



The Journal Gastronomy Tourism

Journal homepage:

<https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/gastur/index>



The Culinary Icons of Mekar Laksana Tourism Village : A Main Attraction for Gastronomy Tourism

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ABSTRAK

Culinary icons are a key factor in creating unique offerings that enhance the competitiveness of tourism attractions at various destinations. This is especially relevant in rural tourism, where culinary icon can serve as a major draw for gastronomic tourism, thereby increasing the number of tourists and visitors to these areas. Despite their importance, research on the uniqueness of culinary icons—especially in Mekar Laksana Tourism Village, Bandung Regency—remains limited. This study aims to identify and explore local culinary icons that have the potential to attract gastronomic tourists to Mekar Laksana. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with key informants involved in the development of the Mekar Laksana tourism village. The findings reveal that *Balado Entog* and *Kopi Wanoja* are significant culinary icons with great potential to become attractions for gastronomic tourism in the Mekar Laksana tourism village. These insights can serve as a valuable reference for developing gastronomic tourism as part of the broader tourism village development program in Indonesia.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received Dec 2024

First Revised May 2025

Accepted June 2025

First Available online June 2025

Publication Date June 2025

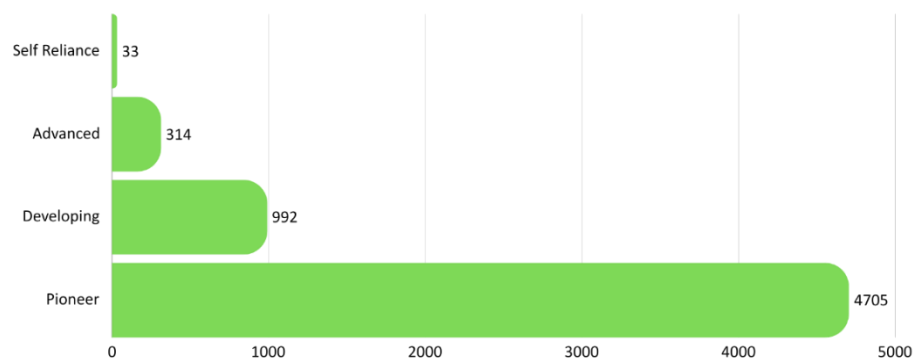
Keyword:

Gastronomy Tourism; Rural
Tourism; Mekar Laksana;
Culinary Icon

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism refers to a form of tourism that enables visitors to engage in rural activities. This includes outdoor experiences, participation in livestock and agricultural practices, and an exploration of the culture of village communities (Tourism, 2021). The concept of rural tourism emerged as a response to the need to develop tourism potential in rural areas, emphasizing the unique culture and natural beauty of these communities. The idea of rural tourism began gaining traction in the early 20th century as tourist preferences shifted away from mass tourism towards more authentic and special experiences (Rosalina et al., 2021). Given its potential to stimulate local economies and create jobs, rural tourism has been widely embraced around the world and has become a means of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. In Indonesia, the rural tourism concept has been developed into a program called "Tourism Villages (*Desa Wisata*)," based on Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages. This was further supported by the Regulation of the Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia No. 29 of 2015, which focuses on "Rural-Based Tourism Development." (Arida, 2017) The Regulation of the Minister of Tourism No. 6/2024 highlights strategic plans for developing rural tourism, with an emphasis on creating tourist destinations, empowering communities, and ensuring sustainability. As a result, Tourism Villages have become the most popular tourism program in Indonesia over the past five years.

To promote the Tourism Village concept, the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia has established a development program focused on tourism villages. This program includes various training, mentoring, and assessment initiatives aimed at enhancing the standardization of rural tourism activities throughout Indonesia (Rahayu et al., 2023). The Ministry classifies tourism villages into four categories: (1) Pioneer Villages, (2) Developing Villages, (3) Advanced Villages, and (4) Self-Reliance Villages. These classifications are based on specific criteria, including the operational and institutional management capabilities of village administrators, the ability to develop tourism products, and the capacity to manage the economic impacts of tourism activities (Setiawan et al., 2022). Between 2016 to December 2023, a total of 6,004 out of 81,616 villages in Indonesia have participated in the tourism village program across the aforementioned categories.



Figures 1. Number of Tourist Villages in Indonesia by Category

Source : www.jadesta.id ; accessed at 7 October 2024 ; 11:34 AM

All regional governments in Indonesia are currently working to optimize the role of Tourism Villages as a means of improving the local economy. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism, the concept of Tourism Villages is being implemented in various provinces across the country. The table below provides the number of villages

in each province that have registered for and adapted the Tourism Village program.

Table 1. Distribution of Tourism Villages in Indonesia

No.	Provincial Name	No Of Tourism Villages	No	Provincial Name	No Of Tourism Villages
1	East Java	603	20	Bangka Belitung	98
2	West Sumatra	561	21	West Borneo	93
3	South Sulawesi	537	22	Bengkulu	86
4	Central Java	514	23	Banten	86
5	West Java	470	24	West Celebes	81
6	North Sumatra	336	25	Jambi	80
7	West Nusa Tenggara	275	26	Central Borneo	72
8	South East Celebes	234	27	Papua	69
9	Yogyakarta	198	28	South Borneo	62
10	Bali	168	29	Gorontalo	47
11	Lampung	140	30	Riau Islands	43
12	Aceh	132	31	North Borneo	40
13	East Nusa Tenggara	132	32	North Mollucas	39
14	North Celebes	127	33	South West Papua	36
15	South Sumatera	123	34	West Papua	34
16	East Borneo	122	35	Jakarta	32
17	Mollucas	121	36	Papua Pegunungan	12
18	Riau	121	37	Central Papua	1
19	Central Celebes	118	38	South Papua	1

Source : www.jadesta.id, accessed at 7 October 2024 : 13:34 PM

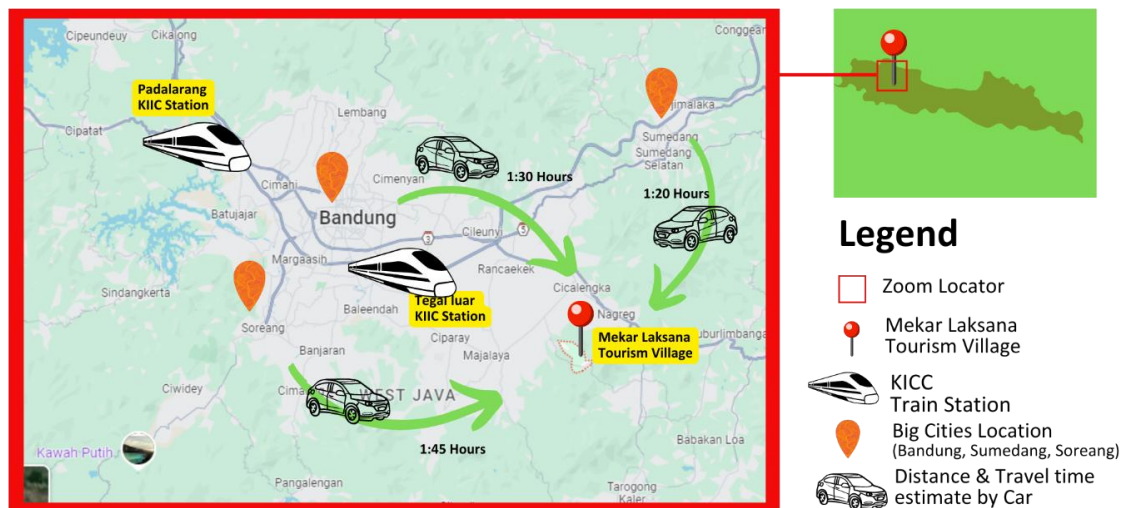
West Java, the province with the largest population in Indonesia, ranks fifth in terms of the number of tourist villages, boasting a total of 470 villages. The classification of tourist villages in West Java includes 383 Pioneer tourism villages, 68 Developing tourism villages, 18 Advanced tourism villages, and 1 Self-Reliant tourism village. One notable example is the Mekar Laksana Tourism Village in Bandung Regency, which is recognized as a Pioneer Tourism Village. Since 2022, the Mekar Laksana Village Tourism Mobilization Group (Kompepar), with the support of the Village Government, has been working to optimize the village's resources to enhance its competitiveness as a tourist destination. Mekar Laksana is home to Pangradinan Hill, often referred to as the "Merbabu of West Java," which has been developed as a special-interest tourist attraction. Additionally, the village features coffee plantation areas, rice fields, community livestock activities, and a variety of local culinary delights. Among these are *Balado Entog*, a dish made from processed poultry with a special spice mixture, and *Wanoja Coffee*, a type of Robusta and Arabica coffee cultivated by women farmers. Despite being declared a Tourism Village, the number of tourists visiting Mekar Laksana has not grown significantly compared to other tourist villages in Bandung Regency. According to data from the Bandung Regency Tourism Office, the visitor numbers have shown the following trends:

Tabel 2. Comparison of Tourism Village Visit

Tourism Villages	2022 Visitor	2023 Visitor
Mekar Laksana	192	228
Lebak Muncang	566	933
Alam Endah	1713	2818

Source : Bandung Regency Tourism Office Official Data 2022

When compared to two other tourist villages in Bandung Regency, the increase in tourist visits to Mekar Laksana Village is not as significant as that seen in the other villages. Based on field observations, the author concludes that the tourism products offered in Mekar Laksana Tourism Village are generally similar to those available in other locations, primarily focusing on natural beauty and countryside activities. This similarity may weaken the competitiveness of Mekar Laksana compared to other tourism villages, especially those established prior to Mekar Laksana. However, Mekar Laksana does benefit from geographical advantages, as its location is more accessible than that of larger cities in West Java, such as Bandung, Garut, and Sumedang.



Figures 2. Location and Distance to Mekar Laksana Tourism Village

Additionally, the author recognizes the potential for unique local dishes that can be found in the Mekar Laksana Tourist Village. This research was conducted to determine whether Mekar Laksana Village has the potential to develop local dishes that could attract gastronomic tourism. The results of this study are intended to serve as a reference for the Mekar Laksana Tourism Village to enhance its competitiveness. Additionally, it may provide guidance for other Tourism Villages looking to capitalize on the potential of local dishes as an attraction for gastronomic tourism.

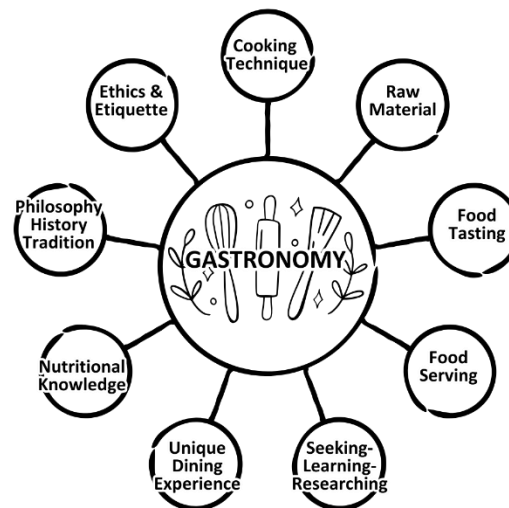
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of gastronomic tourism as an attraction in rural villages offers a unique perspective compared to other tourist destinations. Two key factors that are deeply intertwined with rural tourism are community involvement and sustainable practices. To better understand how gastronomic tourism can be implemented within rural tourism activities, we can explore the following literature review:

2.1. Gastronomy Tourism Concept

Gastronomy is a prominent term in French culture that emerged in the early 18th century, believed to have originated from the ancient Greek term *gastronomia*. In this context, *gastro* means stomach, while *nomos* refers to knowledge or rules. Therefore, gastronomy can be interpreted as the knowledge or rules concerning cooking methods that satisfy the stomach (Soeroso & Turgarini, 2020). In French culture, gastronomy emphasizes the human interpretation and experience involved in understanding dishes (Gulisova, 2022). The research illustrates that gastronomy represents a comprehensive cycle related to human culture as a whole, encompassing history, philosophy, ethics, and the preparation of dishes. Today, gastronomy extends beyond

just food; it has become a crucial factor influencing tourists' decisions regarding their travel destinations (Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). Over time, gastronomy has evolved into a tool that enhances the image of tourist destinations (Kodaş & Özel, 2023). This is because gastronomy explores the experiential dimensions that stem from dishes reflecting a society's culture. The gastronomic dimension can be visually represented in the following graphic:



Figures 3. Circle of Gastronomy Dimension

Source : Soeroso & Turgarini, 2020

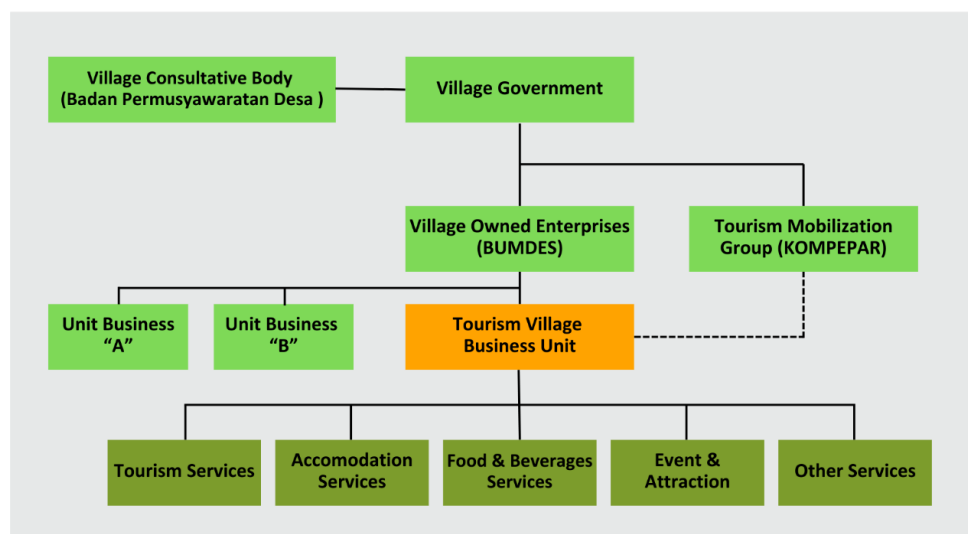
Currently widely used term in the food and beverage industry that encompasses various activities related to food preparation and presentation. From fine dining experiences to molecular gastronomy, it represents a blend of art and knowledge, showcasing dishes as a reflection of cultural heritage (Meneguel et al., 2019). Gastronomy promotes a new circular model that intersects food, cuisine, and principles of sustainability. The unique experiences offered through gastronomy encourage its development as a tourism product (Sio et al., 2024). According to Soeroso's research, gastronomic tourism involves exploring the human experience of food, including an appreciation of geography, space, philosophy, and our relationship with the universe. This niche form of tourism has seen rapid growth over the past two decades, as evidenced by bibliographic research highlighting significant developments in various parts of the world (Celebi et al., 2020). With its numerous advantages, gastronomic tourism has the potential to support the development of tourist villages and enhance the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

2.2. Rural Tourism and the Implementation of Tourism Village program in Indonesia

The concept of rural tourism began to emerge in the early 20th century, driven by factors such as urban development, urbanization, and globalization (Tang, 2017). Growth in cities and economic improvements in urban areas have created new markets, making rural areas attractive to urban communities seeking unique experiences. In Indonesia, rural tourism has evolved into the concept of "Tourism Villages," which is regulated by Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning tourism. This legislation focuses on four key development pillars: Industry, Destinations, Marketing, and Institutions (Setiawan et al., 2022). It is important to differentiate between rural

tourism and village tourism destinations. Rural tourism refers to tourism activities in village areas that are managed by village-owned organizations, utilizing local resources and involving the community. In contrast, a village tourism destination is typically an activity in a rural area that is operated by the private sector and does not involve broader community participation (Rakhman LF & Rochman P, 2023).

The Tourism Village Program promotes active community participation and aims for equitable regional development while prioritizing the preservation of village potential (Wiweka et al., 2021). The management of this program is governed by the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No. 84 of 2015, which outlines the organizational structure and work procedures of village governments, as well as Government Regulation No. 11 of 2021, which pertains to village-owned business entities (Maulia & Setiyono, 2023). A study by Ketut Swabawa illustrates the institutional model of tourist villages and their relationship with other village officials through a conceptual framework as follow:



Figures 4. Tourism Village (Desa Wisata) Management Model

The concept of a Tourism Village aims to maximize the potential of rural areas and enhance the welfare of their communities. With effective governance, tourism villages can serve as a foundation for sustainable community businesses (Hall et al., 2005). This initiative promotes the establishment of community business nodes, which positively contribute to a better and more sustainable quality of life for village residents. Tourism villages can leverage their unique characteristics to gain better bargaining power and establish an equitable relationship with urban areas. Both villages and cities can benefit from a mutually advantageous symbiosis (Putra et al., 2023). Community empowerment plays a crucial role in the development of the Tourism Village concept. Research by Aminuddin has shown that Tourism Villages significantly improve the local economy, as well as the education and health sectors. Overall, Tourism Villages have proven to be an effective strategy for fostering development in rural areas (Aminuddin et al., 2022).

2.3. Creating the Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is an approach aimed at managing the negative impacts of the tourism industry (Lipman, 2017). This concept began receiving widespread attention in the 1980s. A key milestone in its development occurred in 1987 with the release of the "Our Common Future" report by the World Commission on Environment and

Development (WCED). This report emphasized the importance of meeting present development needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In 1995, the UN World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO) convened the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Lanzarote, Spain. This event prompted various organizations, governments, and stakeholders to adopt principles of sustainability to mitigate negative impacts and enhance the social, economic, and environmental benefits of tourism.

In his 1987 book *The Concept of Sustainable Economic Development*, Edward B. Barbier discusses the goals of sustainable development, emphasizing the importance of integrating economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection. Barbier outlines that sustainable development should aim to:

- a. Maintain Environmental Capacity: development should occur without diminishing the environment's ability to support life in the future. This entails managing natural resources wisely and preventing ecosystem damage that could jeopardize the sustainability of future resources.
- b. Guarantee Social Justice: development must ensure a fair distribution of benefits and burdens among various groups in society.
- c. Improve Economic Welfare: development should enhance the standard of living and overall economic well-being of the community (Barbier, 1987).

The concept of sustainable tourism aims to provide tourism experiences that meet the needs and desires of travelers while also preserving the environmental integrity and sustainability of the destinations they visit. Sustainable tourism always emphasizes the importance of environmental protection, which includes resource management, conservation efforts, and community empowerment (Budeanu et al., 2016). By understanding gastronomic tourism, tourist villages, and the principles of sustainable tourism, we can better grasp how to manage gastronomic tourism in a way that enhances the well-being of local communities.

3. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interviews to explore which local dishes could serve as icons for the development of gastronomic tourism in Mekar Laksana Village.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with six key informants, including tourism practitioners (such as tourism guides and members of tour and travel agencies) and stakeholders from the tourism village (including members of Pokdarwis, the Mekar Laksana Village Head, and representatives from the Bandung Regency Culture and Tourism Office). Each interview session lasted approximately 120 minutes. The informants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) possessing relevant knowledge and data related to tourism; (2) being able to provide insights into the gastronomic ecosystem within Mekar Laksana Tourism Village; and (3) being involved, either directly or indirectly, in the activities related to the development of the tourism village.

Secondary data were collected through a literature review of key documents, including the Mekar Laksana Village Medium Term Development Plan Document (RJPMDes), as well as work programs and development planning documents for the Mekar Laksana Tourism Village. The credibility of the data was assessed using triangulation techniques to ensure its validity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *Balado Entog* and *Kopi Wanoja*, Featured Dishes from Mekar Laksana Tourism Village

The Muscovy duck (known as *entog* in Sundanese and *itik serati* in Indonesian) is a bird species native to the Americas that belongs to the duck family. This species is raised for its meat and eggs. It is believed that Muscovy ducks were introduced to Indonesia by Spanish explorers who arrived in the archipelago during the 15th century (Lase & Lestari, 2020). According to the Negara Kertagama manuscript, ducks were a significant source of food served at banquets for kings and their guests during that era (Anwar, 2016; Pigeaud, 1960). In Mekar Laksana Village, Muscovy ducks are kept as pets, providing a source of protein for the community. Additionally, they play a crucial role in recycling organic waste generated in the area. Since the 1980s, the village government has promoted a poultry farming program that highlights the value of ducks and chickens as superior agricultural commodities. This initiative has contributed to an increase in the local population of these birds in Mekar Laksana Village.



Figures 5. Balado Entog, Local Dishes

Balado Entog is a traditional dish that has been a staple in Mekar Laksana Village for many years. According to the village head, Mr. Jajang Suryadi:

"As far as I remember, since I was little, Balado Entog, or stir-fried duck, has been a typical dish of this village. However, in the past, this dish was only served on special occasions, such as Mauludan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, or major holidays like Indonesian Independence Day." (Mr Jajang Suryadi – Village Head)

Balado Entog is exclusively produced in Mekar Laksana Village, as there are numerous *entog* farms in the area. As stated by Gunawan from Kompepar Mekar Laksana:

"This Entog is a typical bird from Mekar Laksana. If you enjoy entog, you should definitely visit this village. Ever since the dry land of this village was converted into chili plantations, the residents have loved making spicy Balado Entog." (Mr Gunawan – Kompepar)

The uniqueness of *Balado Entog* has become a distinct identity for Mekar Laksana Village. Entog meat is known for its tender and dense texture, as well as its savory

aroma, which surpasses that of duck meat. Many chefs prefer this meat for spiced dishes due to its unique qualities and flavor (Chang et al., 2023). Research conducted by Damayanti (2006) indicates that entog meat contains a higher protein content compared to chicken or *manalung* duck, along with lower fat content. Additionally, it boasts higher levels of iron and vitamins than chicken, which are essential for forming red blood cells and supporting various proteins and enzymes in the body (Widianingrum et al., 2022). This exceptional quality and uniqueness can position Balado Entog, from Mekar Laksana Village, as a local icon in gastronomic tourism. This aligns with the following statement:

"This food is unique, and I rarely find it in Bandung. It's interesting because it has many benefits and should be featured more often." (Koko Koswara - GPI)

Mekar Laksana Village, aside from its Entog product, also boasts a range of superior coffee plants. The highland areas of Mekar, Ibun, and Kamojang have been coffee cultivation sites since the Dutch colonial period (Lasmiyati, 2015). One notable product from Mekar Laksana Village is *Wanoja* brand coffee. This coffee, made from both robusta and arabica beans, not only offers a unique taste and quality but also tells the story of women's empowerment through community initiatives centered around coffee cultivation and processing. *Wanoja* is a Sundanese term meaning "woman." *Wanoja* Coffee is a business run by women, led by Mrs. Etti Sumiati since 2012. The distinct flavor and consistency of *Wanoja* coffee have allowed it to penetrate the European market, thus improving the economic situation for women in the village (Natassya, 2023). *Wanoja* Coffee stands out not only for its taste but also for its strong narrative on empowerment, which can foster emotional connections for tourists engaging with these empowerment activities. This narrative plays a crucial role in the development of the tourist village.



Figures 6. Wanoja Coffee of Mekar Laksana

To develop gastronomic tourism, we can explore the local dishes of Mekar Laksana Tourism Village through the following table:

Table 3. Description of Gastronomic Dimensions, Mekar Laksana Cuisine Products

No	Gastronomic Dimensions	Balado Entog	Kopi Wanoja
1	Cooking Technique	There is a unique traditional cooking technique that involves the use of firewood. However, most people currently cook using modern equipment and methods.	Here are some traditional coffee brewing techniques. Modern coffee preparation methods are also available.
	Raw Materials	Ninety-five percent of the raw materials are sourced from the village itself. The primary raw material for Muscovy ducks is farmed in the village area.	All coffee beans are also grown within the village. The processing of coffee occurs in the village as well.
	Food Tasting	The flavor is often spicy and rich in spices	Arabica coffee has a lighter taste with low acidity.
	Food Serving	There is currently no special presentation available	There is currently no special presentation available
	Seeking-learning-researching – writing	Each generation engages in research and development of local dishes. There are few studies that have examined this topic	Local communities have developed various methods for coffee harvesting and the post-harvest processes.
2	Unique Dining Experience	The Tourism Mobilization Group (KOMPEPAR) created a unique outdoor dining area that evokes a typical village atmosphere.	There is a designated area for drying, roasting, and grinding coffee beans. Local people provide information about the process of preparing dishes.
	Nutritional Knowledge	There is local knowledge about the health benefits of this dish, but modern understanding of nutrition is still lacking.	Local and modern knowledge about nutrition is available
	Philosophy, history, tradition	While local and modern knowledge about nutrition is available, the philosophy surrounding the product has not been thoroughly explored. There are historical records that link various foods to community traditions	The presence of coffee in this area is connected to the history of colonization by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Additionally, there are extensive historical records related to coffee and its cultural significance
	Ethics & Etiquette	There are several ethics and etiquette related to consuming dishes.	However, there are no specific ethics and etiquette in the coffee consumption process

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that both *Balado Entog* and *Wanoja Coffee* meet most of the criteria for promoting gastronomic tourism in the area. This indicates that these two dishes have the potential to serve as iconic attractions for gastronomic tourism.

4.2. Gastronomic Attraction of Mekar Laksana Tourism Village

Goeldner & Richie (2020), in their book "Tourism, Practices, Philosophies," describe several key requirements for a successful gastronomic tourism product. These requirements include: (1) uniqueness and authenticity that set the destination apart, (2) high-quality dishes made from local ingredients, (3) an educational experience, (4) visual appeal, and (5) active involvement from the local community. Mekar Laksana Tourism Village's gastronomic offerings seem to meet most of these criteria. This is supported by the statement from Mr. Koko Koswara of the Indonesian Tourism Association:

"This Balado Entog is very unique and delicious; it could become an icon of this village, as it is made from local raw materials and recipes handed down from generation to generation."

Residents of the surrounding villages have recognized the unique gastronomic advantages of Mekar Laksana Village. However, there is still a need to improve promotion and the attractiveness of the products to generate wider interest among tourists. A tour guide who has brought several visitors to Mekar Laksana Village shared the following insight:

"This delicious Balado Entog and coffee need to be packaged more simply and attractively so they can serve as food treats for visiting tourists." (Hedi - Tour Guide)

The gastronomic products offered by Mekar Laksana Tourism Village are sourced from the local environment, which enhances the appeal of the destination for gastronomic tourism. Tourists can engage with the entire food production cycle, from the cultivation of raw materials to livestock raising and food preparation done by the local community. Hedi, the tour guide, elaborated:

"At Mekar Laksana, before tasting Balado Entog, I often take tourists to see the Entog farm and spice gardens. After that, we cook together and enjoy the dishes, which is a lot of fun for the tourists." (Hedi - Tour Guide)

4.3. Supporting Aspects of Mekar Laksana Gastronomic Tourism Attraction

In order to develop effective gastronomic tourism attractions, tourist villages must focus on several key supporting aspects. First, they need to establish appropriate gastronomic serving infrastructure that ensures accessibility and adequate facilities for tourists. This infrastructure development should go hand in hand with efforts to improve product quality and enhance service standards (Wiweka et al., 2021). Additionally, engaging in good promotional activities and involving local communities will support sustainable gastronomic tourism development. It is important to recognize that gastronomic tourism encompasses not only the food itself but also the cultural experiences derived from the history and socio-anthropological aspects of the community (Gulisova, 2022; Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024). This value should be communicated to all local residents so they can share it with tourists. Developing education and knowledge about tourism among community members is crucial, as it fosters awareness that they play a vital role as the main "subjects" in tourism

development. In this regard, the following perspective was shared:

"People often forget that typical food needs to be more than just delicious; it also requires good presentation and an interesting story, as these elements provide an experience for tourists." (Dedi - Tour Guide)

Villagers often seek inspiration from urban areas, leading to the development of city-style gastronomic tourism. However, they often overlook that tourists are actually searching for "authenticity," which is different from their usual experiences. To enhance tourism development, there is a need for improvement in standardization. The government's role in providing guidance and support on this matter is crucial.

"The Bandung Regency Government continues to offer guidance and training for the development of tourist villages. This program has become an annual initiative that is consistently provided." (Mrs. Rini, Head of Tourism for Bandung Regency)

The supporting aspects of Mekar Laksana Village still require further enhancement. This should be the primary focus for the managers of the Tourism Village, who must strive for improvements through various efforts, including fostering collaboration among different Tourism Village stakeholders.

5. CONCLUSION

Local dishes such as Balado Entog and Wanoja Coffee have significant potential to become major attractions for gastronomic tourism in the Mekar Laksana Tourism Village, located in Bandung Regency. These dishes reflect the community's activity cycle in the Mekar Laksana tourism village, which includes: (1) the processing of local raw materials, (2) the historical narratives and philosophy behind each dish, (3) the techniques used in their preparation, and (4) the empowerment of the local community.

Both dishes possess high authenticity and engaging historical stories that are appealing to tourists. These findings suggest that they can serve as captivating icons for developing gastronomic tourism in the Mekar Laksana Tourism Village.

To enhance gastronomic tourism in Mekar Laksana, improvements in product innovation, promotional activities, and supporting infrastructure are essential. Further research on the packaging and promotion of gastronomic tourism, as well as the development of related amenities, is crucial for creating sustainable gastronomic tourism activities in the village.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our gratitude to the Bank Indonesia West Java Regional Office for organizing the West Java Tourism Talk program. This initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness of tourism villages in West Java and promote increased economic activity in rural areas through the Tourism Village program. Additionally, we would like to extend our appreciation to the District Tourism Office of Bandung, the government of Mekar Laksana Village, and the Tourism Mobilization Group - Mekar Laksana for their valuable contributions and support in preparing this research.

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