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Developing Innovative Nature-Based Tourism Products Through Ecotourism: A Model From Egon Buluk Tourism Village, Indonesia

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Abstract

Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses diverse natural tourism resources, including natural hot springs, waterfalls, cold-water springs, Mount Egon trekking and hiking trails, agrotourism attractions, and natural caves. This study aims to identify these resources, analyse development opportunities and challenges, and formulate an ecotourism-based nature tourism product innovation model. Using a qualitative case study approach, the findings indicate that these resources have strong potential to be developed into tourism products centred on visitor experiences, education, conservation, and community empowerment. However, destination development continues to face challenges related to infrastructure, accessibility, visitor safety, human resource capacity, institutional capacity, and environmental management. The study proposes an ecotourism-based tourism product innovation model that integrates diverse tourism resources into a comprehensive tourism experience system to enhance destination competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and local community well-being.

Keywords: ecotourism, tourism product innovation, nature tourism, tourism village, destination development.

INTRODUCTION

The essence of ecotourism lies in its role as a passport to prosperity for local communities in tourism destinations through the preservation of natural and cultural resources (Aseres & Sira, 2021). Ecotourism can be viewed as a form of supplementary tourism. Supplementary tourism refers to tourism that is based on conservation efforts

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and traditional community livelihoods while being supported by pre-existing facilities and infrastructure (Adikampana, 2021). Ecotourism plays a significant role in promoting equality, social justice, and social entrepreneurship. Strzelecka, Boley, and Akhshik (2025) emphasise that ecotourism represents a relatively sustainable pathway to economic development, one that justifies the protection and restoration of natural environments while simultaneously creating opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and the empowerment of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

Sikka Regency possesses a remarkable diversity of natural and cultural resources (Sawu & Adikampana, 2025). These resources include extensive rice fields, arid hills, coastal and marine landscapes, historical buildings, archaeological heritage sites, local customs, and cultural traditions (Chandra & Sawu, 2024). Such richness provides a strong foundation for the development of sustainable tourism destinations in the region. However, efforts to realise this potential have not yet been optimally implemented. Therefore, community-based ecotourism studies remain essential for identifying an appropriate positioning strategy for sustainable tourism development in Sikka Regency (Sawu, 2024). This objective is also consistent with the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (*RIPPARDA*) of Sikka Regency, Chapter IV, Article 9(a), which emphasises the application of sustainable development principles.

In general, regional tourism development policies in this context refer to the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan of Sikka Regency. Tourism destination development encompasses destination zoning, attraction development, accessibility and transportation improvement, the provision of public infrastructure and tourism facilities, community empowerment through tourism, and tourism investment development. However, in practice, the development of tourism destination components remains limited. This condition is largely attributed to the lack of academic studies that can support and guide tourism destination development within the region (Sawu, 2024).

Egon Buluk Tourism Village is one of the areas endowed with abundant natural resources that hold considerable potential for sustainable ecotourism development (Pareira & Sawu, 2025). These resources include natural hot springs, waterfalls, cold-water springs, trekking and hiking trails in the Mount Egon area, community-based agrotourism, and natural caves with ecological and educational value. The diversity of these attractions offers significant opportunities to create unique, authentic, and nature-based tourism experiences (Sawu & Ridla, 2024). Nevertheless, these resources have thus far been developed only in a fragmented manner and have not been integrated into

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a planned, sustainable, and ecotourism-oriented nature tourism product innovation framework (Sawu & Tandafatu, 2025).

Contemporary tourism development is no longer focused solely on the utilisation of tourist attractions (Desbiolles, 2021). Rather, it increasingly depends on the ability of destinations to create innovative and sustainable tourism products that generate benefits for local communities (Sawu, 2025). Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses a variety of natural tourism resources, including hot springs, waterfalls, cold-water springs, trekking and hiking trails, agrotourism attractions, and natural caves, all of which have the potential to become flagship tourism attractions (Pareira & Sawu, 2025). These resources constitute valuable assets for the development of ecotourism that prioritises environmental conservation, education, and community empowerment. However, without appropriate product innovation, these resources risk remaining ordinary attractions that are unable to provide memorable visitor experiences or achieve a competitive advantage (Sawu & Tandafatu, 2025).

Although Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses diverse natural tourism resources, they have not yet been transformed into integrated and sustainable tourism product innovations (Pareira & Sawu, 2025). Tourism activities remain largely conventional and are primarily oriented towards visits to individual attractions rather than the creation of higher-value tourism experiences. There are currently no tourism products that combine hot springs, waterfalls, trekking, hiking, agrotourism, and natural caves into integrated ecotourism packages or activities (Sawu & Tandafatu, 2025). Furthermore, environmental conservation, tourism interpretation, educational elements, and community participation have not yet become central components of existing tourism product development. As a result, the economic, social, and environmental benefits generated from these natural tourism resources have not been fully optimised.

This study was undertaken because Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses a unique and comprehensive range of natural resources that have not yet been optimally utilised through the development of ecotourism-based nature tourism product innovations. Research on tourism product innovation within this area remains limited, highlighting the need for studies capable of identifying existing tourism resources and formulating innovative tourism products that align with local characteristics. The findings of this study are expected to provide a foundation for developing a more competitive destination, strengthening natural resource conservation, enhancing community participation, and serving as a reference for local governments and tourism village

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managers in their efforts to establish Egon Buluk Tourism Village as a sustainable ecotourism destination in Sikka Regency.

Literature Review

Ecotourism-Based Nature Tourism

Nature-based tourism in nature recreation parks and protected areas is increasingly recognised as a *nature-based solution* aimed at mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change while protecting biodiversity, generating economic benefits, building local capacity, and enhancing community resilience (Onofri & Narain, 2025). Within this context, ecotourism has emerged as an important approach to maintaining and improving the ecological health of protected areas (Fennell & de Grosbois, 2024). Previous studies have demonstrated that ecotourism can serve as an effective mechanism for stimulating local economies while simultaneously supporting the management and conservation of protected areas (Wani et al., 2025). Therefore, achieving a sustainable synergy between ecotourism activities and conservation practices requires effective governance and management systems for protected areas (Nutsugbodo & Adjei, 2020).

Ecotourism is founded on principles of environmental conservation, education, community participation, and sustainable economic development. Unlike conventional tourism, ecotourism seeks not only to provide recreational experiences but also to foster environmental awareness and generate benefits for local communities. Through responsible tourism practices, ecotourism contributes to the preservation of natural resources while creating opportunities for local livelihoods and community empowerment. Consequently, the development of ecotourism-based nature tourism requires an integrated approach that balances environmental protection, visitor satisfaction, and community well-being.

Tourism Village Development

Tourism village development aims to preserve and showcase the authentic characteristics of rural life. The uniqueness of tourism villages lies in the integration of natural and cultural resources that create distinctive tourism experiences. Rural tourism should be understood as tourism that develops within rural settings and reflects rural characteristics. Its key attributes include being located in rural areas, fulfilling rural functions, operating on a small scale, maintaining traditional values, growing gradually

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and sustainably, and being managed by local communities (Adikampana et al., 2019; Sawu & Adikampana, 2025).

Rural tourism is widely recognised as an important driver of economic development and an instrument for improving the quality of life of rural residents (Martínez, 2019; Sawu & Adikampana, 2025). Tourism activities create employment opportunities, diversify local income sources, and stimulate the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. Rural tourism destinations are generally characterised by the dominance of small-scale tourism businesses that are closely connected to local communities and resources. Furthermore, rural tourism contributes to social well-being by strengthening community cohesion and reducing socio-economic pressures in rural areas (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012; Sawu & Adikampana, 2025). Therefore, sustainable tourism village development should integrate economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions to ensure long-term benefits for local communities.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design focusing on Egon Buluk Tourism Village. The selection of the case study was based on the characteristics of Egon Buluk Tourism Village, which possesses diverse natural tourism resources that have not yet been integrated into an ecotourism-based tourism product capable of generating optimal benefits for both local communities and the environment.

The researcher conducted a series of field visits to tourism sites representing the village's tourism potential, including natural hot springs, waterfalls, Mount Egon trekking and hiking trails, community agricultural areas, and natural caves. At each location, observations were undertaken to assess the condition of tourism attractions, existing tourism activities, linkages among attractions, supporting facilities, accessibility, and opportunities for development as part of a more integrated tourism product.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with village government representatives, members of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), community leaders, tourism entrepreneurs, academics, and visitors. These interviews aimed to obtain insights into the village's tourism potential, existing management practices, opportunities for tourism product development, challenges encountered, and stakeholder expectations regarding future tourism development. Furthermore, the researcher organised focus group discussions involving key stakeholders engaged in tourism development within the village.

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The study also explored the relationships between existing tourism resources and opportunities for creating more diverse and educational tourism experiences aligned with ecotourism principles. Simultaneously, various constraints affecting destination development were identified, including limitations related to facilities, accessibility, visitor safety, community capacity, institutional arrangements, and environmental conservation efforts.

Data were analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Field findings were categorised into major themes related to natural tourism potential, development opportunities, development challenges, and the need for tourism product innovation. These findings were subsequently synthesised to formulate an ecotourism-based nature tourism product innovation development model that reflects the characteristics and actual conditions of Egon Buluk Tourism Village.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Natural Tourism Potential of Egon Buluk Tourism Village

Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses a diverse range of natural tourism resources with strong potential to be developed into ecotourism-based tourism products. These resources include natural hot and cold springs, waterfalls, Mount Egon trekking and hiking trails, community-based agrotourism, and natural caves. These attractions are located within an interconnected area, creating opportunities for the development of integrated tourism activities. This finding is supported by a statement from the village government:

> *"Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses a very comprehensive range of tourism resources. These resources could actually be developed into interconnected tourism products capable of generating greater economic benefits for the local community"* (Village Government, 2026).

One of the village's distinctive features is its natural hot springs, which offer recreational, relaxation, and wellness experiences for visitors. These hot springs possess both ecological and recreational value and have the potential to be developed as a nature-based wellness tourism attraction. Visitors engage in bathing and relaxation activities within a tranquil rural setting. This unique experience makes the hot springs one of the village's most promising attractions for both domestic and international tourists.

A visitor stated: *"This area has a very peaceful and natural atmosphere. Bathing in the hot springs surrounded by rural landscapes and mountains*

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provides a relaxation experience that is different from other destinations" (Visitor, 2026).

The village also features natural waterfalls that remain well preserved. Their cool atmosphere, natural scenery, and relatively peaceful environment provide an attractive tourism experience for visitors seeking direct contact with nature. Furthermore, these waterfalls have considerable potential to be developed as photography-based ecotourism recreation destinations. The waterfall area also possesses educational value by introducing visitors to biodiversity, conservation, and the importance of environmental preservation.An academic interviewed in this study explained:

"The waterfalls in Egon Buluk possess aesthetic value and also serve as a medium for environmental interpretation, supporting visitor education regarding the importance of natural resource conservation" (Academic, 2026).

The trekking and hiking routes leading to Mount Egon represent one of the village's special-interest tourism resources, offering adventure experiences alongside direct interaction with nature. Throughout the journey, visitors can enjoy attractive landscapes, distinctive mountain scenery, and the diverse flora and fauna found within the area. This attraction is highly relevant to the growing demand for ecotourism and experiencebased tourism, particularly among visitors seeking active, exploratory, and educational activities. According to the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*):

"The strength of Egon Buluk lies in the combination of adventure and nature. Visitors do not merely hike; they also gain valuable learning experiences about the environment and the lives of local communities" (Pokdarwis, 2026).

Community-based agrotourism represents another important tourism resource. Traditional farming activities provide opportunities to create educational tourism experiences by involving visitors in agricultural practices, introducing local crops, and demonstrating the land management systems employed by local residents.

The presence of natural caves further enhances the village's tourism potential. These caves possess ecological, educational, and recreational value. They can serve as learning sites for understanding landscapes, geology, and environmental conservation while simultaneously functioning as special-interest attractions that distinguish Egon Buluk Tourism Village from other destinations. An academic noted:

"Natural caves represent a unique tourism resource because they offer both adventure experiences and educational opportunities related to geological processes and environmental conservation" (Academic, 2026).

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Table 1.1 Ecotourism Development Potential in Egon Buluk Tourism Village

Key Potential	Form of Innovation	Tourism Experience	Sustainability Principles
Natural hot springs	Nature-based wellness tourism products	Relaxation and tranquillity in a rural environment	Visitor capacity management, cleanliness, and protection of water resources
Waterfalls	Nature tourism and environmental interpretation	Recreation, photography, and biodiversity education	Waste management and protection of environmentally sensitive areas
Mount Egon trekking and hiking	Adventure tourism and environmental interpretation	Adventure experiences, landscape appreciation, and flora-fauna observation	Safety SOPs, trained guides, and trail carrying-capacity management
Agrotourism	Farm-based experiential tourism	Participation in farming activities and learning about local crops	Direct economic benefits for farmers and local households
Natural caves	Special-interest tourism and educational tourism	Learning about geology, landscapes, and environmental conservation	Restrictions on activities in environmentally sensitive areas
Cross-attraction integration	Integrated ecotourism packages	Combined experiences of adventure, education, and relaxation	Equitable benefit distribution and tourism impact management

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Opportunities and Challenges in Developing Ecotourism-Based Nature Tourism Product Innovation

Egon Buluk Tourism Village has significant opportunities to develop innovative ecotourism-based nature tourism products. These opportunities primarily stem from the diversity of natural attractions located within a single destination area, including hot springs, waterfalls, cold-water springs, Mount Egon trekking and hiking trails, community-based agrotourism, and natural caves. This diversity provides a strong foundation for developing tourism products centred on integrated visitor experiences. Such conditions position the integration of natural resources, tourism experiences, education, conservation, and community empowerment as the basis for tourism product innovation. According to the village government:

> *"The greatest opportunity we see is to integrate all existing tourism resources into a comprehensive tourism package so that visitors can stay longer and spend more money within the village"* (Village Government, 2026).

The development of experience-based tourism products is particularly promising. Mount Egon's trekking and hiking routes can be combined with environmental interpretation, flora and fauna observation, waterfall visits, community farming experiences, and relaxation at the natural hot springs. Through this approach, the value of the tourism product is determined by the quality of the experience gained by visitors. This is important because contemporary tourism development is increasingly shifting from merely utilising attractions towards creating innovative, sustainable products that generate benefits for local communities. According to a visitor:

> *"I would be interested in joining a tourism package that combines hiking Mount Egon, visiting waterfalls, participating in farming activities, and relaxing in the hot springs within a single trip"* (Visitor, 2026).

Nature-based health and wellness tourism also presents considerable potential. The natural hot springs possess characteristics that can be developed into recreational and relaxation experiences within a rural environment. Such products could serve as a form of destination differentiation by linking natural resources with more personalised wellness experiences. However, the development of these products must continue to consider environmental carrying capacity, facility quality, safety, and service standards in order to preserve the area's natural character.

There is also substantial potential for the development of community-based agrotourism. Traditional agricultural activities can be transformed into educational tourism experiences through visitor participation in farming activities, the introduction of

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local crops, and learning opportunities related to community land management practices. Within this model, local residents serve as experience providers, guides, activity managers, suppliers of local food products, and tourism entrepreneurs.

Opportunities for nature tourism product development continue to expand as local governments increasingly recognise tourism as a driver of local economic growth. The tourism development plan of Sikka Regency targets an increase in visitor arrivals from 36,041 tourists in the baseline year to 39,041 tourists by 2026. During the same period, the average length of stay is expected to increase from 1.82 days to 1.98 days. Tourist expenditure is projected to rise from IDR 75 billion to IDR 78 billion, while the contribution of the accommodation and food service sector to the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) is expected to increase from 0.62 per cent to 0.70 per cent. These targets demonstrate that tourism is increasingly being positioned as a strategic sector in regional development (BPS, 2026).

Research conducted by Rande et al. (2024) in the Egon Protected Forest revealed that the attractiveness component achieved a feasibility score of 76.67%, while accessibility scored 70.83%. These findings indicate the strong tourism resource potential of the area. However, accommodation received a score of only 33.33%, while supporting facilities and infrastructure achieved 30.00%. Overall, the feasibility level of tourism development within the Egon nature tourism area reached 61.80%. These results suggest that substantial improvements are still required before the destination can be optimally developed as an ecotourism-based tourism area.

Empirical conditions indicate that accessibility, visitor safety, and visitor comfort remain critical issues. The nature-based tourism activities available in Egon Buluk, particularly trekking and hiking, require more comprehensive safety systems, including trail management, interpretative signage, local guides, safety procedures, sanitation facilities, first-aid services, and risk information systems. Studies on tourism management in Mount Egon have demonstrated that limited infrastructure, inadequate sanitation, and safety concerns remain significant obstacles to sustainable tourism development. According to the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*):

> *"We still need improvements in basic facilities, trail management, interpretative signage, and better safety systems so that visitors can feel safe and comfortable during their visit"* (Pokdarwis, 2026).

Community capacity and institutional capability also represent critical factors in tourism management. Ecotourism development in Indonesia continues to face challenges related to limited community involvement in planning and decision-making

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processes. The literature suggests that community participation often remains at the level of utilisation rather than active engagement. Limited information, weak stakeholder coordination, inadequate human resource capacity, and the dominance of certain actors in management processes may hinder the achievement of community-based ecotourism. Therefore, tourism product development in Egon Buluk should ensure that local communities are actively involved in planning, decision-making, management, and the distribution of economic benefits.

Another challenge involves maintaining a balance between increasing visitor numbers and conserving natural resources. The diversity of natural attractions in Egon Buluk constitutes the primary asset for ecotourism development. However, increased tourism activity without adequate management may place pressure on the environment. Product innovation should therefore be accompanied by visitor carrying-capacity management, waste management systems, water resource protection, controls on activities in environmentally sensitive areas, environmental interpretation programmes, and tourism impact monitoring. In this context, innovation should be understood not only as the creation of new tourism products but also as innovation in destination governance and conservation practices.

Based on these conditions, the primary opportunity for Egon Buluk lies in its ability to integrate diverse natural resources into tourism experiences that provide educational, recreational, conservation, and economic value for local communities. The major challenges include infrastructure readiness, visitor safety, human resource capacity, institutional capability, promotion, and environmental impact management. Consequently, development strategies should focus on enhancing the quality of visitor experiences and increasing the benefits generated for both local communities and the environment. This approach is consistent with the characteristics of tourism villages, which position attractions, amenities, digitalisation, institutions, human resources, and resilience as essential components of sustainable destination development.

Sustainable Ecotourism-Based Nature Tourism Product Innovation Development

The sustainable ecotourism-based nature tourism product innovation model was developed through a synthesis of the destination's potentials, opportunities, and challenges. Natural resources, including hot springs, waterfalls, cold-water springs, Mount Egon trekking and hiking routes, agrotourism, and natural caves, serve as the primary inputs that need to be integrated, as they have previously been developed in a fragmented manner. The innovation process is directed towards the development of

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tourism products centred on visitor experiences, education, environmental conservation, and local community empowerment.

This integration is realised through the packaging of various attractions into comprehensive tourism products. These include environmentally interpreted trekking and hiking activities, educational agrotourism, waterfall and cave tourism, and relaxation experiences at natural hot springs. Product development is supported by improvements in human resources, amenities, accessibility, sanitation, safety, interpretation services, and digital promotion. Conservation serves as the foundation of the model through carrying-capacity management, water resource protection, waste management, and tourism impact monitoring. Local communities are positioned as the primary actors in planning, management, service provision, and the distribution of economic benefits.

The model is implemented through a collaborative governance approach involving the village government, the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), local communities, tourism businesses, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), academics, and regional government agencies. The model produces integrated nature-based tourism products aimed at enhancing visitor experiences, strengthening destination competitiveness, generating economic benefits for local communities, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Continuous evaluation of visitor experiences, community benefits, safety conditions, and environmental quality provides feedback for the ongoing improvement of tourism products and destination management.

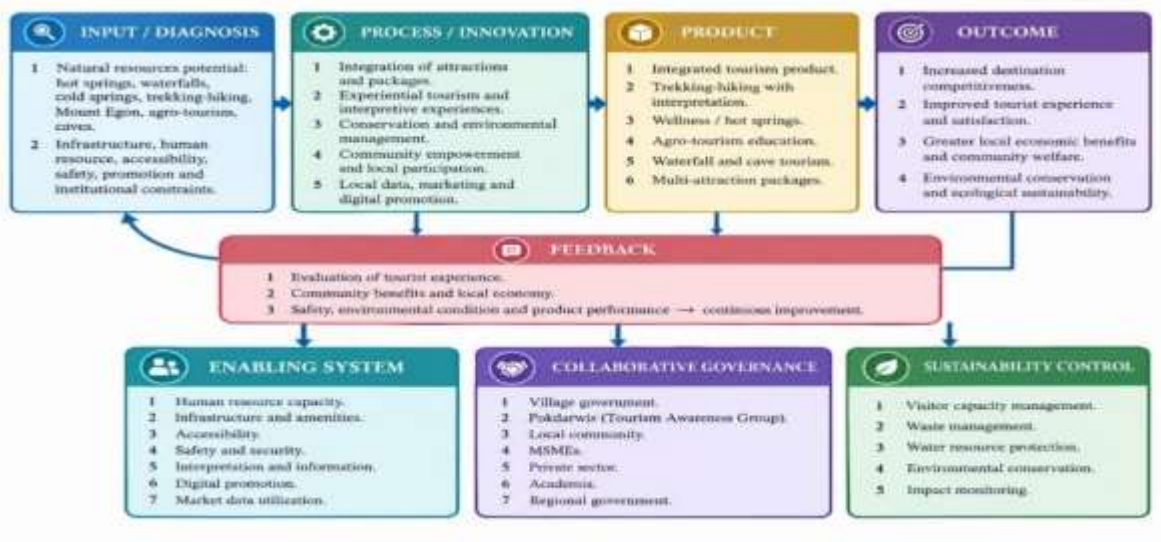


Figure 1. Sustainable Ecotourism-Based Nature Tourism Product Innovation Development Model in Egon Buluk Tourism Village

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The development of sustainable ecotourism-based nature tourism product innovation begins with the identification of the destination's potentials and challenges. The innovation process is subsequently carried out through the integration of tourism attractions, the enhancement of visitor experiences, environmental conservation, and community empowerment. This process results in integrated tourism products such as interpretive trekking and hiking, hot spring tourism, educational agrotourism, and multi-attraction tourism packages that provide more meaningful and value-added visitor experiences.

The success of the model is supported by enabling systems that include human resource capacity development, infrastructure improvement, enhanced accessibility, visitor safety, and digital promotion, as well as collaborative governance involving government agencies, Tourism Awareness Groups (*Pokdarwis*), local communities, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), academics, and tourism businesses. The entire process is guided by sustainability principles, including waste management, water resource protection, visitor carrying-capacity management, and tourism impact monitoring. Consequently, the model is expected to enhance destination competitiveness, strengthen economic benefits for local communities, and ensure the long-term conservation of environmental resources.

CONCLUSION

Egon Buluk Tourism Village possesses diverse natural tourism resources with significant potential for development as ecotourism-based tourism products. These resources offer recreational, educational, conservation, and community empowerment values. However, they are currently developed in a fragmented manner and have not yet been integrated into a comprehensive tourism product. The findings of this study indicate that nature tourism product innovation can be significantly enhanced through the integration of various attractions into more valuable tourism experiences. Nevertheless, its development continues to face challenges related to infrastructure limitations, accessibility, visitor safety, human resource capacity, institutional capacity, and environmental management. Based on these findings, this study proposes an ecotourism-based nature tourism product innovation development model that integrates tourism attractions, visitor experiences, environmental conservation, and community empowerment within a collaborative governance framework. The model is expected to enhance destination competitiveness, strengthen economic benefits for local communities, and support environmental sustainability.

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