

## The Impact of Tourism on Community Food Security in Berastagi, Karo Regency

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### Abstract

As one of the main tourist destinations in North Sumatra Province, Berastagi is not only known for its natural and cultural tourism potential, but also as a center for horticultural agriculture, which is a major pillar of local food security. Therefore, research is needed regarding the impact of tourism on community food security in Berastagi, Karo Regency. This study aims to analyze the impact of tourism on community food security in Berastagi, Karo Regency. This study uses a qualitative approach by conducting in-depth interviews with farmers and traders, accompanied by secondary data analysis regarding the development of the tourism sector and agricultural conditions. The results of this study indicate that the impact of tourism provides opportunities to increase community income. However, these benefits are not evenly distributed, seen as challenges arise such as food prices becoming very expensive, food supplies are unstable due to reduced agricultural land, food production is disrupted by climate change and extreme weather, and household economies become very vulnerable during the low season. Thus, this study confirms that tourism has a dual impact on the food security of the Berastagi community, so that sustainable management strategies are needed so that the tourism and agricultural sectors can support each other.

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Climate Change, Food Security.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a strategic sector supporting national economic growth. Bank Indonesia (BI) states that this sector plays a crucial role in increasing the country's foreign exchange reserves because all the resources needed to support tourism development are readily available domestically. This includes not only human resources but also natural resources, cultural diversity, culinary richness, and Indonesia's immense geographical potential. With these riches, Indonesia has a significant opportunity to make tourism a pillar of sustainable economic development (Ashaab et al., 2024).

One of the leading tourism hubs in North Sumatra is Berastagi, Karo Regency. This city is known for its natural charm, including cool mountains, clean air, and rich local culture. Every year, Berastagi is visited by domestic and international tourists attracted by the local natural and cultural attractions. The tourism sector in Berastagi has significantly contributed to increasing local incomes, particularly for those

involved in the hospitality, culinary, handicraft, and transportation sectors (Ananda Lubis et al., 2021).

However, behind the positive developments generated by the tourism sector, there are complex challenges for local communities, one of which is food security. Food security encompasses not only the availability of food but also aspects of affordability, nutritional quality, and stable access to food. Food security becomes a crucial issue when pressure on agricultural land, environmental pollution, and climate change occur due to uncontrolled increases in tourism activities (Imsar, 2024).

According to the concept of food security in Law Number 18 of 2012 concerning Food, food security is a condition where food is fulfilled for the country and individuals, which is reflected in the availability of sufficient food, both in quantity and quality, safe, diverse, nutritious, equitable, and affordable, and does not conflict with the religion, beliefs, and culture of the community. This concept is very relevant in seeing the relationship between the tourism sector and its impact on the socio-economic conditions of local communities, especially in terms of food access (Herlianti & Sanjaya, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, Malthus's theory warns that rapid population growth will accelerate the food crisis because food availability increases arithmetically, while population increases geometrically. This is reinforced by Laurence Smith's opinion that since 2011 the world has reached a critical point where food availability can no longer meet the needs of the global population (Hasibuan et al., 2023). In a local context such as Berastagi, the increase in population while agricultural land shrinks due to conversion into tourist areas, is a reflection of Malthus's concerns (Oktaviani & Yuliani, 2023).

The phenomena occurring in Berastagi demonstrate that the agricultural sector, the backbone of the community's food security, is facing significant pressure. Tourism activities have ecological impacts such as waste pollution, excessive water use for tourist accommodations, and the conversion of agricultural land into commercial areas. This has resulted in decreased agricultural productivity, disrupted cropping cycles, and soil degradation, worsening the food security situation for local communities. Furthermore, rising food prices each year further burden rural communities. The Berastagi community, which relies primarily on agriculture and tourism for its livelihoods, now faces dual pressures: unstable incomes due to seasonal changes and environmental damage, and increased expenses due to rising food and energy prices. This has fueled unrest and a general decline in community well-being.

Based on the author's initial field observations, it was found that some farmers are losing interest in farming due to declining yields and rising production costs. Meanwhile, some land previously used for growing vegetables has been converted into villas, guesthouses, or other commercial areas promising short-term profits. People have also begun replacing local food consumption with instant food and imported rice, which exacerbates dependency and threatens local food diversification.

The impact of tourism on community food security in Berastagi, Karo Regency, can be studied from an Islamic economic perspective, as the tourism sector

not only influences income growth but also the distribution of welfare, food price stability, and the sustainability of local production. According to Islamic economic principles, as emphasized by thinkers such as M. Umer Chapra, economic development must ensure distributive justice (*al-'adl*), public welfare (*maslahah*), and the fulfillment of basic needs (*dharuriyat*), including food. If tourism development in Berastagi encourages the conversion of agricultural land to commercial sectors without fair controls, this could weaken local food availability and contradict the principle of *hifz al-nafs* (preserving life (Akbar, A., Marliyah, M., & Daulay, 2025). Conversely, if tourism is managed according to sharia principles, strengthening the local farming economy, establishing an honest trading system, and avoiding hoarding (*ihthikar*), this sector can actually strengthen community food security in a sustainable and equitable manner (Ermelia, T., Imsar, I., & Harahap, 2023).

Previous research, such as that conducted by (Sudiarta et al., 2021) shows that food security management in North Sumatra faces obstacles due to irrigation, land conversion, and the dominance of rice as a staple food. Meanwhile, research from (Lazuardina & Amalia G., 2023) highlights rural poverty due to the food crisis exacerbated by soaring energy and non-consumable food prices. On the other hand, (Alih et al., 2025) Some studies have suggested that globalization and trade liberalization have made local food less competitive. However, none of these studies have specifically linked tourism development to local food security in tourist areas like Berastagi.

This study aims to explore in-depth the impact of tourism development on community food security in Berastagi, Karo Regency. The specific objectives of this study include: identifying changes in agricultural systems and food consumption due to tourism growth, analyzing the challenges faced by the community in maintaining food security, and formulating alternative strategies, such as local food diversification, to improve economic and ecological sustainability in the region. This title is worthy of research because tourism development in Berastagi has the potential to impact community food availability and access, both through increased income and through the conversion of agricultural land. This research is crucial to ensure that the growth of the tourism sector does not threaten food security but instead supports community well-being in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the author is interested in researching food consumption diversification with the title "The Impact of Tourism on Community Food Security in Berastagi, Karo Regency."

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes in-depth understanding of informants' social experiences in relation to economic growth and food security in Berastagi. Researchers interacted directly with informants to understand how they maintained their economy post-COVID-19 and addressed food security challenges.

This research was conducted in Berastagi City on June 20, 2025, involving four key informants selected through purposive sampling. These informants were Mrs. Adillah Ahmad, a migrant from Binjai who has run a grilled fish business since 2001; Mr. Hariansyah, a chicken vendor at Berastagi Market Center since 2003; Mrs.

Rosmalemta Sinuhaji, a fruit vendor at Berastagi Fruit Market since 1998; and Mrs. Mawar Tarigan, a horticultural farmer since 2004. These four informants were selected because they represented the culinary, staple food, tourism commodity, and agricultural sectors, all relevant to the study of tourism and food security in the Berastagi community. The specific criteria for selecting informants included (Rahmani, 2022): (1) having at least 10 years of business experience to understand changes before and after tourism development, (2) being directly involved in the local food distribution chain, (3) permanently residing in Berastagi, and (4) directly experiencing the impact of fluctuating tourist visits on food prices, demand, and availability.

The data analysis in this study used a qualitative approach through several stages. First, data reduction, which involves filtering and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus. Second, data presentation, which involves organizing data into narratives or thematic categories for easier understanding. Third, data interpretation, which involves providing meaning by linking it to theory and field conditions. Finally, conclusions are drawn that formulate key findings regarding the impact of tourism on the food security of the Berastagi community (Rukminingsih, 2020).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Tourism Impacts Food Security Based on Production**

Tourism in Berastagi significantly impacts the community's food production sector. Most Berastagi residents work in the agricultural sector, particularly horticulture, such as vegetables, fruits, and flowers. However, tourism development has driven the conversion of agricultural land into tourist areas, hotels, and restaurants. Interviews with the community and village officials revealed that the area of converted agricultural land has increased by approximately 6% in the past five years, particularly in the outskirts of Berastagi. Based on data from the Karo Statistics Agency (BPS Karo) (2023–2024), the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) of Karo Regency at constant prices reached IDR 15,966.67 billion, representing a growth of 5.06%. The tourism, agriculture, and transportation sectors are the main contributors to the regional economy. Increases in tourist numbers, such as during the 2024 Eid al-Fitr holiday with 78,000 visitors and the 2023 Tanah Karo Flower and Fruit Festival with 65,000 visitors, demonstrate the significant contribution of the tourism sector to the community's economic activities.

### **Figure 1.** Economic Growth in Various Sectors in Berastagi

Source: BPS Karo 2023/2024

The impact of tourism on food security can be seen in terms of food production. The increase in tourist visits has driven a surge in demand for agricultural products, particularly Berastagi's unique fruits and vegetables. Observations from several farmers indicate that they prefer to sell their crops directly to hotels or tourist restaurants due to the higher selling price.

This aligns with the sentiments expressed by business owners in the field:

*"Tourism makes our crops sell."* (Mawar, 2025).

A broiler chicken trader emphasized that high demand does not always translate into smooth production:

*"During the holiday season, restaurants and hotels often seek out chickens. But often, the stock from farmers is insufficient."* (Hariansyah, 2025).

Meanwhile, a fruit farmer added:

*"Local fruit is indeed highly sought after by tourists."* (Rosmalemta, 2025).

Analysis of these interviews indicates that tourism has indeed opened up significant market opportunities for agricultural products and local products from the Berastagi community. The presence of tourists significantly increases demand for vegetables, fruit, fish, and chicken produced and sold by these businesses. This situation should provide important capital for communities to obtain a more stable income, but in practice, production capacity remains unstable. This creates a new chain of problems. When harvest yields decrease, high demand from the tourism sector cannot be matched by sufficient supply.

These field findings align with research (Sudarmi & Rusdi, 2022), which emphasizes that tourism can indeed encourage consumption of agricultural products, but does not guarantee improved welfare for farmers and small traders. Similar findings were also found by (Hasanah, S. N., Imsar, I., & Tambunan, 2024), which showed that the link between the tourism and agriculture sectors has not yet fully delivered a significant economic impact on rural communities due to farmers' weak bargaining position vis-à-vis tourism businesses.

Meanwhile, (Putri et al., 2021) emphasized that without government policy intervention to strengthen farmer cooperatives, market access, and distribution infrastructure, the relationship between the two sectors can actually widen the income gap for local communities. In other words, tourism, on the one hand, creates a large market, but on the other hand, it also demands the availability of consistent and high-quality supplies. Without the support of farmer protection policies, diversification of income sources, and strengthening of agricultural and distribution infrastructure, local communities will only become providers of labor and raw materials who will not gain maximum benefits from the tourism boom.

### **Tourism Impacts Food Security Based on Prices**

Food prices in Berastagi are heavily influenced by tourism. During the holiday season and religious holidays, demand increases sharply, resulting in price hikes for various commodities such as vegetables, fruit, and rice. According to interviews, the price of red chilies can double from IDR 25,000/kg to IDR 50,000/kg

during peak tourist periods. This situation makes it difficult for local residents to purchase daily necessities.

Furthermore, rising food prices lead to a decline in purchasing power. Based on field data, the purchasing power index dropped from 92 to 78 during the low tourist season. Several informants stated that when food prices soar, they reduce their consumption of nutritious side dishes and prefer simple rice and vegetables. This situation demonstrates a relationship between price dynamics and household food security in tourist areas.

Another impact is seen in the price aspect. The surge in demand during the holiday season drives up food prices significantly. For businesses, this can be profitable, but for local residents without additional income, high prices actually make it difficult to purchase basic necessities. This aligns with statements from business owners in the field:

*"When tourism is busy, fish prices can double. I can't do much but raise the selling price, even though local customers often complain,"* (Abdillah, 2025).

A broiler chicken trader added:

*"When demand for chicken is high, prices at the farm immediately soar. This situation also causes my selling price to consumers to rise, thus reducing the purchasing power of local residents,"* (Hariansyah, 2025).

Farmers, on the other hand, admitted they don't fully benefit from rising market prices:

*"Harvest prices do rise during peak periods, but we farmers only get a small share, even though fertilizer and labor costs are even higher,"* (Mawar, 2025).

Meanwhile, a fruit trader stated:

*"When fruit is expensive, sometimes tourists still buy because they need it, but local residents often cut back on spending. As a result, we traders lose some of our regular customers,"* (Rosmalemta, 2025).

These results demonstrate that tourism is creating local food inflation, the benefits of which are not evenly distributed among the Berastagi community. While rising prices for vegetables, fruit, fish, and chicken provide benefits for some traders and farmers who can meet tourist demand, they also increase the burden on local consumers with limited purchasing power. This phenomenon is particularly evident during the holiday season, when food prices soar, while groups not directly involved in the tourism sector are forced to economize on their daily consumption.

Consequently, seasonal inflation caused by tourism creates economic inequality: groups closely connected to tourism activities tend to benefit, while lower-income communities, primarily consumers, are squeezed. This illustrates a paradoxical dynamic: tourism, which should drive regional economic growth, on the other hand, has the potential to weaken the food security of some households.

Research (Imsar et al., 2023) further supports these findings by confirming that tourism in Karo Regency triggers significant seasonal food price increases. While these price increases present economic opportunities for large traders or entrepreneurs who can control the supply chain, they also place significant pressure on local consumers, whose incomes do not always increase in line with price increases. This finding aligns with research (Hasibuan, M., Nawawi, ZM, & Tambunan, 2024), which shows that the growth of the tourism sector in

mountainous areas impacts fluctuations in staple food prices and reduces the purchasing power of local residents.

A similar finding was expressed by (Ruchiyani et al., 2023), who found that food inflation in tourist areas tends to be driven by unequal distribution of goods and weak price controls at the local level. Thus, tourism-induced food inflation is not solely related to the laws of supply and demand but also reveals structural issues related to the distribution of economic benefits. If this situation is left unchecked without policy intervention, tourism can actually widen the gap between profitable businesses and the lower-income communities, who must bear the impact of high living costs and declining quality of daily food consumption.

### **Tourism Impacts Climate-Based Food Security**

The development of tourism in Berastagi has also impacted the region's environment and climate. The construction of tourist facilities such as hotels, restaurants, and parking lots has reduced green areas and increased average temperatures in some areas. Furthermore, changes in rainfall patterns and soil erosion have occurred in agricultural land adjacent to tourist areas.

Land conversion and reduced vegetation in hilly areas have led to decreased soil fertility and increased risks of landslides and minor flooding. This has a direct impact on agricultural productivity. Climate is a key factor influencing food security in Berastagi. Extreme weather conditions, heavy rainfall, and landslides often hamper food distribution. As a result, both farmers and traders face losses when supplies don't arrive on time or the quality of their goods declines.

This aligns with the statements of business owners in the field:

*"The weather is very unpredictable now. Once, the fish I ordered from Medan arrived in a stale condition because the journey was disrupted by heavy rain and landslides. The quality of my sales has decreased,"* (Abdillah, 2025).

Farmers also face problems:

*"Temperature changes make chickens susceptible to illness. If stocks decrease, supply to traders becomes disrupted, especially if roads are damaged by rain"* (Hariansyah, 2025).

Farmers are also affected:

*"Heavy rains cause many crops to rot in the fields. Sometimes the harvest fails completely, so our income drops and we have difficulty meeting our daily needs"* (Mawar, 2025).

A fruit trader added:

*"If the roads are damaged by landslides, the fruit we sell can rot en route. The losses are enormous, especially during the low tourist season"* (Rosmalemta, 2025).

This analysis shows that climate factors are exacerbating food instability in Berastagi. Unpredictable weather patterns, such as prolonged heavy rain, landslides on distribution routes, or extreme temperatures, directly impact food production and availability. The quality of the vegetables and fruit harvests, which are the community's mainstay, often declines or even fails, while food distribution from other areas is often delayed, impacting the smooth flow of supplies.

As a result, food supplies in local markets are not only increasingly limited but also experience a decline in quality, leading to more volatile prices. In the long term, this situation puts pressure on the purchasing power and consumption of

households that depend on the availability of fresh food to meet daily nutritional needs.

Similarly, research (Adinda et al., 2024) confirms that climate change in the Karo Mountains region has increased the risk of food insecurity, especially for communities dependent on horticultural farming and the distribution of fresh produce. These findings align with findings (Rif'ah, 2022), which show that weather uncertainty and declining land quality in highland areas cause fluctuations in crop yields, directly impacting the economic stability of farming households. Meanwhile, (Chantarungsri et al., 2024) also notes that changing rainfall patterns and extreme temperatures shorten the planting cycle, reduce productivity, and increase production costs for smallholder farmers.

Thus, climate is a significant variable that weakens food security at the household level, requiring more serious adaptation strategies from farmers, traders, and local governments to ensure food security amidst rapid environmental change.

### **Tourism Impacts Food Security Based on Access and Consumption**

The final aspect is access and consumption. When incomes increase during the peak tourist season, people can afford more nutritious food. However, during the low season or a crisis, purchasing power weakens, forcing families to reduce the quality and quantity of food consumed.

This aligns with the statements of business owners in the field:

*"When income decreases, I have to reduce my purchases of fresh side dishes. My children rarely buy snacks. I even had a friend who was a trader who sold jewelry to pay for food and school fees"* (Rosmalemta, 2025).

A grilled fish seller said:

*"When tourism is low, income drops drastically. To make ends meet, we often just eat what we have, even cutting out nutritious side dishes"* (Abdillah, 2025).

A broiler chicken seller added:

*"If chicken prices rise, local buyers decrease. Ultimately, I also suffer losses because sales decrease. In that situation, my income decreases, and automatically family consumption decreases as well"* (Hariansyah, 2025).

Meanwhile, a farmer stated:

*"If the harvest fails, not only do we have nothing to sell, but it's also difficult to buy rice or additional side dishes. Children often only eat what little vegetables are available,"* (Mawar, 2025).

From this description, it's clear that access to food in Berastagi is closely linked to the stability of community income. When tourism is operating normally and demand is high, the incomes of farmers, traders, and culinary entrepreneurs increase, allowing them to purchase a more diverse and nutritious diet. However, when tourism declines due to the low season or external disruptions, people's purchasing power immediately declines. This situation forces households to adjust consumption, usually by reducing the quality and quantity of food. As a result, access to food is not only a matter of physical availability in the market, but also the family's economic ability to purchase it consistently.

This aligns with the theory (Damanik, D., & Ancient, 2020), which emphasizes that economic access is one of the main pillars of food security, where household

purchasing power significantly determines consumption patterns. Research (Pertiwi Tri Bagus, Yenni Samri Juliati Nasution, 2024) shows that low household income in mountainous tourist areas directly impacts the community's ability to meet nutritional food needs. Similarly, (Sufika & Sujatmoko, 2023) found that food price fluctuations due to external factors, such as seasonality and tourism activity, weaken the purchasing power of low-income communities.

Thus, economic fluctuations create unequal access to food, especially for poor communities, necessitating strategies to strengthen economic access and more inclusive social protection.

### **Factors Inhibiting Food Security in Berastagi**

Food security in Berastagi faces a number of interrelated factors, including structural, economic, and environmental constraints. This directly threatens household purchasing power and the quality of food consumption.

Furthermore, environmental and infrastructure factors are also major constraints. All of these factors contribute to instability in food supply, prices, and access, especially for groups lacking adequate economic buffers during crises or the low season.

The following are the views of informants regarding these constraints:

*"The price of staple foods rises easily during the holiday season. I have to think hard about keeping my selling price low, but if the price of fish from suppliers has doubled, it's clearly very difficult to make a profit,"* (Abdillah, 2025).

Similarly, a broiler chicken trader highlighted the issue of feed prices and distribution:

*"The rainy season and damaged roads increase transportation costs, so the price of animal feed also increases. This forces me to raise the price of chicken to consumers, which makes local buyers complain,"* (Hariansyah, 2025).

From the farmers' perspective, they reiterate the high cost of production:

*"Our main problem is the increasing cost of fertilizer and pesticides, but the middlemen only increase the selling price of our harvests slightly. So, whether there are many tourists or not, we farmers are still barely making ends meet,"* (Mawar, 2025).

Meanwhile, fruit farmers focus on declining purchasing power and a lack of stable income:

*"If our merchandise doesn't sell, there's no money coming in. That's the hardest part. Buying things our children need, like milk and nutritious side dishes, becomes difficult. We have to save money, sometimes taking out loans, because our income is completely dependent on the season,"* (Rosmalemta, 2025).

Food security in Berastagi faces challenges stemming from the complex interaction of economic, structural, and environmental dynamics, exacerbated by tourism activity. The following are the main inhibiting factors:

#### **1. Supply Chain Structures That Disadvantage Smallholder Farmers**

Although food prices in the market often spike dramatically, especially during the holiday season, these benefits are not shared equally by smallholder

farmers. Farmers are forced to sell their crops at prices significantly lower than the final market price. As a result, market price increases driven by tourist demand only enrich middlemen, while farmers' profit margins remain small, out of proportion to the ever-increasing production costs (fertilizer, labor).

2. **Seasonal Food Inflation and Weakening Purchasing Power of Local Consumers**  
High price fluctuations are a direct result of the surge in tourist demand. During the peak season, prices of strategic commodities such as chilies, vegetables, fruit, fish, and chicken can double. This price increase triggers local food inflation, severely burdening Berastagi residents who are not directly involved in the tourism sector or have a fixed income. Although traders profit, local consumers' purchasing power declines dramatically. This situation forces low-income households to reduce their consumption of nutritious side dishes, threatening the nutritional quality and overall health of their families.
3. **Household Economic Instability Due to Dependence on Tourism**  
Access to nutritious food is largely determined by the stability of household income. People who work as small traders or culinary businesses experience extreme income fluctuations: abundant during the peak season and very little during the low season. This heavy dependence on the tourism cycle makes them extremely economically vulnerable. When a crisis or prolonged low season occurs, incomes plummet, forcing families to drastically reduce the quality and quantity of food consumption, even to the point of selling assets or going into debt to meet daily food needs.
4. **Environmental and Infrastructure Disruptions Due to Climate Change**  
Environmental factors, exacerbated by land conversion for tourism, hamper production and distribution. Extreme weather patterns (heavy rainfall, temperature changes), exacerbated by reduced vegetation in tourist areas, lead to decreased soil fertility, increased risk of erosion, and even crop failure for farmers. Furthermore, extreme weather conditions often trigger landslides that damage major road infrastructure. This road damage directly hampers food distribution, causing delays in supplies from Medan and other areas, reducing the quality of goods (e.g., rotten fish), and ultimately increasing logistics costs for traders and consumers.

## CONCLUSION

Tourism in Berastagi, Karo Regency, has a significant impact on community food security. The development of the tourism sector has increased demand for local food products such as vegetables, fruit, fish, and chicken, creating economic opportunities for farmers and traders. However, tourism also impacts the food security system through changes in production, prices, climate, and food access and consumption. Agricultural land conversion, fluctuating food prices, production disruptions due to climate change, and household income instability make the food security of communities, particularly low-income groups, vulnerable. This situation demonstrates that tourism's impact on food security is dual: it can stimulate economic activity while simultaneously putting pressure on local food sustainability.

Therefore, tourism management that prioritizes sustainability and economic equity is necessary to prevent the food security of the Berastagi community.

Strengthening the local agricultural sector, protecting productive land, stabilizing food prices, and increasing the community's capacity to adapt to climate change are crucial steps to maintain a balance between tourism and food security. Furthermore, efforts to strengthen economic access and social protection for vulnerable households are necessary to ensure that all levels of society can benefit more equitably from tourism. With an integrated approach, tourism in Berastagi is expected to develop sustainably while supporting food security and the well-being of local communities.

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