



Socio-Economic Impacts of Meleura Tourism Development on Employment, Income, and Community Welfare

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of the Meleura Tourism Site on employment opportunities, income levels, and community welfare in Lakarinta Village, Lohia District, Muna Regency. Although tourism development is often linked to local economic improvement, empirical evidence at the village level, particularly in coastal tourism areas, remains limited. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that tourism development has expanded employment in service and trade sectors and significantly increased household income. Average daily earnings rose from approximately IDR 30,000–50,000 before 2021 to IDR 150,000–300,000 during normal tourism seasons, with higher income during peak periods. Tourist arrivals increased steadily from 2,500 visitors in 2021 to 3,800 visitors in 2024, generating multiplier effects across microenterprises such as food stalls, boat rentals, and parking services. These developments have contributed to improved household welfare, stronger community participation, and enhanced local economic resilience. This study contributes to the literature on community-based tourism by providing empirical, village-level evidence of tourism's socio-economic impacts. A key policy implication is the need for stronger regional government support in infrastructure development, capacity building, and facilitation of small enterprises to ensure sustainable and inclusive tourism growth.

Keywords: *Community Welfare; Employment Opportunities; Income; Local Economic Development; Tourism Development.*

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a key role in Indonesia's economic development, serving as one of the country's most strategic sectors for boosting regional income and improving community welfare. The Indonesian government continues to promote tourism not only in urban centers but also in rural areas as part of its efforts to create jobs and strengthen local economies. As one of the main drivers of local growth, the tourism sector helps stimulate community well-being. According to Paluseri et al. (2024), community-based tourism can open up new economic opportunities and expand employment for people living around tourist destinations. Through its sustainable development agenda, the

government aims to grow rural tourism to support local economic resilience and reduce regional disparities.

Tourist destinations provide a range of economic benefits to surrounding communities, from encouraging small business development to creating direct employment opportunities in the tourism industry (Pajriah et al., 2025). Increasing visitor numbers have led to higher household incomes for local residents. This shows that tourism is not only about recreation, but it also serves as a powerful tool for empowering local communities and promoting sustainable social and economic progress in line with national policy (Karyatun et al., 2021). Consistent with this, (Royali et al., 2024) demonstrated that community-based tourism programs in rural East Java significantly increased local income and reduced unemployment, with sectoral shifts from primary to secondary and tertiary sectors improving household economic capacity.

Muna Regency possesses considerable tourism potential supported by its island geography, and the local government has prioritized the development of several destinations, including the Meleura Tourism Site in Lakarinta Village, Lohia District. As of 2024, Lakarinta Village was home to 1,211 residents whose livelihoods were traditionally concentrated in farming, trading, and small service activities. The development of Meleura has enabled residents to diversify income sources through tourism-related activities such as operating food stalls, providing parking services, and participating in site management. This shift illustrates how rural tourism can function not only as a recreational space but also as a mechanism for community-based economic empowerment aligned with local development objectives.

The growth of the Meleura Tourism Site has also expanded small-scale economic activities driven by rising visitor numbers between 2021 and 2024. Improved accessibility and proximity to Raha City have strengthened Meleura's role as a short-distance tourism destination, stimulating microenterprises such as food stalls, boat rentals, and parking services. Rather than relying solely on its natural attractions, Meleura's development demonstrates how accessibility and visitor growth translate into tangible economic benefits for local communities (Nanda Kharisma, 2022).

From a regional development perspective, tourism acts as a key engine for local economic growth. Fitriaty et al. (2024) found that community-based tourism has a strong multiplier effect, stimulating other sectors such as trade, transport, and creative industries. As visitor numbers rise, local economic activity also grows, helping build community self-reliance. Community participation is essential for successful tourism management. Rindrasih et al. (2024) point out that when residents take part in planning, managing, and sharing tourism benefits, it strengthens their capacity for long-term economic independence. This approach positions local people not just as beneficiaries but as active partners in development. Mauliyanti et al. (2024) argued that participatory approaches in tourism governance significantly enhance community ownership and sustainability, leading to more inclusive local development.

Tourism growth has also had a clear impact on community welfare. With more jobs and business opportunities in the tourism sector, local residents have gained additional income to support their families. This income growth has improved living standards, expanded access to education, and increased participation in community development activities (Veriasa et al., 2023). Consistent with this, Fabinyi et al. (2022) demonstrated that tourism-driven maritime zone developments in coastal Southeast

Asia, including Sulawesi, create new economic opportunities for diversified coastal livelihoods, though they also create challenges for traditional small-scale fishing communities seeking livelihood resilience. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the Meleura Tourism Site affects employment, income, and overall welfare in Lakarinta Village, while also exploring how community empowerment contributes to sustainable local economic development.

Although numerous studies highlight the positive economic effects of community-based tourism in rural Indonesia, empirical evidence on small coastal villages with limited initial resources remains scarce. Existing literature tends to focus on well-developed tourism villages or destinations with established management systems, creating a gap in understanding how early-stage or emerging destinations transform local livelihoods. Moreover, few studies compare pre-development baseline conditions with subsequent socio-economic changes, making it difficult to assess the magnitude of tourism's impact over time.

Therefore, this study fills the gap by examining the Meleura Tourism Site, an emerging rural destination whose development between 2021 and 2024 has significantly changed local economic patterns. The research provides baseline insights into community conditions before major tourism investment, allowing a clearer understanding of how employment, income, and welfare shift during the early stages of tourism growth.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the socio-economic impacts of the Meleura Tourism Site on employment opportunities, income generation, and community welfare in Lakarinta Village, Lohia District, Muna Regency. This approach allows an in-depth and contextual understanding of tourism development based on the lived experiences of local communities. The study was conducted in Lakarinta Village, which hosts the Meleura tourism area and has experienced notable growth in tourism activities in recent years.

Data were collected from 15 informants, selected purposively to represent key stakeholder groups involved in tourism development. These informants included village officials, tourism managers, local micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) owners, tourism service providers (such as food stall and boat rental operators), and community members. The inclusion of diverse stakeholder groups enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives on changes in employment, income, and community welfare resulting from tourism activities.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, method triangulation was applied through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. Observations focused on daily economic activities and visitor interactions at the tourism site. In-depth interviews explored participants' experiences and perceptions regarding tourism-related employment and income changes. Documentation analysis included visitor statistics, income records, and official reports from 2021 to 2024. Data from these sources were systematically cross-checked to validate findings and minimize researcher bias.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Data

reduction involved selecting and categorizing information relevant to tourism impacts, while data display used descriptive narratives and tabulated summaries to illustrate key relationships. Conclusions were drawn through pattern identification and verified through continuous comparison across data sources.

RESULT

The Meleura Tourism Site is in Lakarinta Village, Muna Regency, and derives its name from the local Kamboja language, in which *mele* means “meeting” and *ura* means “current,” referring to the confluence of freshwater from the land and seawater from the coast. Historically, this water source was essential for residents’ daily activities, including cooking, drinking, and household use. Over time, the site evolved beyond its traditional function and began to attract visitors due to its natural features, such as clear seawater and small surrounding islands, positioning Meleura as a tourism destination with both environmental and cultural significance.

Prior to major government intervention, tourism management at Meleura was underdeveloped. Facilities were limited, accessibility was inadequate, and community involvement in tourism-related activities remained low. Following the allocation of public funding exceeding one hundred million rupiahs by the Regional Office of Tourism and Creative Economy, several development initiatives were implemented, including the construction of basic public facilities, road infrastructure improvements, and promotional efforts aimed at increasing visitor awareness and accessibility.

Lakarinta Village is predominantly a coastal community whose residents traditionally depend on fisheries as their main livelihood. In addition to fishing, residents engage in informal and small-scale economic activities such as labor services, parking management, motorcycle taxi operations, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) surrounding the tourism site. Since Meleura was designated as one of Muna Regency’s leading tourism destinations in 2015, these activities have expanded alongside improvements in infrastructure and government-led promotion. Cultural events such as the annual *Mai Te Wuna Festival* have further strengthened Meleura’s tourism identity and stimulated local economic activity.

Against this contextual background, the following subsection presents empirical findings on visitor growth, income changes, and employment opportunities generated by the development of the Meleura Tourism Site.

Before infrastructure upgrades began in 2021, economic activity at the Meleura Tourism Site was very limited. Facilities consisted mainly of temporary shelters, no structured parking area was available, and residents earned only sporadic income from informal weekend visitors. Average daily revenue for small vendors ranged between Rp30,000–Rp50,000, indicating that tourism had not yet become a significant or reliable source of livelihood for the community.

Following infrastructure improvements and increased promotion, visitor numbers grew steadily between 2021 and 2024. As presented in Table 1, total tourist arrivals increased from 2,500 visitors in 2021 to 3,800 visitors in 2024. Weekend visitors consistently dominated total arrivals, indicating that Meleura functions primarily as a leisure and short-stay destination. Annual growth rates remained relatively stable,

averaging around 15%, which suggests sustained destination development rather than temporary or seasonal fluctuations.

Table 1. Number of Visitors to Meleura Tourism Site (2021–2024)

Year	Weekday Visitors	Weekend Visitors	Total Visitors
2021	600	1,900	2,500
2022	700	2,175	2,875
2023	800	2,500	3,300
2024	900	2,900	3,800

The visitor growth trend is further illustrated in Figure 1, which shows a consistent increase in weekday, weekend, and total visitors throughout the study period. The linear upward pattern in the graph confirms that tourism growth in Meleura has been gradual and sustained. Notably, weekend visits increased more sharply than weekday visits, highlighting the site's strong appeal for recreational travel and family tourism.

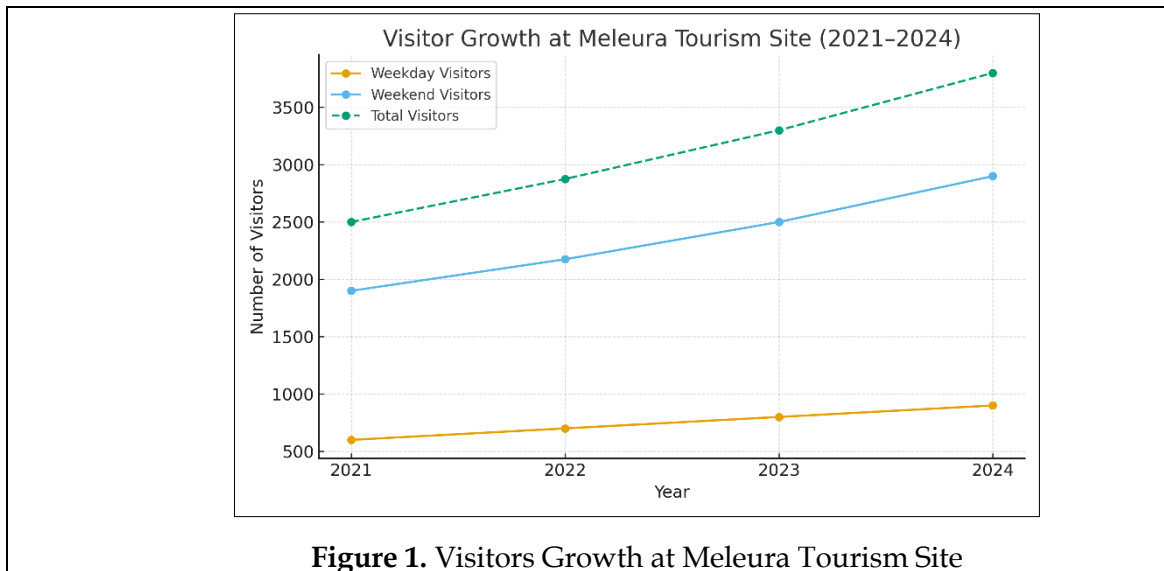


Figure 1. Visitors Growth at Meleura Tourism Site

The increase in tourist arrivals has directly contributed to local revenue through entrance ticket fees. With an admission rate of Rp5,000 per visitor, tourism revenue in 2024 was estimated at Rp19,000,000. Beyond formal revenue generation, tourism growth has produced a multiplier effect within the village economy by expanding employment opportunities and strengthening microenterprise activities. Local residents increasingly participated in tourism-related services such as food vending, boat rentals, and parking management, transforming tourism into an important source of household income.

Income improvements at the microeconomic level are summarized in **Table 2**. Food stall operators earn approximately Rp150,000–Rp300,000 per day during normal seasons, with income rising to several million rupiah per day during peak holidays. Boat rental providers generate around Rp300,000–Rp500,000 per day, particularly on weekends, while parking services contribute Rp100,000–Rp200,000 per day, with higher earnings during festivals and special events. Compared with the pre-2021 baseline income (Rp30,000–Rp50,000 per day), these figures indicate a substantial improvement in income stability and economic dependence on tourism-related activities.

Table 2. Average Daily Income of Local Businesses at Meleura Tourism Site

Enterprise Type	Daily Income (Normal Season)	Daily Income (Peak Season)
Food stalls	Rp150,000–Rp300,000	Up to millions/ day
Boat rentals	Rp300,000–Rp500,000	Higher on holidays
Parking services	Rp100,000–Rp200,000	Increased during festivals

The tourism site is supported by facilities designed to enhance visitor comfort, including food and beverage stalls, clean restrooms, and permanent gazebos. Fourteen food stalls operated by residents offer various food and beverage options, while leisure activities such as boat rentals and float rentals encourage longer visitor stays. Although parking capacity remains limited during peak periods, the combination of natural attractions and improved amenities continues to attract increasing numbers of visitors. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the development of the Meleura Tourism Site has transformed local economic conditions by increasing visitor demand, expanding employment and microenterprise opportunities, and improving household income and welfare in Lakarinta Village.

DISCUSSION

The development of tourism destinations is widely recognized as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation in local communities, particularly through job creation, income generation, and improvements in overall welfare. The findings from Lakarinta Village confirm this pattern, as the growth of the Meleura Tourism Site has stimulated new economic activities and diversified local livelihoods. As tourist arrivals increased steadily between 2021 and 2024, tourism emerged as an alternative economic base that complements traditional fisheries-based livelihoods. These impacts can be analytically discussed through three interrelated dimensions: employment opportunities, household income, and community welfare.

Impact on Household Income and Community Welfare

Tourism-related activities have been shown to significantly enhance community welfare by improving access to daily necessities, housing conditions, and education, while also fostering social cohesion through collective participation in tourism management and cultural events. Similar patterns have been documented in multiple Indonesian tourism contexts. For instance, increased tourism revenue has been found to positively influence community welfare through economic growth and improved living standards (Prestiantika & Sishadiyati, 2024). In Penglipuran Tourism Village, tourism development increased local income by 150–300%, expanded business opportunities, and simultaneously preserved cultural traditions (Prihantara et al., 2025). Comparable outcomes were also reported in large-scale tourism development areas such as the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, where tourism contributed to improvements in education, economic capacity, and health services through enhanced training and entrepreneurial programs (Yuli et al., 2023).

The findings in Lakarinta Village reflect these broader trends. Increased household income from food stalls, boat rentals, and parking services has enabled residents to better meet daily needs, invest in housing improvements, and support their children's

education. Tourism income has also strengthened local economic circulation, reinforcing the multiplier effect whereby visitor spending flows back into the community through wages, services, and microenterprise activities, consistent with observations in other tourism economic zones such as Soziona in North Sumatra (Gulo et al., 2023).

Beyond material welfare, tourism development in Lakarinta has contributed to stronger social cohesion and cultural identity. Community participation in tourism management and cultural events has fostered a sense of collective ownership and pride. The annual *Mai Te Wuna Festival* exemplifies how cultural activities can serve dual functions as tourism attractions and platforms for cultural preservation. This finding aligns with studies showing that cultural tourism can enhance community well-being and reinforce local identity, as observed in Sikkim, where cultural tourism strengthened social cohesion despite emerging challenges such as over-tourism (Bhutia, 2024).

Inclusive Employment, Gender Participation, and Capacity Building

Tourism employment in Lakarinta has been notably inclusive, engaging village youth and women, particularly housewives, in small-scale enterprises. This inclusivity plays a critical role in local economic development and social cohesion. Similar dynamics have been reported in other Indonesian tourism villages, where women actively manage homestays, food services, and home-based industries, contributing significantly to household income and community welfare (Nurtanio & Brahmantyo, 2021; Wirdawati et al., 2024). Broader reviews also confirm that women's participation in tourism is closely associated with economic empowerment and improved social outcomes in developing economies (Mahwish & Nawaz, 2022; Işpanović et al., 2025).

However, as in many community-based tourism settings, employment opportunities in Lakarinta remain largely informal and vulnerable. Studies from Sakerta Timur and other rural tourism villages indicate that limited institutional support and access to training constrain the sustainability of women-led tourism enterprises (Nurtanio & Brahmantyo, 2021). Evidence from successful community-based tourism initiatives, such as Nglanggeran and Meat Tourism Village, highlights the importance of local leadership, capacity-building programs, and continuous training in sustaining inclusive tourism development (Pasaribu et al., 2025). Without such support, informal tourism employment may struggle to withstand economic shocks or fluctuations in visitor demand.

Risks, Sustainability, and Governance Implications

Despite the positive socio-economic impacts observed, tourism development in Lakarinta also faces potential challenges related to environmental pressure, unequal benefit distribution, and economic dependence on a single destination. Similar concerns have been identified in tourism villages such as Coal Village in East Nusa Tenggara, where tourism benefits were unevenly distributed across the community (Sukur & Sanjiwani, 2023). Infrastructure limitations, as reported in Nagari Taram, further demonstrate that tourism growth alone is insufficient without parallel improvements in governance and public services (Putri et al., 2024). In this context, weak institutional oversight and fragmented coordination among stakeholders may undermine the sustainability of local development initiatives, highlighting the importance of strengthening governance capacity and monitoring mechanisms to ensure equitable and long-term outcomes (Rahma Wati et al., 2025).

Overall, while the Meleura Tourism Site has generated meaningful economic and social benefits, sustaining these outcomes will require strengthening institutional capacity, promoting inclusive governance, and integrating environmental safeguards. Tourism in Lakarinta has evolved beyond a recreational function into a driver of local development; however, its long-term contribution to community welfare depends on deliberate strategies that balance economic growth, cultural preservation, and social equity.

CONCLUSION

The development of the Meleura Tourism Site has produced notable socio-economic benefits for Lakarinta Village, particularly through increased employment opportunities, higher household income, and improved community welfare. Tourism has shifted from a marginal activity to a key driver of local economic development, complementing traditional livelihoods and stimulating MSMEs. The steady growth in visitor numbers confirms Meleura's potential as a viable tourism destination supported by infrastructure development and community participation.

Beyond economic outcomes, tourism development has strengthened social cohesion and cultural identity, as reflected in residents' active involvement in tourism management and cultural events such as the *Mai Te Wuna Festival*. These developments indicate early signs of community empowerment, where residents participate directly in and benefit from tourism activities. However, sustaining these gains depends on effective governance, institutional capacity, and equitable distribution of benefits across the community.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain, including environmental pressure, informal employment structures, and economic dependence on a single tourism destination. This study is limited by its qualitative approach and the 2021–2024 timeframe. Future research should employ quantitative or mixed-method designs and comparative analyses across tourism villages to better assess long-term impacts and support the formulation of sustainable, community-based tourism policies.

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