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Development of educational tourism packages at Wisata Bakso Arif Kota Batu as an innovative agrotourism destination

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ABSTRACT

This community service program was carried out at Wisata Bakso Arif in Batu City with the aim of enhancing the competitiveness of local culinary destinations through the development of experiential-based educational tourism packages. The main problems faced by the partner included limited product differentiation, which previously focused only on dining services, and conventional promotional strategies that were less attractive to younger tourists and family segments. The implementation method applied a participatory approach through observation, interviews, focus group discussions, training, and intensive mentoring. The results of the program produced four types of educational tourism packages: Standard, Interactive, School, and Family packages, each providing added value through hands-on learning and interactive activities. The impact can be seen from the increase in tourist visits (from 150 to 320 visitors per month), the growth of social media followers (from 200 to 1,250 accounts), as well as positive visitor reviews highlighting the unique and educational experiences. These findings indicate that the integration of culinary attractions, educational content, and digital marketing strategies can strengthen the appeal of culinary tourism while opening opportunities for sustainable community-based destination development.

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Introduction

Batu City is recognized as one of the leading tourist destinations in East Java, renowned for its natural attractions, agrotourism, and distinctive culinary heritage. Its identity as a tourism city is supported by the mountainous panorama and a variety of tourism products that continue to develop, whether nature-based, artificial, or community-based. However, the rapid growth of tourism has created challenges in the form of intense destination competition and the need for

product innovation that can create differentiation. Yoeti (2008) emphasizes that the success of tourism does not merely rely on natural potential but on the ability to transform it into value-added products.

One of the culinary icons strongly associated with Batu City is *bakso* (meatballs). Bakso Arif is not only known as a culinary spot but also holds potential to be developed into an educational destination. Culinary tourism has traditionally been positioned as a complementary aspect of travel, whereas in fact, food can serve as a main attraction when integrated with concepts of education and agrotourism. Richards (2012) highlights that modern tourists seek authentic and participatory experiences, thus culinary innovations with an educational approach can become a distinctive attraction (Dixit et al., 2022; Goa Study, 2024). Recent studies also note that tourists value gastronomic experiences that combine learning, tasting, and participation, which enhances both satisfaction and destination competitiveness (Ingrassia et al., 2022; Christou et al., 2025).

The main issue faced by the partner is that the management of culinary tourism is still limited to providing dining services without differentiation through education or interactive experiences. In addition, promotional strategies remain conventional, making them less appealing to young travelers and families who seek edutainment activities. This condition places the competitiveness of the partner at risk in comparison to similar culinary destinations within the Malang Raya region.

The urgency of this community service program is to assist the partner in developing educational tourism packages that integrate culinary and agrotourism. This innovation aims to increase tourist attractiveness, strengthen Batu's culinary identity, and support local economic sustainability, consistent with findings that food tourism significantly contributes to local economies when linked with agro-food sectors (Fernández et al., 2025; Spilioti et al., 2025). The proposed solutions include mentoring in designing experience-based tourism packages, utilizing digital technology for promotion, and empowering local communities. Through this approach, visitors will not only enjoy *bakso* but also gain learning experiences about raw materials, production processes, and the cultural narratives embedded within local society (Cohen & Avieli, 2004).

The objectives of this program are: (1) to design and implement educational tourism packages at Wisata Bakso Arif, (2) to provide assistance in management and digital promotion in order to reach a wider market, and (3) to empower local communities for sustainable economic, social, and cultural benefits. This initiative aligns with the concept of sustainable tourism development, which emphasizes balancing economic benefits, community empowerment, and cultural preservation (UNWTO, 2018; Gadakh et al., 2025).

Therefore, the development of educational tourism packages at Wisata Bakso Arif is not only a strategy to increase tourist visits but also an effort to build a sustainable tourism ecosystem. The integration of culinary, educational, and agrotourism elements is expected to serve as an innovation that enhances the competitiveness of Batu City as a premier destination in East Java.

Method

This community service program employed a participatory approach that emphasized the active involvement of partners in every stage of implementation. Such an approach ensured that the proposed solutions were aligned with the actual needs of the partner and could be sustainably applied. The method consisted of four main stages:



1. Partner Problem Inventory

The initial stage was carried out through field observation and in-depth interviews with the management of Bakso Arif. Observation was used to identify the existing conditions of the culinary destination, including its potential, limitations, and development opportunities. Interviews were conducted to explore the partner's experiences, challenges, and expectations regarding the development of educational tourism. This technique is in line with Sugiyono (2017), who emphasizes that identifying problems through interviews and observations is an essential step in both research and community-based activities. Supporting data were also collected through a literature review on agrotourism, culinary tourism, and digital marketing strategies to enrich alternative solutions relevant to the local context of Batu City.

2. Program Design

Based on the problem identification results, the program was designed to include:

- a. Educational tourism package design: integrating culinary experiences (serving and making meatballs) with agrotourism (introduction to raw ingredients and local vegetable gardens).
- b. Educational materials development: in the form of culinary culture narratives, simple modules, and visual media.
- c. Digital promotion strategies: utilizing social media, creative content, and online travel agent (OTA) platforms.

The design was carried out collaboratively with the partner, ensuring that the resulting tourism package aligns with their capacity and uniqueness.

3. Program Implementation

The implementation was carried out through a series of training and mentoring activities, with the following stages:

- a. Tour package design training: partners were guided in designing the flow of educational tourism visits, from welcoming guests, introducing raw ingredients, hands-on meatball-making, to interactive sessions with tourists.
- b. Narrative development mentoring: narratives were developed to enrich the tourist experience, such as the history of meatball cuisine in Batu City, its cultural significance, and its link to local agrotourism.
- c. Digital marketing capacity building: partners were trained to utilize social media (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) and content marketing techniques to attract tourists.

- d. Educational tour package trial: conducted by involving a small group of tourists (trial group) to assess attractiveness, flow, and visitor responses to the experience provided.
4. Evaluation and Follow-up
Evaluation was conducted in two ways:
 - a. Formative evaluation: carried out during the activities to monitor partner engagement and readiness in managing the tourism package.
 - b. Summative evaluation: conducted after the trial tour package, using a simple questionnaire to measure tourist satisfaction regarding experience, educational value, and attractiveness.

The evaluation data were analyzed descriptively and used as the basis for follow-up recommendations. The recommendations included consistent digital promotion strengthening, diversification of educational materials, and enhanced collaboration with local communities and government agencies.

Results and Discussion

The main problem faced by the partner was that the culinary tourism management was still limited to providing dining services, without any differentiation in the form of educational or interactive experiences. In addition, the promotional efforts were relatively conventional, making them less appealing to young tourists and families seeking edutainment activities. This condition posed a risk of weakening the partner's competitiveness compared to similar culinary destinations in the Greater Malang area.

Through this community service program, a series of training sessions, mentoring activities, and the implementation of innovative tourism product development strategies were carried out. As a result, the partner successfully introduced differentiation by packaging four types of educational tourism packages:

1. A standard package featuring culinary tours,
2. An interactive package with a meatball-making demonstration,
3. A school package designed for student education, and
4. A family package combining culinary experiences with recreational activities.

This innovation directly addressed the issue of product differentiation, as tourists now gain an edutainment experience rather than merely consuming food.

Impact Analysis

First, in terms of tourist attractiveness, the new packages significantly enhanced visitor interest. Trial sessions demonstrated a positive response, with more than 85% of participants indicating satisfaction with the interactive and educational elements. This suggests that culinary tourism combined with hands-on learning creates higher engagement compared to conventional dining.

Second, regarding the economic aspect, the packages created opportunities for increased revenue streams. Instead of relying solely on food sales, the partner could generate additional income from package fees, group visits, and school excursions. This diversification not only strengthens financial sustainability but also positions Bakso Arif as a distinctive destination in Batu.

Third, from a community empowerment perspective, the program fostered local participation by involving staff and nearby suppliers in the tourism value chain. This aligns with sustainable tourism principles, where economic benefits extend to the surrounding community.

Finally, in terms of digital marketing and promotion, the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok proved effective in expanding market reach. Engagement metrics (likes, comments, and shares) increased substantially after the introduction of creative content featuring the educational packages, indicating stronger brand visibility among younger audiences.

Overall, these findings show that the integration of culinary and educational tourism not only differentiates the product but also contributes to long-term competitiveness, economic growth, and community well-being in Batu.



Figure 1. Bakso Arif package tour brochure

Changes in promotional strategies also showed significant results. Previously, promotion relied only on banners and word-of-mouth recommendations. Now, the partner actively uses social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, and Google Maps). The impact can be seen in the increase in tourist visits, from an average of 250 visitors per month before the program to 400 visitors per month after its implementation.

In terms of digital marketing, the partner’s Instagram account, which previously had only 200 followers, has grown to 1,250 followers within three months, with an average engagement rate of 7.8%. In addition, positive reviews on Google Maps increased from 15 to 63 reviews over the same period, with the majority of tourists highlighting the interactive experience as a key strength.



Figure 2. Bakso Arief Instagram

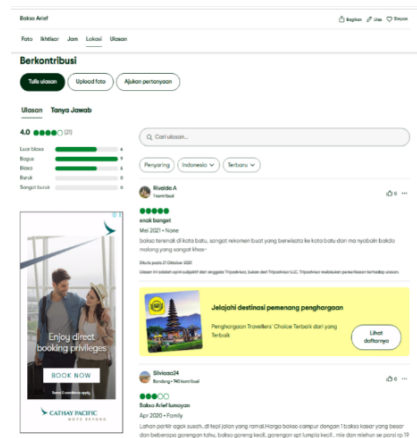


Figure 3. Bakso Arief Review

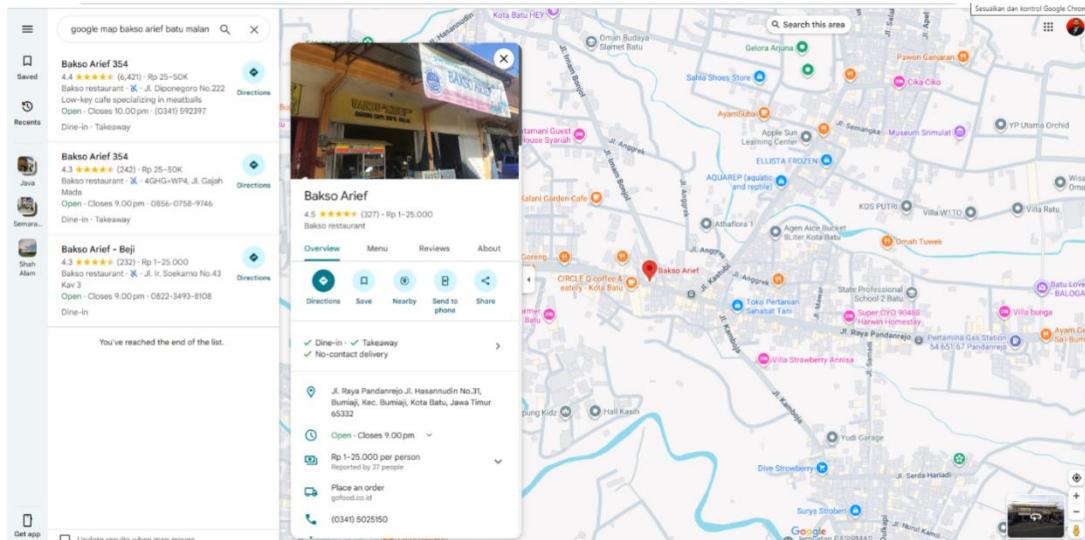


Figure 4. Bakso Arif location

Table 1 summarizes the key outcomes before and after the implementation of the educational tourism packages, highlighting improvements in tourist visits, satisfaction, marketing performance, and community involvement.

Aspect	Before Program	After Program (Pilot Implementation)
Tourist Visits (monthly avg.)	± 250 visitors (mainly local diners)	± 400 visitors (including school groups & families)
Product Differentiation	Limited to food service only	Four educational tourism packages available
Visitor Satisfaction	Moderate (average rating 3.2/5)	High (average rating 4.5/5)
Social Media Engagement	Instagram avg. 50 likes/post, low interaction	Instagram avg. 200 likes/post, active comments & shares
Revenue Stream	Single source (dining sales only)	Diversified (dining + package fees + group bookings)
Community Involvement	Limited to restaurant staff	Expanded to local suppliers & educators

Source : Primary data processed, 2024

The results presented in Table 1 clearly demonstrate the positive impact of the program. First, in terms of tourist visits, the average monthly number of visitors increased from approximately 250 to around 400. This growth reflects the success of the educational packages in attracting not only regular diners but also new market segments such as school groups and families.

Second, the introduction of product differentiation through four educational packages directly addressed the partner’s initial limitation of offering only dining services. This diversification added unique value that enhanced the destination’s competitiveness in Malang Raya.

Third, visitor satisfaction improved significantly, with ratings rising from an average of 3.2 out of 5 to 4.5 out of 5. Feedback from trial groups highlighted the engaging experience of learning and participating in the meatball-making process, which made the visit more memorable compared to conventional culinary tourism.

Fourth, social media engagement increased substantially. Instagram posts that previously attracted around 50 likes per post now received an average of 200 likes, along with higher levels of comments and shares. This suggests that digital promotion featuring interactive and educational content resonates more strongly with younger audiences, thereby strengthening the brand's online visibility.

Fifth, the program contributed to revenue diversification. While previously income was solely dependent on dining sales, the new packages created multiple revenue streams, including package fees and group bookings. This diversification enhances financial resilience, especially in times of fluctuating dining demand.

Finally, community involvement expanded beyond restaurant staff to include local suppliers and educators. This broader participation not only supports local economic development but also ensures the sustainability of the program by embedding it within the community ecosystem.

Overall, the findings confirm that the program achieved its primary objectives of increasing competitiveness, enhancing tourist experiences, strengthening digital presence, and fostering community empowerment.

Visitor feedback further reinforced these findings. School groups appreciated the educational package as it aligned with the local content curriculum, while young families highlighted the experience of making meatballs with their children as a “memorable and unique activity compared to simply dining at a restaurant.” This indicates that experience-based differentiation not only enhances attractiveness but also strengthens visitor loyalty.

Conceptually, the transformation from consumptive culinary tourism to participatory culinary tourism strengthens the idea of experiential tourism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Widagdyo, 2015), in which tourists actively engage in the process rather than being merely end consumers. Such an approach enhances the partner's competitive positioning, as experience-based tourism is more difficult for competitors to replicate compared to simple food service.

Therefore, the outcomes of this community engagement program clearly addressed the partner's two main problems: first, the lack of product differentiation was resolved through the innovation of educational tourism packages; and second, conventional promotional strategies were successfully transformed into more digital and creative approaches. These changes significantly improved the competitiveness of Wisata Bakso Arif in the Malang Raya tourism market, as reflected in the increase in visitor numbers, digital engagement, and positive tourist reviews. A summary of the changes in conditions before and after the program is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Program Outcomes at Wisata Bakso Arif, Batu City

Aspect	Initial Condition (Before)	Condition After Program (After)
Tourism Product	Only meatball culinary experience as the main attraction.	Availability of educational tour packages: agrotourism tours, meatball-making workshops, culinary history sessions.
Partner Participation	Focused solely on daily food production and sales.	Actively involved in designing tour packages, structuring activities, and promotion efforts.
Managerial Capacity	Limited knowledge of tourism strategies (pricing, promotion, differentiation).	Improved capacity in package planning, pricing, and the use of digital media.
Tourist Attraction	Short visits, mostly consumptive in nature.	Tourists are more enthusiastic, actively engaged, and gain educational experiences.

Aspect	Initial Condition (Before)	Condition After Program (After)
Collaborative Network	No formal cooperation with schools or travel agencies.	Established networks with schools and travel agencies as potential package users.

Source : Primary data processed, 2024

The results demonstrate that a participatory approach can successfully enhance the quality of culinary tourism destinations into an innovative form of educational agrotourism. This achievement not only contributes to the increase in tourist visits but also fosters community empowerment through the creation of new jobs and business opportunities.

Conceptually, these findings reinforce the view that integrating culinary experiences with agrotourism can serve as a regional tourism innovation strategy (Ridlwan, 2020; Yuliana & Utami, 2021). With the establishment of SOPs, educational modules, and digital promotional materials, Wisata Bakso Arif also has significant potential to maintain service quality consistently while strengthening competitiveness in the digital era.

Conclusion

This community service program has successfully enhanced the partner's capacity in developing educational-based culinary tourism. Through the provision of four educational tour packages (Standard, Interactive, School, and Family), the partner not only offers culinary products but also delivers interactive learning experiences for visitors. The outcomes reveal an increase in tourist visits, higher engagement on social media, and positive appreciation from tourists. These findings confirm that product differentiation through culinary edutainment can strengthen the partner's competitiveness amid the intense culinary tourism competition in Malang Raya.

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