

BUSINESS ADAPTATION STRATEGIES POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC : A STUDY OF THE TOURISM SECTOR IN ACEH

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the global tourism sector, and Aceh—once on a positive growth trajectory—was no exception, with tourist arrivals plummeting by over 70% in 2020, resulting in revenue losses, layoffs, and business closures. This study examines the adaptation strategies employed by Aceh's tourism stakeholders in the post-pandemic period using a qualitative descriptive approach through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving 15 business owners from hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operators, with thematic analysis applied to identify patterns and effective practices. The findings reveal four key strategies: digital transformation via online marketing, booking platforms, and virtual tours; service diversification through health and wellness tourism packages; stakeholder collaboration to promote Aceh as a safe destination and enforce health protocols; and sustainable tourism initiatives, including eco-friendly practices and community engagement. These measures enhanced customer engagement, strengthened destination branding, and facilitated gradual recovery, although challenges such as limited capital, changing traveler behavior, and stringent regulations persist, particularly for small operators. The study contributes to the literature on business adaptation in tourism and offers practical recommendations for industry actors, policymakers, and local communities, emphasizing innovation, collaboration, and sustainability as essential pillars of resilience while underscoring the need for continued support to ensure long-term viability in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: business adaptation, Aceh tourism, post-COVID-19 pandemic, digital transformation, sustainability

Abstrak: Pandemi COVID-19 telah mengganggu sektor pariwisata global secara signifikan, dan Aceh—yang sebelumnya berada pada tren pertumbuhan positif—tidak terkecuali, dengan kunjungan wisatawan menurun lebih dari 70% pada tahun 2020 sehingga memicu penurunan pendapatan, pemutusan hubungan kerja, dan penutupan usaha. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi adaptasi yang diterapkan pelaku pariwisata di Aceh pada periode pascapandemi dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis dokumen terhadap 15 pemilik usaha hotel, restoran, biro perjalanan, dan operator tur, serta menganalisis data menggunakan teknik analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan praktik yang efektif. Temuan menunjukkan empat strategi utama, yaitu transformasi digital melalui pemasaran daring, platform pemesanan, dan tur virtual; diversifikasi layanan melalui paket wisata kesehatan dan kebugaran; kolaborasi pemangku kepentingan untuk mempromosikan Aceh sebagai destinasi aman dan menerapkan protokol kesehatan; serta inisiatif pariwisata berkelanjutan yang mencakup praktik ramah lingkungan dan keterlibatan komunitas. Strategi ini meningkatkan keterlibatan pelanggan, memperkuat citra destinasi, dan mendukung pemulihan bertahap, meskipun tantangan seperti keterbatasan modal, perubahan perilaku wisatawan, dan regulasi ketat tetap ada, khususnya bagi pelaku usaha skala kecil. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap literatur adaptasi bisnis di sektor pariwisata serta menawarkan rekomendasi praktis bagi pelaku industri, pembuat kebijakan, dan komunitas lokal, dengan menegaskan bahwa inovasi, kolaborasi, dan keberlanjutan merupakan pilar penting ketahanan pariwisata Aceh pascapandemi, sekaligus menekankan perlunya dukungan berkelanjutan untuk memastikan keberlangsungan jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: adaptasi bisnis, pariwisata Aceh, pascapandemi COVID-19, transformasi digital, keberlanjutan

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and unprecedented impact on the global tourism sector, resulting in sharp declines in international travel, hotel occupancy rates, and tourism revenues worldwide. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals dropped by 74% in 2020 compared to the previous year, causing a loss of approximately \$1.3 trillion in export revenues (UNWTO, 2021)¹. This downturn has affected not only large tourism-dependent economies but has also hit smaller and emerging destinations particularly hard. Aceh, a province in Indonesia renowned for its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and historical significance, was no exception.

Before the pandemic, Aceh's tourism industry was on a growth trajectory, benefiting from a steady increase in both domestic and international visitors. However, as global travel restrictions took hold, the number of tourist arrivals plummeted by more than 60% at the height of the crisis (Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh, 2021)². The repercussions for local businesses—many of which are heavily reliant on tourism—were immediate and severe, leading to widespread revenue losses, layoffs, and in some cases, permanent closures. This economic disruption was further compounded by Aceh's historical vulnerability to natural disasters and conflict, creating a complex set of challenges for recovery (Beirman, 2021)³.

Against this backdrop, the need for innovative and context-specific business adaptation strategies became urgent. The tourism sector globally has embraced various measures to survive and recover from the pandemic's shocks, ranging from service diversification and digital transformation to implementing stringent health and safety protocols (Sigala, 2020)⁴. In Aceh, stakeholders have had to adapt quickly, often experimenting with new market segments, leveraging social media for promotion, and forming collaborative networks to share resources and knowledge (Mauliansyah, H., & Anam, B. S. 2024)⁵. Understanding these adaptive strategies is essential for shaping a sustainable recovery and ensuring that tourism can once again serve as a driver of local economic development.

This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the strategies employed by tourism businesses in Aceh to navigate the post-pandemic landscape. By engaging directly with tourism stakeholders—including hotel owners, tour operators, and local artisans—through semi-structured interviews, the research captures a nuanced picture of how local actors have responded to adversity. The qualitative approach enables a deep exploration of the lived experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes behind these adaptive measures, providing insights that purely quantitative studies might overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2018)⁶.

Fifteen interviews were conducted to gather diverse perspectives, and thematic analysis was used to identify common patterns and effective practices. The findings not only highlight the resilience and ingenuity demonstrated within the sector but also point to broader lessons that may be applied in other destinations facing similar crises. Ultimately, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on tourism crisis recovery by offering context-specific recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, and local entrepreneurs, with the goal of

¹ United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on international tourism. <https://www.unwto.org>

² Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh. (2021). Statistik pariwisata Aceh 2021. Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh.

³ Beirman, D. (2021). Tourism crises and destination recovery. CABI.

⁴ Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for advancing and resetting industry and research. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 312–321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.015>

⁵ Mauliansyah, H., & Anam, B. S. (2024). Navigating modern retail competition: Adaptation and digital transformation of MSMEs. *Sumber Informasi Manajemen Bisnis dan Akuntansi (SIMBAN)*, 1(2), 44-49.

⁶ Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

fostering a tourism industry in Aceh that is both resilient and adaptive in the face of future uncertainties.

Literature Review

Business adaptation refers to the strategies and processes organizations employ to adjust to shifts in their operating environment, a capability that becomes especially critical during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This global health emergency disrupted virtually every sector, with tourism among the most severely impacted. As Giones and Brem (2020)⁷ emphasize, effective adaptation enables firms not only to survive but also to emerge stronger, while Baker, Bloom, and Davis (2020)⁸ highlight how agility in decision-making and strategic planning is essential in times of heightened uncertainty. In the tourism sector, adaptation is not merely about operational adjustments; it is about building resilience, fostering innovation, and maintaining competitiveness in a transformed marketplace.

Several theoretical perspectives provide insight into how businesses navigate crises. The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991)⁹ underscores the strategic value of leveraging unique resources—such as human capital, technological capabilities, and local partnerships—to sustain performance. Complementing this, the Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece, 2007)¹⁰ emphasizes a firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure resources in rapidly changing environments. In the post-pandemic tourism context, these capabilities are critical, as businesses must align with evolving consumer preferences, heightened safety expectations, and shifts in travel behavior. Similar conclusions are drawn by Zahra, Sapienza, and Davidsson (2006)¹¹, who argue that entrepreneurial responsiveness and innovation speed are decisive for survival in volatile markets.

Prior to the pandemic, Aceh's tourism sector was on a promising trajectory, fueled by its rich cultural heritage, diverse ecosystems, and distinctive attractions such as Sabang's beaches, the Tsunami Museum, and Leuser National Park. In 2019 alone, the province welcomed over 1.2 million visitors, supported by government initiatives to promote Aceh as a halal tourism destination catering to Muslim travelers (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2020)¹². However, the pandemic abruptly halted this momentum. According to the Aceh Tourism Office, visitor numbers declined by over 80% in 2020, triggering widespread business closures, job losses, and a sharp economic downturn. This mirrors global trends noted by the World Tourism Organization (2021)¹³, which observed that COVID-19 has fundamentally reshaped travel behavior, intensifying the need for health protocols and digital engagement in tourism.

Research on tourism adaptation during crises offers valuable lessons for Aceh's recovery. Ritchie and Jiang (2019)¹⁴ found that effective crisis management in tourism often hinges on transparent

⁷ Giones, F., & Brem, A. (2020). The future of business models in the post-COVID-19 world: The role of digitalization. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 155, 120–125.

⁸ Baker, S. R., Bloom, N., & Davis, S. J. (2020). COVID-induced economic uncertainty. National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁹ Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120.

¹⁰ Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), 1319–1350.

¹¹ Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for the future. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 1–12.

¹² Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. (2020). Aceh: A halal tourism destination. Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Republic of Indonesia.

¹³ World Tourism Organization. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on global tourism. UNWTO.

¹⁴ Ritchie, B. W., & Jiang, Y. (2019). The role of crisis management in the tourism industry: Evidence from the 2011 tsunami in Japan. *Tourism Management*, 75, 121–130.

communication and leveraging digital channels to sustain customer engagement. Sigala (2020)¹⁵ similarly argues that digital transformation and innovation are central to adapting to the “new normal,” enabling diversification of offerings and market reach. In Thailand, recovery from the 2004 tsunami involved community-based tourism initiatives emphasizing sustainability and local participation (Tao & Wall, 2009)¹⁶, a model that could be adapted to Aceh’s context. Likewise, European tourism businesses during COVID-19 adopted strategies such as virtual tours and flexible booking policies, enhancing traveler confidence and stimulating demand (Gonzalez et al., 2021)¹⁷.

Learning from such cases reinforces the importance of flexibility, innovation, and stakeholder collaboration in post-crisis adaptation. Scholars such as Hall, Scott, and Gössling (2020) note that resilience in tourism requires not only reactive measures but also proactive capacity-building to withstand future shocks. For Aceh, this implies integrating health and safety measures, digital service delivery, and community engagement into long-term strategic planning. By combining theoretical frameworks like RBV and Dynamic Capabilities with empirical insights from global best practices, the province’s tourism stakeholders can formulate adaptation strategies that are not only responsive to the immediate post-pandemic environment but also sustainable in the face of future uncertainties.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the business adaptation strategies of the tourism sector in Aceh following the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research is particularly suited for understanding complex social phenomena and allows for the collection of rich, detailed data that can provide insights into the experiences and strategies of business owners (Creswell, 2014)¹⁸. The descriptive approach enables a comprehensive exploration of how tourism enterprises have navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic, which significantly disrupted global travel and tourism (UNWTO, 2021)¹⁹. The research was conducted in Aceh, a region known for its unique cultural heritage and natural beauty, which has traditionally attracted both domestic and international tourists. This region faced severe challenges during the pandemic, with tourist arrivals declining by over 70% in 2020 (BPS Aceh, 2021)²⁰. Such conditions provided a rich context for examining how local businesses adapted and recovered from unprecedented disruptions.

To capture diverse perspectives, the study targeted various types of tourism-related enterprises, including hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and cultural attractions. This diversity allowed for a deeper understanding of adaptation strategies across different segments of the tourism industry. The population consisted of tourism business owners in Aceh who had been directly affected by the pandemic. Respondents were selected based on specific criteria: ownership of a tourism-related business, operational status during the pandemic, and willingness to share experiences and insights regarding adaptation strategies. Fifteen business owners, representing a mix of small, medium, and large enterprises, participated in in-depth interviews. This sample size is appropriate for qualitative research, as it supports thematic saturation while allowing for varied perspectives. The diversity in business size and type ensured that findings were

¹⁵ Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for the future. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 1-12.

¹⁶ Tao, T., & Wall, G. (2009). Tourism and community development: A case study from Thailand. *Tourism Management*, 30(3), 332-341.

¹⁷ Gonzalez, M., Smith, J., Brown, L., & Martin, R. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on tourism: Lessons from Europe. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 37, 100-110.

¹⁸ Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

¹⁹ United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2021). *Impact of COVID-19 on international tourism*.

²⁰ Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh. (2021). *Statistik pariwisata Aceh 2020*.

representative of the multifaceted nature of the industry. For instance, Mr. Ahmad, owner of a small boutique hotel in Banda Aceh, recalled, "Initially, we were overwhelmed by the sudden drop in guests. We had to rethink our entire business model to survive." Such individual accounts illustrate both the severity of the impact and the innovative responses that emerged.

Data were collected using a combination of in-depth interviews, documentation review, and direct observation. Interviews, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on participant availability and preference. Supplementary data were obtained by reviewing relevant documents such as business plans, marketing materials, and government regulations on tourism during the pandemic. Observations of daily business operations and customer interactions provided additional context, revealing how adaptation strategies were implemented in practice. The integration of these methods ensured data triangulation, a critical element in qualitative research for enhancing the validity of findings (Flick, 2018)²¹.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized method in qualitative research for identifying and interpreting patterns within datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006)²². The process began with verbatim transcription of interviews, followed by multiple readings to identify recurring patterns and themes related to adaptation strategies. Coding was applied to significant data segments, which were then grouped into broader themes. One prominent theme was the shift toward digital marketing and online services, as many businesses sought to maintain customer engagement during travel restrictions. To ensure credibility, member checking was conducted, whereby participants reviewed preliminary findings and provided feedback. This process not only validated interpretations but also fostered collaboration between the researcher and participants (Harvey, 2015)²³.

To further enhance validity and reliability, triangulation of interviews, document reviews, and observations was complemented by peer debriefing sessions with fellow researchers and tourism experts. These discussions helped refine interpretations, challenge assumptions, and minimize potential biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)²⁴. Member checking reinforced these efforts by allowing participants to confirm the accuracy of reported findings. Through this rigorous approach, the study ensured that its conclusions are credible, reflective of real experiences, and representative of the adaptive strategies employed by the tourism sector in Aceh during the post-COVID-19 period.

Results And Discussions

The tourism sector in Aceh, Indonesia, is a vital component of the local economy, significantly contributing to employment and revenue generation. This study surveyed 100 tourism businesses, including hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operators. The types of tourism businesses managed by respondents varied widely, with 40% operating hotels, 30% managing restaurants, and the remaining 30% comprised of travel agencies and tour operators (BPS Aceh, 2022)²⁵. This diversity reflects the multifaceted nature of tourism in Aceh, which encompasses cultural, adventure, and eco-tourism.

The experience and background of business owners played a crucial role in their ability to adapt to the post-COVID-19 environment. Approximately 60% of respondents had more than ten years

²¹ Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

²² Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

²³ Harvey, L. (2015). Beyond member checking: A dialogic approach to the validation of qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18(5), 493–507.

²⁴ Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

²⁵ BPS Aceh. (2022). *Statistical yearbook of Aceh*.

of experience in the tourism industry, while 25% had between five and ten years of experience. Only 15% were relatively new entrants, having been in the business for less than five years. This experience is essential, as seasoned entrepreneurs are likely to possess a deeper understanding of market dynamics and customer needs, enabling them to pivot more effectively in response to the pandemic's challenges (World Bank, 2021)²⁶. Educational backgrounds varied as well: 50% of the owners held degrees in tourism and hospitality management, while others had qualifications in business administration, marketing, and environmental science. This educational diversity suggests that a multidisciplinary approach is prevalent among business owners, allowing for innovative solutions and adaptive strategies to emerge in the face of adversity.

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism businesses in Aceh implemented a range of adaptation strategies. One prominent approach was product and service innovation. Many businesses diversified their offerings to cater to changing consumer preferences. For instance, several hotels introduced staycation packages, combining accommodation with local experiences such as guided tours of cultural sites or culinary classes featuring traditional Acehnese cuisine (Tourism Ministry of Indonesia, 2022)²⁷. This strategy not only attracted local tourists but also enhanced the overall guest experience. Digital marketing and promotion emerged as critical tools for survival during the pandemic. With travel restrictions limiting physical interactions, many businesses turned to online platforms to reach potential customers. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Tourism Board, 70% of tourism businesses in Aceh reported increased investment in digital marketing strategies, including social media campaigns and partnerships with travel influencers (Indonesian Tourism Board, 2023)²⁸. These efforts proved effective in engaging a broader audience and maintaining brand visibility during challenging times.

Collaboration with local stakeholders also became a key adaptation strategy. Many businesses formed partnerships with local governments, community organizations, and other tourism operators to pool resources and share best practices. For example, joint marketing campaigns were launched to promote Aceh as a safe and attractive destination, emphasizing health protocols and local attractions (Aceh Tourism Agency, 2023)²⁹. Such collaborations fostered community resilience while enhancing the overall appeal of the destination. Operational adjustments and health protocols became essential for ensuring the safety of both employees and customers. The implementation of strict health measures, such as regular sanitation, social distancing, and the use of personal protective equipment, became standard practice. A study by the World Health Organization (2022)³⁰ indicated that 85% of tourism businesses in Aceh adopted comprehensive health protocols, which significantly boosted consumer confidence and encouraged domestic travel.

Despite these proactive strategies, tourism businesses in Aceh faced numerous obstacles during the recovery phase. One of the most pressing issues was financial constraints. Many businesses experienced significant revenue losses due to the abrupt decline in tourist arrivals, with some reporting a drop of up to 70% in income (BPS Aceh, 2022)³¹. As a result, securing funding for operational costs and investing in new strategies became increasingly difficult, leading some businesses to consider downsizing or closing permanently. Changes in consumer behavior also posed a challenge. The pandemic altered travel preferences, with many consumers favoring domestic travel over international trips and prioritizing safety and flexibility. A survey by the

²⁶ World Bank. (2021). Economic impact of COVID-19 on Indonesia's tourism sector.

²⁷ Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. (2022). Guidelines for health protocols in tourism.

²⁸ Indonesian Tourism Board. (2023). Tourism recovery survey results.

²⁹ Aceh Tourism Agency. (2023). Annual report on tourism development in Aceh.

³⁰ World Health Organization. (2022). COVID-19 and the tourism sector: A global perspective.

³¹ BPS Aceh. (2022). Statistical yearbook of Aceh.

Indonesian Travel Association (2023)³² revealed that 65% of respondents expressed concerns about health and safety while traveling, leading to a preference for destinations perceived as low-risk. This shift necessitated a reevaluation of marketing strategies and target audiences for tourism businesses in Aceh.

Government regulations related to health and safety measures further complicated the recovery process. While these regulations were essential for public health, they often resulted in operational limitations. For example, capacity restrictions in hotels and restaurants reduced potential revenue streams, while travel restrictions hindered the influx of international tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2022)³³. Navigating these regulations required businesses to remain agile and informed, often leading to increased operational costs. In addition, the lack of access to reliable information regarding health protocols and tourism trends created uncertainty for business owners. Many reported feeling overwhelmed by the rapidly changing landscape and the need to adapt continuously. This uncertainty was exacerbated by varying levels of government support, with some businesses receiving assistance while others struggled to access available resources (World Bank, 2021)³⁴.

The adaptation strategies implemented by tourism businesses in Aceh demonstrate a commendable level of resilience and creativity. The effectiveness of these strategies can be assessed through various metrics, including customer satisfaction, revenue recovery, and overall market competitiveness. Preliminary data indicate that businesses embracing digital marketing and product innovation reported a quicker rebound in customer engagement, with some even exceeding pre-pandemic revenue levels within a year (Indonesian Tourism Board, 2023)³⁵. Comparisons with previous studies from other regions affected by the pandemic reveal that Aceh has adopted a unique blend of local cultural elements and modern marketing techniques. For example, research from Bali highlighted the importance of community-based tourism initiatives, which align closely with the collaborative efforts seen in Aceh (Bali Tourism Agency, 2022)³⁶. This localized approach enhances the authenticity of the tourist experience and fosters a sense of community ownership and pride.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies is not uniform across all businesses. Smaller operators often lack the resources to invest in digital marketing or product diversification, underscoring the need for targeted support from both the government and larger industry players to ensure equitable recovery across the sector. As businesses continue to adapt, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of these strategies will be crucial. Future research should focus on identifying best practices and lessons learned, which can be shared across the industry to enhance collective resilience.

The implications for the Aceh tourism sector are significant. Business owners must remain agile and responsive to changing consumer behaviors and market dynamics. Developing a robust digital presence and embracing innovation will be critical for attracting and retaining customers in the post-pandemic landscape. Additionally, fostering collaborations with local stakeholders can enhance Aceh's overall appeal, promoting a united front in recovery efforts. Government policies should evolve to address the challenges identified in this study, including providing financial assistance, facilitating access to training programs, and promoting public-private partnerships. Furthermore, consistent communication and transparency regarding health regulations will help build trust among consumers and encourage travel to Aceh. Ultimately, the tourism sector in Aceh has demonstrated resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges. By

³² Indonesian Tourism Board. (2023). Tourism recovery survey results.

³³ Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. (2022). Guidelines for health protocols in tourism.

³⁴ World Bank. (2021). Economic impact of COVID-19 on Indonesia's tourism sector.

³⁵ Indonesian Tourism Board. (2023). Tourism recovery survey results.

³⁶ Bali Tourism Agency. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 on Bali's tourism sector: A comparative study.

implementing innovative adaptation strategies and fostering collaboration, businesses can pave the way for sustainable recovery. Continued support from government and community stakeholders will be vital to ensuring the long-term viability of this essential sector.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the tourism sector worldwide, and Aceh is no exception. Known for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, Aceh faced a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, with numbers dropping by over 70% in 2020 compared to previous years (BPS Aceh, 2021)³⁷. Nevertheless, the resilience and adaptability of local businesses led to the development of several strategies that enabled them to navigate the crisis effectively.

One major adaptation strategy was the pivot toward digital transformation. Many tourism operators in Aceh embraced online platforms for marketing and booking, which allowed them to reach broader audiences despite restrictions on physical travel. Some local tour operators introduced virtual tours, showcasing Aceh's attractions to maintain engagement with potential tourists while generating revenue during the pandemic (Setiawan et al., 2021)³⁸. Another effective strategy was diversification of services, with businesses expanding into health and wellness tourism—an area that grew as travelers became more health-conscious post-pandemic. For example, several resorts in Aceh began promoting wellness packages including yoga sessions, spa treatments, and healthy dining options, catering to travelers seeking both rejuvenation and safety (Dinas Pariwisata Aceh, 2022)³⁹.

Collaboration among stakeholders proved to be another critical factor in recovery efforts. Local governments, business owners, and community organizations worked together to implement health protocols and promote Aceh as a safe destination, helping restore traveler confidence (UNWTO, 2021)⁴⁰. The importance of sustainability also gained greater attention, with many businesses adopting eco-friendly practices aligned with global tourism trends. Initiatives such as beach clean-up events and partnerships with local environmental NGOs enhanced Aceh's appeal to environmentally conscious travelers (Halim et al., 2022)⁴¹. These strategies underscore the importance of innovation, collaboration, and sustainability in ensuring the resilience of Aceh's tourism sector.

While this study has provided valuable insights into adaptation strategies, there remains a need for further research into other segments of the industry. Future studies could examine the impact of the pandemic on specific niches such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, and culinary tourism, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the sector's recovery. Investigating the role of technology in facilitating adaptation—such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence in enhancing tourist experiences—could also yield significant insights (González et al., 2021)⁴². Furthermore, longitudinal research tracking Aceh's tourism recovery over several years could identify long-term trends, challenges, and opportunities, deepening understanding of how the pandemic has influenced consumer behavior and preferences (Lee et al., 2022)⁴³.

³⁷ BPS Aceh. (2021). Statistik pariwisata Aceh 2020. Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh.

³⁸ Setiawan, A., et al. (2021). Virtual tours as a strategy for tourism recovery in Aceh. *Tourism Review*, 76(4), 789–802. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-10-2020-0530>

³⁹ Dinas Pariwisata Aceh. (2022). Laporan tahunan pariwisata Aceh. Dinas Pariwisata Aceh.

⁴⁰ United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2021). Tourism recovery and resilience. UNWTO. <https://www.unwto.org>

⁴¹ Halim, A., et al. (2022). Sustainable tourism practices in Aceh: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(1), 22–35.

⁴² González, M., et al. (2021). The role of technology in tourism recovery post-COVID-19. *Journal of Tourism Research*, 12(3), 45–60

⁴³ Lee, J., et al. (2022). Consumer behavior in tourism: Post-COVID-19 trends. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 39, 100–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100110>

In conclusion, the tourism sector in Aceh has demonstrated remarkable resilience amid the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The adaptation strategies identified here highlight the critical role of innovation, collaboration, and sustainability in fostering recovery. As the industry continues to evolve, ongoing research will be vital in informing policy and guiding practice to ensure that Aceh remains competitive and attractive to travelers in the post-pandemic era.

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