

To cite this article: Jasmine Qur'ani (2025). Oar Island as an Ecotourism Destination: Potential and Challenges Analysis. International Journal of Education, Business and Economics Research (IJEBER) 5 (4): 108-116

OAR ISLAND AS AN ECOTOURISM DESTINATION: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES ANALYSIS

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<https://doi.org/10.59822/IJEBER.2025.5407>

ABSTRACT

Oar Island, located in Sumur Village, Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, is a small island within the Ujung Kulon National Park, a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. With its unspoiled landscape, pristine white sand beaches, calm and clear seawater, and tranquil atmosphere, Oar Island holds significant potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination. This study aims to identify the potentials and challenges in developing Oar Island as a sustainable ecotourism site. The method used is a qualitative approach with a literature study as the primary basis, focusing on key factors such as environmental carrying capacity, infrastructure readiness, socio-economic impacts, and local community involvement. The findings indicate that Oar Island offers remarkable attractions, including stunning coastal landscapes, rich marine biodiversity supporting snorkeling activities, and a strategic location near other destinations in Ujung Kulon. However, several challenges have been identified, including limited basic infrastructure (electricity, sanitation, and accommodation), the absence of maritime safety standards, and the risk of environmental degradation due to unregulated tourism activities. On the other hand, local communities play a vital role as boat operators, tour guides, and providers of traditional coastal cuisine, enriching the visitor experience while also boosting the local economy. Developing Oar Island as an ecotourism destination requires an integrated approach that emphasizes environmental conservation, community empowerment, the establishment of tourism service standards, and ongoing visitor education. This strategy is expected to optimize Oar Island's tourism potential without compromising its ecological sustainability and local socio-cultural values.

KEYWORDS: - : Oar Island, ecotourism, coastal tourism potential, community participation, sustainability.

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Published Online: July 2025

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world, comprising more than 17,000 islands stretching from Sabang to Merauke. This vast geographical expanse gives Indonesia the second-longest coastline in the world after Canada, offering an enormous potential for marine tourism (Soemarmi et al., 2019). This natural wealth has attracted millions of tourists, both domestic and international, to explore the diverse maritime destinations across the country.

One destination that exemplifies this potential is Oar Island, located in Sumur Village, Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province. The island lies within the Ujung Kulon National Park, a protected area recognized as a Natural World Heritage Site by UNESCO since 1992. Due to its relatively small size, Oar Island is often referred to as a “mini island.” It offers stunning seascapes and serene, uncrowded beaches, making it a promising alternative for travelers seeking a more private and nature-oriented experience.

With an area comparable to that of a football field (Indonesia Kaya, 2025), Oar Island can be explored in about 45 minutes on foot. In addition to the renowned marine scenery of Ujung Kulon, this uninhabited island features pristine white sandy beaches that are soft and sparkling, enhancing its appeal as a peaceful and captivating coastal destination.

Access to Oar Island typically begins with an overland journey from Jakarta, which takes approximately eight hours by car via the toll road to Sumur Village. From there, visitors can take a 15–20 minute boat ride to reach the island. Although the journey may seem long and tiring, the natural beauty awaiting at the destination more than compensates for the effort.

Oar Island holds significant potential as an ecotourism destination, thanks to its unspoiled natural environment and its uniqueness as a small, remote island offering an exclusive experience. However, to realize sustainable ecotourism development, a deeper examination is required of the challenges it may face — including environmental concerns, infrastructure limitations, and the socio-economic readiness of nearby communities. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze both the potential and challenges in developing Oar Island as a sustainable ecotourism site.

2.0 METHOD

The methodology used in this study is a qualitative approach with a literature study as the primary basis. This literature study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ecotourism potential on Oar Island, as well as the challenges associated with sustainable management in the area. The focus of this literature review is on key factors that influence ecotourism development, including the carrying capacity of Oar Island, the availability and planning of environmentally friendly tourism facilities, the potential impacts of tourism activities on coastal and marine ecosystems, and the involvement of local communities in managing sustainable tourism initiatives.

The references employed in this study include findings from previous research on ecotourism in Oar Island and the broader Ujung Kulon National Park area, as well as relevant studies on the management of national parks and ecotourism destinations across Indonesia. Through this

approach, the study seeks to identify both the opportunities and constraints that need to be addressed to support Oar Island's development as a sustainable ecotourism destination.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Potential Of Infrastructure And Facilities

Oar Island does not yet have modern infrastructure — such as electricity networks, permanent lodging, or adequate sanitation facilities — which actually opens up significant opportunities for development based on sustainable principles from the outset. Given its pristine condition, future development can be directed towards green infrastructure concepts, for example the use of solar panels for electricity, composting or eco-friendly toilets, rainwater harvesting systems, and eco-lodge accommodations or organized camping areas. Thus, tourist needs can be met without causing significant ecological damage.



Figure 1 Fishing Boat

Oar Island is already served by small ferry boats from Sumur Harbor. However, these transportation services currently lack adequate safety standards, both in terms of safety equipment (life jackets, fire extinguishers, emergency communication devices) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for handling maritime accidents. This is an important note as well as a potential area for improvement to ensure that future trips to Oar Island are not only comfortable but also safe for visitors.



Figure 2 Minimal Lighting

The absence of an electricity network also results in minimal lighting on the island, especially at night (Figure 2). This can pose challenges to visitor comfort and safety but simultaneously presents an opportunity for the application of solar-powered lighting technology that is environmentally friendly.

Although Oar Island currently faces various infrastructure limitations, these conditions can be transformed into strengths if development is directed according to sustainable ecotourism principles. This approach not only provides added value for tourists but also preserves the island's environmental integrity in the long term.

3.2 Tourism Attractions

Oar Island has a variety of unique features that strengthen its position as a potential ecotourism destination. Its attractiveness is reflected in both its natural aspects and its strategic geographic location.

The island boasts clean, soft white sandy beaches that are ideal for sunbathing, relaxing, or simply strolling along the shoreline. In addition, the surrounding marine waters are known for their clarity and relatively calm waves, making them safe for swimming and snorkelling. These conditions are further supported by the rich biodiversity of coral reefs and various species of tropical fish that are fascinating to explore (Figure 5).



Figure 3 The sunrise panorama on Oar Island,

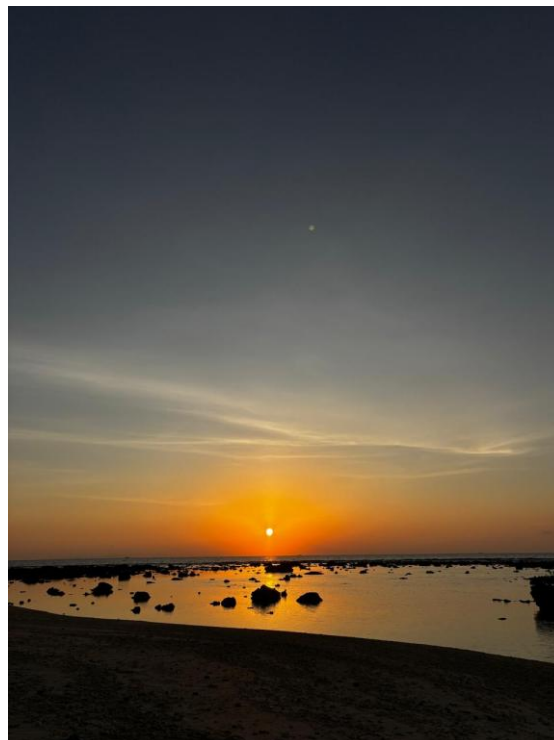


Figure 4 Sunrise panorama on Oar Island

The island's quiet and uninhabited atmosphere also provides a unique added value. This gives a private and exclusive impression, allowing tourists to enjoy the natural beauty more intimately without the disturbance of crowds. Oar Island also offers stunning sunrise and sunset panoramas, which serve as one of the main magnets attracting visitors (Figures 3 and 4).

Geographically, Oar Island is located near Umang Island and Peucang Island, which are still part of the Ujung Kulon National Park area. This proximity opens up opportunities for integrated tourism packages, such as island hopping tours, guided marine ecotourism, or conservation education activities, which can increase the length of stay of tourists while providing broader economic impacts for local communities.

The diversity of attractions on Oar Island makes it not only feasible to develop as a regular tourism destination but also highly potential to be directed as a flagship ecotourism destination that combines natural beauty, tranquillity, and environmental conservation values.



Figure 5 Underwater marine life suitable for snorkeling

3.3 Role Of Local Communities

The local communities, especially those residing around Sumur Village and the coastal areas of Pandeglang, play a central role in supporting the development of Oar Island as an ecotourism destination. Their involvement is crucial not only in providing tourism services but also as the forefront in maintaining environmental sustainability and preserving local socio-cultural values.

Sustainable tourism must empower the local economy by creating employment opportunities, supporting creative industries and local crafts, and promoting partnerships between tourism businesses and local communities. This helps reduce poverty, increase incomes, and improve the welfare of local residents (Hartadji, 2024). The local community currently acts as operators of sea transportation, providing ferry services from Sumur Harbor to Oar Island. This activity has become one of their main sources of livelihood, which in the future can be further strengthened through capacity building, the standardization of maritime safety, and the promotion of integrated tourism packages.

Community involvement can also be expanded through the provision of local tour guide services equipped with knowledge about conservation and environmental interpretation. This not only

enhances the quality of the tourist experience but also fosters a sense of ownership among the community toward their natural resources.

From a cultural perspective, the local community has great potential to introduce culinary heritage, such as fresh seafood dishes or traditional Banten delicacies like *sate bandeng*, *rabeg*, and coastal-style grilled seafood rice. This culinary tourism offering not only enriches the ecotourism experience on Oar Island but also opens up new income opportunities for local households through catering services, small eateries, or dining packages at tourism sites. Furthermore, gastronomic tourism can serve as an educational medium for tourists to understand the close relationship between coastal communities and the sea as well as traditional fishing cultures.

From a social perspective, the development of ecotourism on Oar Island involving local communities is expected to foster collective awareness of the importance of environmental conservation while minimizing potential conflicts of interest arising from tourism management. Thus, the local community is not merely seen as passive beneficiaries but becomes the main actors in maintaining the sustainability of the destination.

The development of ecotourism on Oar Island is predicted to bring several social impacts. Increased tourist visits can open up business opportunities and create new jobs for local communities, raise economic standards, and expand access to education related to tourism and conservation. On the other hand, without clear regulations, it may also lead to conflicts of interest, cultural shifts, or social pressures due to uncontrolled tourist flows. Therefore, management strategies based on community participation and continuous socialization are essential. By preserving and promoting their cultural heritage, local communities not only honor their own cultural roots but also provide authentic experiences to visitors, which can enhance the tourism appeal and strengthen the cultural identity of the area (Amelia & Susanti, 2024).

3.4 Standardization Of Tourism Activities

To ensure both high-quality and sustainable tourism experiences, tourism activities on Oar Island need to be organized under management guidelines that meet ecotourism standards. This may include:

- a. Limiting the number of visitors per day to maintain environmental carrying capacity.
- b. Providing guidelines for snorkelling, swimming, and camping activities that do not damage the ecosystem.
- c. Installing educational facilities such as interpretation boards on flora, fauna, and the importance of conservation.
- d. Certification and training for local guides so they can deliver quality environmental explanations to visitors.

With these standards in place, Oar Island will not only become an aesthetically attractive destination but also offer educational value and support long-term nature preservation.

3.5 Main Challenges In Ecotourism Development

Alongside its great potential, the development of Oar Island as an ecotourism destination also faces several undeniable challenges, including:

- a. Lack of basic infrastructure, such as electricity, clean water, adequate sanitation facilities, and proper transport routes to Sumur Village.
- b. Limited institutional capacity, both in terms of regulations and local human resources trained in ecotourism practices.
- c. Potential environmental degradation, such as coral reef damage due to uncontrolled snorkelling activities or unmanaged plastic waste disposal.
- d. High investment needs, particularly to build eco-friendly tourism facilities and sustainable conservation monitoring systems.
- e. Fluctuating tourist numbers, which are highly dependent on seasons, weather, and national socio-economic stability.

The strategy for developing Oar Island as an ecotourism destination must be designed holistically. An integrated approach that combines zoning plans, community empowerment, implementation of ecotourism standards, and conservation education is key to ensuring tourism management is not only economically viable but also maintains ecological and social sustainability in the long term.

4.0 DISCUSSION

Oar Island holds significant potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination based on sustainability principles. This potential is evident in its pristine natural conditions, rich marine biodiversity, and strategic location near Ujung Kulon National Park. Its main attractions—such as white sandy beaches, clear seawater, a tranquil and private island atmosphere, and stunning sunrise and sunset views—serve as key assets to attract ecotourists.

The involvement of local communities is also a crucial factor that can accelerate the development of this destination. Beyond operating boat transportation services, local residents can participate by offering guiding services, culinary businesses featuring local gastronomy, and managing home stays or organized camping grounds. This ensures that the economic benefits of tourism are directly felt by the local community.

However, several challenges that have been identified need to be addressed promptly. The lack of basic infrastructure, absence of safety standards for marine transport, limited supporting tourism facilities, and the risk of environmental degradation from unregulated visitor activities are strategic issues that require attention. Without serious management, Oar Island's ecotourism potential could instead threaten the island's ecosystem.

Therefore, an integrated development approach that combines ecological, economic, social, and cultural aspects is necessary. This can take the form of drafting ecotourism zoning plans, establishing visitor limits (carrying capacity), preparing standard operating procedures (SOP) for tourism activities, providing environmental education for tourists, and offering intensive training for local communities. Through this approach, ecotourism on Oar Island can proceed sustainably,

delivering economic and social benefits to local residents without compromising environmental quality.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Oar Island possesses highly significant potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination. The beauty of its coastal landscapes, clear sea waters, and private atmosphere make the island attractive to tourists seeking authentic nature-based experiences. Support from local communities, particularly in managing transportation, tourism services, and promoting coastal culinary specialties, is a critical aspect that can strengthen the competitiveness of this destination.

Nevertheless, the development of ecotourism on Oar Island also faces serious challenges, including limited infrastructure, the lack of safety standards, the risk of marine ecosystem degradation, and the need for investment to establish environmentally friendly tourism facilities. Therefore, destination development strategies must be formulated comprehensively by involving all stakeholders, emphasizing conservation principles, and enhancing the capacity of local communities to ensure sustainability goals can be achieved.

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