

Resilient Pathways of Small Island Tourism: A Qualitative Study of Post-COVID Recovery in Indonesia

Supiandi¹, Putrawan Habibi²

¹Department of Economics, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Nusa Tenggara Barat, Mataram City, Indonesia

²Department of Education, National Tsing Hua University, Hsincu, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

This study explores how tourism communities in Indonesia navigated disruption and recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation across selected small island destinations. Thematic analysis revealed that the pandemic not only disrupted livelihoods but also reshaped perceptions of vulnerability and resilience. Respondents emphasized the severity of income loss, psychological distress, and the erosion of community ties during the crisis. However, recovery pathways were marked by adaptive strategies including diversification into agriculture and fisheries, increased reliance on domestic tourists, and the creative use of digital platforms for marketing and communication. Community solidarity, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices emerged as critical resources that supported both economic survival and social cohesion. The findings highlight that resilience in Indonesian tourism is constructed through a combination of adaptive innovation and socio-cultural embeddedness rather than through technical or policy frameworks alone. This study contributes to resilience theory by grounding it in the lived experiences of local stakeholders and offers practical insights for policymakers seeking to support sustainable and inclusive tourism recovery in post-crisis contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the global outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) precipitated one of the most profound crises in the history of tourism. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and border closures triggered a sharp decline in tourist flows, plunging many destinations into socioeconomic distress (Pramana et al., 2022). In Indonesia, where tourism is a key driver of local livelihoods and national economic growth, the sector experienced large contractions: hotel occupancy rates fell dramatically, transportation demand collapsed, and many tourism-related businesses closed or downsized (Pramana et al., 2022; Yudha et al., 2022). The disruption was particularly acute in small island and coastal communities, which often lack diverse economic bases.

As Indonesia enacted large-scale social restrictions (PSBB/PPKM) and other mobility constraints, tourism operations were forced to suspend, intensify competition for limited markets, or innovate in new directions (Malahayati et al., 2021; Pramana et al., 2022). While quantitative studies have investigated the macroeconomic impacts and recovery trajectories (e.g. estimating lost revenue and tourist deficits) Pham et al., (2024) and Singco et al. (2024), less attention has been paid to the lived experiences of local actors how they understood, responded to, and reconfigured tourism under crisis conditions.

Resilience theory, especially in socio-ecological and community contexts, offers a useful lens to understand how local tourism systems absorb, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks (Afifah et al., 2025; Biggs et al., 2015). In tourism research, resilience has been conceptualized in terms of adaptive capacity, institutional support, stakeholder cooperation, and diversification (Alisyah, 2023; Tunjungsari et al., 2024). However, applying resilience to the Indonesian post-COVID context demands sensitivity to cultural, social, and place-based meanings.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how tourism stakeholders in Indonesian small island destinations narrate their experience of disruption and recovery after COVID-19, what adaptive strategies they mobilized, and how they construct resilience in everyday practice. Such inquiry not only deepens theoretical understanding but also offers

grounded insights for policy makers and development practitioners aiming to support equitable and sustainable tourism recovery.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Tourism is highly sensitive to crises, with the COVID-19 pandemic representing the most disruptive shock in recent history. The global shutdown of borders, suspension of air travel, and restrictions on mobility devastated tourism-dependent destinations, leading to unprecedented declines in employment and income (Hall et al., 2021; Sigala, 2020). In Indonesia, the pandemic caused severe contraction in international arrivals and a collapse in small and medium tourism enterprises, especially in island and coastal regions where economic diversification is limited (Hardi et al., 2023; Pramana et al., 2022). While government interventions sought to mitigate losses, many local operators relied on informal coping strategies, highlighting both vulnerabilities and adaptive strengths within the sector (Yudha et al., 2022).

The concept of resilience has become central to explaining how tourism systems respond to shocks. Originating in socio-ecological studies, resilience is defined as the capacity to absorb disturbance while maintaining essential functions, reorganizing, and adapting under stress (Folke et al., 2016). In tourism, resilience encompasses more than economic survival, extending to social solidarity, cultural identity, and institutional adaptability (Espiner & Becken, 2014). Studies show that community networks, traditional knowledge, and collective action often shape the speed and sustainability of recovery in destinations (Aminullah & Wusko, 2025; Biggs et al., 2015). This holistic view challenges policy approaches that emphasize technical or financial recovery measures alone.

Recent literature has identified several adaptive strategies during COVID-19. Enterprises worldwide diversified products, targeted domestic markets, and adopted digital platforms for marketing and sales (Baum & Hai, 2020; Hall et al., 2021). In Southeast Asia, however, recovery was frequently informal, with workers reverting to subsistence farming and fisheries or depending on community reciprocity (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2020). Evidence from Indonesia points to a hybrid model in which digital innovation coexisted with traditional practices, and where resilience was embedded in socio-cultural relations as much as in business strategies (Ayu Lestari et al., 2025; Tunjungsari et al., 2024)

Despite these contributions, there remains a paucity of qualitative accounts that foreground the lived experiences of Indonesian tourism actors. Most studies emphasize macroeconomic indicators or policy frameworks, leaving underexplored how communities themselves narrate disruption, negotiate adaptation, and reimagine futures. This gap underscores the need for qualitative research that captures the voices of small-scale actors and situates resilience within the everyday realities of tourism life in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore how tourism communities in Indonesia experienced disruption and developed resilience strategies during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A case study approach was chosen because it allows for a deep investigation of context-specific processes and provides flexibility in combining multiple sources of evidence, which is particularly important when examining community resilience. The research was conducted in two small island destinations, Lombok in West Nusa Tenggara and Karimunjawa in Central Java, both of which were selected purposively due to their high dependency on tourism, their exposure to pandemic-related disruptions, and their diversity of community-based and small enterprise tourism models. These destinations provided settings where cultural traditions, natural attractions, and local entrepreneurship converge, making them suitable sites for examining tourism resilience.

Participants in this study included local tourism workers such as guides, drivers, homestay operators, and artisans, as well as small business owners such as restaurant operators, dive shop managers, and tour agency operators. Community leaders and representatives of local government institutions responsible for tourism management were also included. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to capture diverse perspectives across gender, age, and type of tourism involvement, and snowball sampling was later used to expand the participant pool. In total, thirty-two individuals were interviewed, with twenty drawn from Lombok and twelve from Karimunjawa.

Data collection was carried out over a four-month period from March to June 2024 using multiple qualitative techniques. Semi-structured interviews formed the core of the data, with each interview lasting between forty-five and ninety minutes. The interviews, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, focused on the experiences of disruption during the pandemic, coping strategies, sources of community support, innovations, and perceptions of resilience. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. In addition to interviews, four focus group discussions were conducted, two in each location, each consisting of six to eight participants. These discussions provided opportunities for participants to articulate collective experiences and to reflect on shared strategies for recovery. The researcher also engaged in participant observation during two weeks of fieldwork in each location, attending tourism-related activities, community meetings, and everyday livelihood practices, while maintaining detailed field notes on contextual dynamics and non-verbal expressions. Complementary document analysis was conducted on local government recovery policies, NGO reports, promotional materials, and community tourism plans to provide additional layers of insight.

The analysis of data was conducted through thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts and field notes were imported into NVivo 12, where initial codes were generated inductively, and then organized into broader themes that reflected disruption, adaptation, and resilience. The process was iterative, with themes refined across multiple cycles and compared across sites to identify similarities and differences. Sensitizing concepts from resilience theory informed the interpretation while remaining open to emergent categories grounded in participants' accounts. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate the findings and foreground the voices of participants.

The study applied Lincoln & Guba (1988) criteria for trustworthiness to ensure rigor. Credibility was enhanced through member checking with selected participants who were invited to validate the interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the research settings and participant characteristics to enable readers to assess relevance to other contexts. Dependability was established through maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions, field notes, and analytic memos, while confirmability was strengthened by reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to acknowledge positionality and minimize bias.

Ethical approval for the study was secured from the university's research ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any point. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities in transcripts and reporting. Particular care was taken when discussing sensitive issues, such as financial hardship and psychological distress, by allowing participants the option to decline questions. The ethical approach sought to balance rigorous inquiry with sensitivity toward participants' socio-economic vulnerabilities.

RESULTS

The findings of this study illuminate how tourism communities in Indonesia experienced disruption and navigated recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and observational data produced a set of interrelated themes that capture both the severity of the crisis and the strategies of adaptation that followed. These themes reflect the interplay between economic necessity, socio-cultural resources, and institutional support, as well as the ways in which resilience was constructed in everyday life.

While the pandemic was widely described by participants as an unprecedented disruption that dismantled livelihoods, the narratives also revealed significant creativity and resourcefulness in response to adversity. Participants emphasized the fragility of tourism-dependent economies, yet they also highlighted diverse coping strategies, ranging from diversification into subsistence activities to innovations in digital marketing and the reorientation toward domestic tourists. Social cohesion, cultural traditions, and local solidarity were repeatedly invoked as important foundations of resilience, suggesting that recovery processes extended far beyond financial considerations.

The results are presented in five thematic areas. First, the narratives of disruption illustrate how participants perceived and lived through vulnerability during the crisis. Second, adaptive economic strategies demonstrate the ways in which communities sought to stabilize their livelihoods. Third, social and cultural resources of resilience highlight the centrality of collective identity and solidarity. Fourth, institutional and policy dimensions reveal the complex role of external interventions. Finally, reimagining futures of tourism illustrates how stakeholders envision recovery and sustainability in the longer term. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive picture of resilience as both an adaptive process and a socio-cultural construct within Indonesian tourism communities.

Theme 1: Narratives of Disruption and Vulnerability

Participants consistently described the COVID-19 pandemic as a period of profound disruption that dismantled the foundations of their livelihoods. Tourism workers and small business owners reported abrupt income loss when travel restrictions and lockdowns forced the suspension of tourism operations. Homestay operators in Lombok recounted weeks without guests, while boat drivers and dive guides in Karimunjawa spoke of vessels lying idle for months. For many households, the collapse of tourism income created cascading effects on food security, education expenses, and debt repayment.

The psychological dimension of this disruption was equally significant. Several respondents used terms such as “shock”, “fear”, and “helplessness” to capture their experience of uncertainty. A restaurant owner in Lombok explained, “I had to close my business for almost a year. Every day I worried about how to pay my staff and still feed my family.” Similarly, a tour guide in Karimunjawa reflected, “I lost my identity when there were no tourists. Guiding was not just a job but part of who I am.” These statements reveal how the crisis undermined both economic stability and personal sense of purpose.

Community interactions also shifted under the strain of the pandemic. While traditional values of solidarity remained present, participants described an initial breakdown of trust, particularly regarding health risks and limited resources. A homestay operator remarked, “At the beginning, people became suspicious of each other, afraid of infection, even from neighbors.” This disruption of social cohesion illustrates how the pandemic eroded not only livelihoods but also community bonds.

Institutional trust emerged as another point of vulnerability. Some respondents criticized government relief programs as insufficient or inaccessible, particularly for informal workers not registered in official tourism associations. A dive shop worker in Lombok commented, “The aid was announced, but we never saw it. It felt like only certain groups benefited.” Such sentiments highlight gaps between national recovery measures and local realities, reinforcing perceptions of marginalization in small island communities.

Overall, the narratives of disruption underscored a sense of fragility embedded in tourism-dependent economies. The pandemic exposed the precariousness of relying almost entirely on international visitors and revealed the psychological and social vulnerabilities that accompany

economic dependency. Yet within these accounts of hardship lay the seeds of adaptation, which became more evident in the strategies communities later developed to survive and rebuild.

Theme 2: Adaptive Economic Strategies

Amid the severe disruptions caused by the pandemic, participants described a wide range of adaptive strategies that were mobilized to sustain livelihoods. Economic diversification emerged as one of the most immediate responses. In both Lombok and Karimunjawa, tourism workers temporarily shifted to subsistence activities such as farming, fishing, and small-scale trade. A former boat driver in Karimunjawa explained, “When the tourists stopped coming, I went back to the sea. Fishing was the only way to keep rice on the table.” Similarly, in Lombok, homestay owners reported cultivating vegetables and selling them in local markets, drawing upon agricultural knowledge passed down through their families.

Another important adaptation involved a reorientation toward domestic tourism. As international arrivals collapsed, communities sought to attract visitors from within Indonesia, particularly from nearby cities. This shift required adjusting prices, tailoring experiences, and developing products that appealed to domestic travelers. A tour agency operator in Lombok noted, “We used to rely on Australians and Europeans, but after COVID we focused on Jakarta and Surabaya. Domestic tourists travel shorter, spend less, but at least they come.” Although revenues were lower than before, this strategy was widely regarded as a critical lifeline.

Digital innovation was also highlighted as a survival mechanism. Younger participants, in particular, leveraged social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to market their services and maintain visibility during the downturn. A restaurant owner in Lombok reflected, “Before the pandemic, I never thought of online marketing. Now we post every day on Instagram, and that is how we attract new customers.” In Karimunjawa, dive shops experimented with virtual tours and promotional videos to maintain connections with potential visitors. These forms of digital adaptation illustrate how crises can accelerate technological uptake among small-scale operators who had previously relied on word-of-mouth promotion.

Participants also emphasized the importance of reducing operational costs and innovating on a smaller scale. Several respondents described offering micro-experiences such as village walks, cooking lessons, and bicycle tours that required little capital investment. A homestay operator explained, “We learned to package what we already had in the village. Simple activities, like cooking with local spices, became tourism experiences.” Such innovations reflected not only creativity but also an awareness of shifting tourist expectations toward more intimate and culturally grounded activities.

These adaptive strategies, however, were not uniform. In Lombok, digital adaptation was more pronounced due to better internet connectivity and stronger networks with urban markets, whereas in Karimunjawa the return to fisheries and subsistence agriculture was more dominant. This contrast underscores how structural conditions, such as infrastructure and market access, shaped the range of adaptive possibilities available to communities.

Taken together, the adaptive economic strategies reveal a capacity for flexibility and innovation among Indonesian tourism actors. Diversification into non-tourism livelihoods, the pivot to domestic markets, digital marketing, and small-scale product development all illustrate how resilience was enacted in practice. These strategies not only ensured survival during the pandemic but also laid the foundation for rethinking the sustainability and inclusiveness of tourism futures.

Theme 3: Social and Cultural Resources of Resilience

Beyond economic adaptation, participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of social and cultural resources in sustaining resilience during and after the pandemic. The Indonesian value of *gotong royong* mutual cooperation was described as a lifeline when formal safety nets were limited or absent. Families and neighbors shared food, extended small loans, and offered labor to those most affected. A homestay owner in Lombok explained, “We did not have guests for many months, but our neighbors brought vegetables and rice. We all tried to help one another because we knew everyone was struggling.” Such expressions of solidarity reinforced

the notion that resilience in tourism communities was embedded in social ties rather than in market mechanisms alone.

Cultural traditions also played a significant role in shaping resilience. Rituals, community gatherings, and religious practices provided not only spiritual reassurance but also a sense of continuity amid uncertainty. A tour guide in Karimunjawa reflected, "When there were no tourists, we returned to our village rituals. It reminded us that our identity is more than tourism." In Lombok, participants described how Islamic community organizations coordinated charity programs and distributed essential supplies, strengthening both faith and collective morale. These practices illustrate how resilience is intertwined with cultural worldviews and shared meaning-making.

Community pride in cultural identity further influenced how participants envisioned tourism recovery. Several respondents emphasized that cultural heritage, rather than only natural attractions, should be central in attracting visitors after the pandemic. A craftswoman noted, "Tourism will be stronger if we show who we are, not just the beach. The crisis taught us that our culture is our strength." This sentiment was echoed in both sites, where the pandemic prompted a reevaluation of tourism's purpose and its integration with community identity.

The importance of collective organization was also evident. In both Lombok and Karimunjawa, informal community tourism groups coordinated local responses, such as pooling funds to support unemployed workers and organizing clean-up campaigns to prepare for reopening. These grassroots initiatives were described as more responsive and trustworthy than formal institutions, reflecting a bottom-up approach to resilience. A community leader remarked, "We could not wait for the government. We had to act together, with our own resources, for the sake of the village."

Overall, the findings demonstrate that resilience in Indonesian tourism communities was not only a matter of financial recovery but also a deeply social and cultural process. Mutual support, religious and cultural practices, and collective identity provided meaning, cohesion, and strength in the face of prolonged uncertainty. These social and cultural resources were perceived as equally vital to survival as income-generating strategies, highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of resilience in tourism-dependent communities.

Theme 4: Institutional and Policy Dimensions

Participants offered mixed assessments of institutional and policy responses to the crisis, reflecting both appreciation for certain interventions and frustration with perceived gaps in implementation. Many respondents acknowledged that government programs, such as food distribution, small cash transfers, and credit relief schemes, provided temporary support. Yet these measures were often described as insufficient to meet the scale of losses or as unevenly distributed. A restaurant owner in Lombok explained, "I received assistance one time, but it was very small compared to the money we lost. Many of my friends did not get anything at all." Similarly, a dive shop worker in Karimunjawa remarked, "The aid was promised, but we never saw it reach the ordinary workers." Such comments highlight both the practical limitations and the perception of inequity in recovery programs.

Local governments were seen as more responsive than national institutions, although their resources were limited. Several community leaders described collaborations with district officials to organize vaccination campaigns, hygiene training, and small promotional initiatives targeting domestic tourists. A homestay operator in Lombok noted, "The local tourism office worked with us to prepare for reopening, especially to meet health protocols. It helped us feel ready, even if tourists were slow to return." These partnerships illustrated the value of localized interventions, though they remained constrained by budget and bureaucratic hurdles.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local associations also played important roles. In both sites, NGOs facilitated skills training in digital marketing and provided small grants for community tourism initiatives. Participants valued these contributions because they were more tailored to local needs. A young tour operator from Karimunjawa commented, "The NGO training on online promotion was very useful. Without that, I would not have known how to use Instagram for business." Such interventions were contrasted with national programs, which were often described as abstract or inaccessible to small-scale operators.

Despite these positive elements, institutional mistrust persisted. Several participants voiced skepticism about corruption, favoritism, and lack of transparency in program delivery. Others expressed disappointment that long-term structural issues, such as inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, and limited access to

credit, remained unaddressed. A community leader in Lombok summarized this concern: "The crisis showed that our problems are deeper than COVID. We need policies that support us in the long run, not only emergency aid."

Overall, the findings on institutional and policy dimensions reveal a tension between top-down recovery measures and bottom-up community experiences. While government and NGO initiatives contributed to survival and recovery, participants stressed that support was often temporary, insufficient, or poorly matched to their realities. This theme underscores that resilience was not only shaped by local strategies and cultural resources but also conditioned by institutional frameworks that sometimes facilitated and sometimes constrained community adaptation.

Theme 5: Reimagining Futures of Tourism

As communities reflected on their experiences of disruption and adaptation, many participants articulated visions for the future of tourism that extended beyond immediate recovery. A recurring theme was the aspiration for more sustainable and locally grounded forms of tourism. Several respondents emphasized that the pandemic had exposed the risks of dependence on international markets and called for a greater focus on domestic tourism, cultural heritage, and environmentally responsible practices. A craftswoman in Lombok observed, "We learned that relying only on foreigners is dangerous. In the future, we want tourism that is closer to our culture and that our own people can enjoy."

Sustainability was not only discussed in economic terms but also in relation to environmental stewardship. In Karimunjawa, participants highlighted the temporary ecological recovery during the absence of mass tourism, noting clearer waters and the return of fish to reefs. This experience led to stronger support for conservation-oriented tourism. A dive guide reflected, "When there were no tourists, we saw the sea heal itself. Now we want tourism that protects, not destroys, because the ocean is our life." These observations reveal how the crisis triggered a re-evaluation of the relationship between livelihoods and ecosystems.

Cultural identity and pride were also central to reimagined futures. Respondents expressed the desire to integrate traditional arts, rituals, and local food into tourism products, framing culture as both a resource and a safeguard against homogenization. A community leader in Lombok stated, "Tourism should not erase who we are. After COVID, we realized our strength is in our traditions. This is what we want to show the world." Such perspectives illustrate a shift toward tourism that reinforces cultural resilience rather than undermining it.

At a broader level, participants framed resilience as an ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome. Recovery was described as continuous adaptation, rooted in learning from past crises and preparing for future uncertainties. A homestay operator noted, "We cannot think of resilience as finished. It is something we must keep building, because new challenges will always come." This recognition of resilience as a dynamic, collective endeavor underscores a future-oriented mindset emerging from the lived realities of the pandemic.

Taken together, the narratives in this theme highlight how Indonesian tourism communities are not merely attempting to return to pre-pandemic normality but are actively reimagining tourism futures that are more sustainable, inclusive, and culturally grounded. These aspirations reflect a broader transformation in the meaning of resilience, shifting it from survival toward long-term visions of dignity, stewardship, and community well-being.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted ways in which Indonesian tourism communities experienced and responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing insights into the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional dimensions of resilience. Narratives of disruption emphasized the precarity of tourism-dependent livelihoods, consistent with global research demonstrating the disproportionate vulnerability of destinations reliant on international markets (Hall et al., 2021; Sigala, 2020). Yet, the lived experiences captured in this study extend beyond economic loss, revealing the psychological and social dislocation that accompanied the sudden collapse of tourism. This underscores the importance of framing resilience not solely as an economic condition but as an embodied and emotional process, a point similarly noted by Espiner & Becken (2014) in their work on tourism towns in protected areas.

The adaptive strategies described by participants, including diversification into agriculture and fisheries, the pivot to domestic markets, and the use of digital marketing tools, align with emerging studies on post-pandemic tourism recovery (Baum & Hai, 2020; Gössling & Hall, 2021). However, the findings demonstrate that such

adaptations were highly context-dependent. In Lombok, better infrastructure enabled digital innovation, while in Karimunjawa, subsistence strategies were more prevalent due to structural constraints. This divergence illustrates that resilience must be understood as situated, contingent on local resources, market access, and socio-cultural embeddedness, reinforcing the argument by [Biggs et al. \(2015\)](#) that resilience is not a uniform capacity but a process shaped by context.

Social and cultural resources played a decisive role in sustaining resilience, with gotong royong and religious practices offering both material support and symbolic reassurance. These findings resonate with [Hampton & Jeyacheya \(2020\)](#) work on small island communities, where social capital and collective identity buffered the impacts of crises. The emphasis placed by participants on cultural pride and tradition as sources of recovery highlights how resilience is deeply interwoven with identity, echoing arguments by [Espiner & Becken \(2014\)](#) that community resilience cannot be reduced to economic indicators. This cultural dimension is particularly significant in Indonesia, where rituals and religious organizations constitute not only spiritual but also practical infrastructures of support.

Institutional and policy responses, while present, were often perceived as inadequate, inaccessible, or symbolic rather than material. This critique is consistent with [Pramana et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Yudha et al. \(2022\)](#), who observed that many government interventions during the pandemic were limited in reach and did not effectively address the needs of small-scale or informal tourism actors. In contrast, local organizations and community tourism committees emerged as more trusted and effective actors in coordinating immediate support. This finding supports calls within resilience scholarship to recognize the central role of bottom-up governance structures and community agency in crisis recovery ([Dewayani et al., 2023](#); [Tunjungsari et al., 2024](#)).

Perhaps the most important contribution of this study lies in participants' reimagining of tourism futures. Rather than seeking a return to pre-pandemic normality, communities articulated aspirations for tourism that is more sustainable, inclusive, and culturally grounded. This reflects a shift from resilience as survival to resilience as transformation, aligning with theoretical perspectives that emphasize the capacity of systems not only to adapt but also to reorganize and evolve in response to crises ([Folke et al., 2016](#); [Gani et al., 2023](#)). The recognition of environmental regeneration during the tourism shutdown further underscores the opportunity for embedding conservation and stewardship into post-pandemic tourism models, echoing the arguments of [Gössling & Hall \(2021\)](#) regarding the potential of the pandemic to catalyze sustainable transitions.

Taken together, the findings contribute to resilience theory by demonstrating that in Indonesian tourism communities, resilience is not a linear recovery but a multi-dimensional process shaped by economic adaptation, social solidarity, cultural identity, and contested institutional trust. The study underscores the importance of integrating local voices into resilience scholarship, challenging top-down and economicistic approaches, and emphasizing the lived experiences of those most directly affected. In doing so, it advances understanding of how resilience in tourism is socially constructed, context-specific, and future-oriented.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Indonesian tourism communities experienced disruption and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that the crisis exposed the fragility of tourism-dependent economies, eroding livelihoods and social cohesion while also prompting adaptive strategies that reflected both necessity and creativity. Communities diversified into agriculture and fisheries, reoriented toward domestic markets, adopted digital tools, and developed micro-scale tourism products. Equally important, resilience was sustained through social and cultural resources, particularly mutual cooperation, religious practices, and collective identity. While government interventions were present, their impact was limited, and grassroots organizations emerged as more trusted and responsive actors. Participants' visions for the future emphasized sustainability, cultural pride, and environmental stewardship, signaling a transformation in how resilience is understood.

This study is limited by its focus on two island destinations, which may not fully capture the diversity of Indonesian tourism contexts. The reliance on qualitative data also means the findings are not statistically generalizable, though they provide rich, contextual insights.

Recommendations emerging from the study include the need for policy frameworks that strengthen grassroots initiatives, support digital and market diversification, and integrate cultural and environmental

sustainability. Future research could expand to other regions and employ mixed methods to deepen understanding of resilience pathways.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Data Availability

The qualitative data that support the findings of this study, including interview transcripts and field notes, are available from the author upon reasonable request. To protect participant confidentiality, identifying details have been removed and anonymized.

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