Aceh. Furthermore, they think that social media and the internet, as well as the mitigation center, are perfect mediums and platforms for them to retrieve information about any natural disasters. Other than that, most of the tourist do not know where to seek help if a disaster strike. In addition, five of the respondents know that Banda Aceh has prepared and implemented the natural disaster management plan during the previous natural disaster. However, the other four respondents are not sure about the existing of the natural disaster management plan.

All respondents said that Banda Aceh government should prepare the mitigation information system for tourists as Banda Aceh receives more tourists every year, and most of the tourists do not know about the natural disasters. The tourists will be more alert on the natural disasters and the evacuation information if they are informed regarding the issues before they visit Banda Aceh.

5. Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations
Based on the thematic analysis, most of the tourists who have visited and are going to visit Banda Aceh know that they have to find a safe place such as higher ground or head to safe zone area (green area), depending on the types of disasters like tsunami or earthquake. According to Leah, et al. (2012) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018), the higher ground is a mitigation response to the event of a tsunami. During the tsunami strike in 2004, most of Banda Aceh residents survived when they move to higher ground (Vale, et al., 2004). Based on the study, tourist identified the social media, internet, tourist spot and Mitigation Centre as the most reliable platforms to retrieve disaster-related information.

Banda Aceh government intends to make tourism as a leading sector in foreign exchange earnings, create jobs and introduce the nature and culture of Aceh that is Islamic. From the perspective of tourism, tsunami disaster has brought a positive impact on the city. Banda Aceh, besides one of the Islamic tourism destinations, Banda Aceh Department of Tourism also shaping Banda Aceh as “A Tsunami Education City” which is highly potential for the tourism sector. Banda Aceh tourism department had developed a Tourism Strategic Plan year 2017 – 2022 as a foundation for reference to sustainable development planning under Law No. 10 2009 concerning Tourism.

To visioning Banda Aceh policy of shaping Banda Aceh as “The Education Tsunami City”, some actions should be taken as mentioned by Bierderman (2007) to develop or to promote tourism. In order to achieve the vision of the policy, communication instruments are very essential so that the tourists are
more aware with the knowledge and information on tsunami events and feeling safer to visit Banda Aceh (Velasco, 2016). In order to achieve the policy, one of the actions that should be considered is to spread the earliest information regarding the destination through the internet or media platform about the destination. So, the tourist is being educated through the media platform about the destination before their arrival. By this, we expected tourist to build awareness and prepared/readiness before their journey. A map on figure 1 could be one of the alternatives to introduce the tourists, who intend to visit Aceh, about the position of tourist attraction in the disaster-prone area. This map should be able to be accessed by any platform (internet, social media and other media platforms) that linked to the official department related to disaster and tourism and also incorporation with travel agencies in both countries. The travel agencies in Banda Aceh also found this map would be very useful to be delivered to the tourist during their tour, so they will get the information about the tsunami potential during the city tour visiting each of tourism attraction. The use of any platform of media and application, as communication tools, could be both for raising awareness of specific values, as hospitality, and for supporting promotional campaigns of tourism destinations (Velasco, 2016).

From the respondents’ perspective, the signage for the tsunami evacuation route is available in the most high-potential tsunami zone. Unfortunately, many tour guides stated that the tourists are facing difficulties in reading the signage provided. Hence, the tour guides must be capable of providing information to the tourist groups for explaining the signage. This is also emphasized by the tour guide that the Malay Singaporean Tourists were eager to know more on the disaster information. From the respondents’ perspective, the signage for the tsunami evacuation route is available in the most high-potential tsunami zone. Unfortunately, many tour guides stated that the tourists are facing difficulties in reading the signage provided. Hence, the tour guides must be capable of providing information to the tourist groups for explaining the signage. This is also emphasized by the tour guide that the Malay Singaporean tourists were eager to know more on the disaster information. Therefore, it is compulsory to include the signage and the map as the Standard Operation Procedure for the travel agent, or known as “Safety Briefing”.

In another part, the Banda Aceh government had encouraged their travel agencies to include visiting escape building at any Mitigation Centre in the tourist itinerary. Besides, the government also had taken the initiative to play Smong song in the Tsunami museum (Rahman, et al., 2017). The Smong song is a tradition of indigenous knowledge of tsunami risk that helps inhabitant from Simeulue Island survive during tsunami strike in 2004. The meaning from the song which asks the resident to move to the higher ground when the string earthquake strike followed by lowering of seawater.

Subsequently, this paper evaluates the readiness of Banda Aceh Government and its agencies in providing disaster mitigation information to tourists and some policy actions that need to be taken. Based on the study, only some of the tourists understand and know about mitigation information, but the rest of the tourists still unaware of disaster mitigation information. The Banda Aceh Government and its agencies should implement more effort to deliver mitigation information to the tourist. Signage and any mitigation information should be display at the tourist spot to take tourist attention. Another part, Banda Aceh government has to play a role in educating all stakeholders and strengthening community (such as TAGANA-Taruna Siaga Bencana, Kampung Siaga Bencana, and many others) in providing and training about mitigation information regularly and enriching Community-Based Disaster Preparedness programme (ex: PRBBK-Pengurangan Resiko Bencana Berbasis Communitas) either from government agencies or Non-Government Organization. Therefore, the tourists who involve with the community while city tour will indirectly being educated with the community during their visit.

Other than that, based on the study, tourists will seek help from their embassy or consulate and Banda Aceh authority (police, BASARNAS-National Search and Rescue Agency, BPBA-Aceh Province Disaster Management Agency) and other related officer and Mitigation Centre. Therefore, it is crucial to educate the embassy/consulate regarding the mitigation plan if a disaster occurs. The embassy/consulate also have to train their staffs regarding disaster handling. Besides, understanding ways that the tourist defines risks, recognizes and interprets risks, and communicates these risks to its
members is critically important to be implemented. It is because most of the tourist visit Banda Aceh is from Malaysia, which never has experience regarding disaster strike, notably earthquake and tsunami.

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