

## Chapter Eleven

# Ecotourism in Indonesia

*Ricardo Manurung*

### Introduction

Indonesia is an archipelago with more than 17 000 islands. Approximately 6 000 of these islands are inhabited, of which five main islands and 30 smaller islands serve as home to the majority of the population. The main islands are Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua and Java.

Even though Indonesia has more than 580 languages spoken by many distinct ethnic groups across the archipelago, the official national language is Bahasa Indonesia. The diversity in ethnic and cultural richness, various landscapes and marine resources are definite national assets in the development of a sustainable tourism program.

The strategic position of Indonesia and its waterways, between the Indian and Pacific oceans, has led to a fascinating and complex cultural, religious, political and economic history. The country is rich in natural resources. There are approximately 49 different types of ecosystems. Even though the area of Indonesia territory is only 1.32% of the total world area, it has 10% of plant species in the world, 12% of mammal, 16% of reptile and amphibian, 17% of bird, 25% of fish and 15% of insect species. No wonder Indonesia is known as a country with “megadiversity” in natural resources and is one of the world’s “mega centres” in biodiversity. Currently, Indonesia has approximately 120 potential ecotourism areas including National Parks, forest parks, ecotourism parks and marine tourism parks. Box 1 lists some famous conservation areas in Indonesia.

#### Box 1: Conservation Areas

- Leuser Mount National Park in North West Sumatra
- Kerinci Seblat National Park in West Central Sumatra
- Tai Tai Batti/Siberut Game Reserve in West Sumatra
- Berbak Game Reserve in Central Sumatra

- Thousands Islands Marine National Park in Java
- Munt Palung National Park in West Kalimantan
- Bunaken Manado Tua Islands Marine National Park in North Sulawesi
- Dumoga Bone National Park in North Sulawesi
- Mount Mutis Protection Forest in Timor
- South East Aru Marine Nature Reserve in Maluku
- Teluk Bintuni Nature Reserve in Papua
- Mount Lorentz Nature Reserve in Papua.

### Institutional Framework for Tourism

There are three institutional pillars involved in promoting tourism and ecotourism: the government, the private sector and society. The government is involved through the Ministries of Transportation and Telecommunication, the State Ministry for Tourism and Arts, the Environmental Impact Management Agency and local government. The government is the head (or the brain) of tourism development, while travel agents, and other segments are the executors or the hands and legs of the body. The central government promotes the image of diversity in Indonesia as a whole, but every province or municipality has the authority to carry out promotion of their own products.

Coordination between the three pillars must be increased as the State Ministry for Tourism and Arts cannot handle all tourism issues. However, the new regional autonomy does not mean that the central government is free from obligations to tourism, considering that tourism development is multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral.

Limited funds, inefficient use of funds, security problems and the rarity of leaders in government who have high levels of dedication and motivation to handle tourism development are challenges. The lack of professional human resources and promotional funds are concerns. Still, every challenge is seen as an opportunity. Promotion of tourist attractions or destinations must be heightened, especially because of the poor image of Indonesia at the moment in the eyes of potential tourists. Promotion should be fair and accurate, for if the real situation is different to that depicted by the promotion, it would only worsen the image of the whole country. Being part of ASEAN can be used to promote Indonesian tourism. Cooperation among countries in the region through ASEAN should benefit all its members.

In the case of ecotourism, the office of the State Minister for the Environment coordinates environmental management at national level, as well as being responsible for defining national policy on managing the environment. In addition, the Environmental Impact Management Agency (or BAPEDAL) was established by Presidential Decree No. 23/1990 to anticipate the impacts of development.

BAPEDAL realises that not all stakeholders in the tourism industry are aware of the importance of environmental performance in supporting Indonesian competitiveness in the world of tourism. Neither do all stakeholders realise the value of it, mainly because their orientation is short-term investment and profits, without considering the sustainability of their businesses and industry. Therefore, to achieve the goal of sustainable development, BAPEDAL combines mandatory programs with self-regulatory or voluntary programs (environmental management systems, environmental labelling, cleaner production, green procurement and green productivity).

In the field of sustainable tourism, BAPEDAL is currently in the process of formalising national policy and a strategy for sustainable tourism development. The policy will not only be based on the command and control approach but also on a voluntary approach. BAPEDAL will develop a code of practice as well as guidelines for implementation.

The code of practice for sustainable tourism development is definitely important. It sets boundaries for environmentally sound tourism practices that could be implemented by all tourism development activities. It also helps establish a system and procedure to incorporate sustainable development considerations at the core of the decision-making process. In addition, it gives direction to stakeholders in developing tourism products such as ecotourism, agro-tourism, culture-tourism and so on.

With the introduction of autonomy, the regions in Indonesia will have more authority to manage their own territory. However, the central government will still have the power and authority for some essential affairs, such as the highest level policy making, foreign affairs, defence etc. In tourism, each local authority will conduct programs according to its own needs and environmental attributes, while the central government will only provide the general rules and supervision.

### **An Action Plan for Ecotourism**

After identifying the potential and obstacles for ecotourism development, the next step is an action plan. The general description of an action plan is presented in Box 2.

#### **Box 2: The Elements of an Action Plan**

##### **Socio-economic Development**

Socio-economic development can be achieved through participation, commencing with the planning stage and following through to management and profit sharing. This should result in:

- (i) an increase in society's capability and capacity;
- (ii) an increase in society's income and;
- (iii) an increase in society's participation.

##### **Product Development**

The ecotourism product that will be developed in the destination area must be adapted to the local environment, and its potential place in the tourism market. Matters to be considered include:

- (i) natural attractions and activities for tourists;
- (ii) the use of space;
- (iii) accommodation for staff;
- (iv) equipment necessary for the site;
- (v) tourist accommodation;
- (vi) education of staff and tourists and;
- (vii) awards for excellence.

##### **Effort Improvement**

Several criteria must be addressed in planning ecotourism development, namely:

- (i) the uniqueness of natural phenomenon (ecosystem, endemic flora and fauna);
- (ii) local culture;
- (iii) the society's acceptance of tourists;
- (iv) threats to the ecosystem;
- (v) allocation of land;
- (vi) transportation to ecotourism destinations and;
- (vii) infrastructure.

##### **Marketing**

The development of ecotourism can be an ongoing process if consumers are made aware of what is available via a segmented marketing strategy. There is a need to:

- (i) segment the market;
- (ii) develop a methodology for product marketing and;
- (iii) develop material that will be used in marketing.

##### **Funding**

Funding development can be done in several ways, including by the local community, through to the whole array of investment strategies.

##### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

To guarantee the continuation of ecotourism, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate its impacts on the environment, society and finances. It is necessary to determine:

- (i) the institution that will conduct the monitoring and evaluation;
- (ii) the methodology and material that will be used;
- (iii) when the monitoring will be done.

### **Ecotourism Practices in Indonesia**

Environmentally sound tourism development is one of the objectives that Indonesia wants to achieve. Indonesia recognises that the environment

has to be carefully managed and maintained if the tourism industry is to be sustained. Based on the present condition and taking into account the growing trends of tourism, the Government of Indonesia has taken significant steps in order to achieve this objective. Relevant policies have been formed and follow-up measures have been taken. In doing this, the government has strived to gain both economic benefit and environmental protection. A number of laws have been put in place to achieve these objectives.

Indonesia has developed principles and objectives in developing ecotourism in conservation areas. The principles include: (i) to maintain the balance of nature in the ecosystem and its life support system; (ii) to protect biodiversity and to use it as a genetic pool; (iii) to provide facilities for research, development, education and training; (iv) to provide facilities for nature tourism and preserve local culture; and (v) to maintain the balance between economic interest and conservation of natural resources and their ecosystems.

The management of conservation areas is the responsibility of the government. Such activities like delineation and demarcation of boundaries, inventory and identification of park resources, safeguarding and protecting the environment, management planning, establishment of management infrastructure, habitat management and conservation of park properties, and extension and education for the community, are management matters held by government agencies. Concessionaire rights for operating and conducting tourism activities in the approved conservation areas (such as Nature Recreation Parks, Grand Forest Parks or the intensive use zone of National Parks) can be granted to private enterprises, cooperatives and state enterprises.

Enterprises that are permitted to manage specific tourism areas are allowed to collect visitor fees for services they provide in the area, in accordance with existing regulations; and they are obliged to involve local people in their activities. Other responsibilities are to pay licence fees and royalties for the nature tourism concessionaire right, as well as maintaining the integrity of park areas. Overall, enterprises should be environmentally oriented and support community welfare enhancement.

## **A Case Study**

Bali is developing ecotourism. For that purpose the State Enterprises of the Region of Bali will make use of its 1236 hectare plantation in Pulkan, West Bali, 70 km west of Denpasar. Here tourists can undertake various challenging activities such as hiking, trekking and camping. While doing these things they can enjoy the fresh and unpolluted environment far from the crowd. Besides that, they can also see staff planting trees, picking coconuts, cloves, coffee beans and even tapping rubber trees. They can try fresh fruit

that has just been picked, such as bananas, rambutans, mangoes, or young coconuts. They can also enjoy pure honey or swallows' nests soup.

The walks vary in distance, ranging from two to five hours. There is also the opportunity to cycle. Fishing is another possibility. Camping right in the middle of the plantation is an interesting experience for those who like adventure. A guide will take tourists to the campsite. Outside the tents there are the soothing sounds of insects and birds. In the evening, tourists can seek out animals such as porcupines and boars, or they can have traditional medication which is undertaken by making use of the stings of the bees.

## **Conclusion**

There are three major impediments to the future of ecotourism. These are environmental degradation, economic instability, and socio-cultural changes. Environmental degradation can happen in many ways. It can be degradation that is easily observed, such as erosion or water pollution, or it can go unnoticed for a long time until it reaches a critical level, such as atmospheric pollution.

In terms of the economic impact of ecotourism, communities face two main problems. One is that ecotourism, like any form of tourism, may be an unstable source of income. Many external factors such as natural disasters, fluctuations in international currency exchange, or political conflict can severely impact tourism demand. The second economic problem of ecotourism is that many of its financial gains can leak out of the local economy if there are not policies in place to prevent this. A third problem for ecotourism is the potential for socio-cultural changes. Changes to societies and cultures happen for many reasons. To attain sustainability, comprehensive assessment of these essential factors must be conducted.

Promotion of ecotourism activities is a major activity in Indonesia. Ecotourism, marine tourism, cultural tourism and agro-tourism are all advertised. Indonesia also highlights other tourism types such as youth tourism and convention tourism (exhibitions, meetings, seminars and conferences). However, as biodiversity has an important role in ecotourism and Indonesia is extremely well blessed with biodiversity, ecotourism will be a major thrust of tourism promotion. Maintaining biodiversity is fundamental to the integrity of Indonesia's environment and hence its continued national economic output.