

# Awakening Aroma: Weathering the Covid-19 Storm in Aceh's Coffee Culinary Tourism and Farming Community

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## ABSTRACT

The potential and popularity of coffee culinary tourism, particularly Arabica Gayo coffee, have garnered recognition both locally and internationally for its unique aroma and flavor profile. However, the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in Indonesia has posed serious challenges, including to the coffee culinary tourism industry in Central Aceh. Decreased tourist visits have disrupted various aspects of the business. Hence, research is conducted to identify these impacts and find suitable solutions to revitalize this industry. Through research methods involving observation, in-depth interviews, and group discussions, efforts are made to optimize the potential of coffee culinary tourism in the region. The analysis reveals that operational hour restrictions on coffee culinary businesses are among the major impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Aceh, resulting in revenue decline and export difficulties. Nevertheless, the tourism potential in the area remains high despite the decrease in tourist numbers due to activity restrictions.

**Keywords:** Coffee culinary tourism, Arabica Gayo, COVID-19 impact, Recovery strategies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Aceh is located at the westernmost tip of the island of Sumatra, boasting various uniqueness, including customs, culture, stunning natural landscapes, and various socio-cultural tourist attractions. This uniqueness serves as a magnet for both local and international tourists visiting Aceh. One of the most popular tourist attractions in the province of Aceh is coffee culinary tourism. Although there are many types of coffee found in Aceh, the most famous, even internationally, is Gayo Arabica coffee due to its distinctive aroma and flavor. The name "Arabica Gayo" emerged because the best Arabica coffee originates from the highlands of Gayo, especially in the Central Aceh and Bener Meriah Regencies, as seen in the following table:



**Figure 1.** Graph of Coffee Plantation Area in the Province of Aceh Over the Last Five Years

The graph above shows eight regencies that are coffee production centers in the province of Aceh. Central Aceh Regency is the production center with the largest land area among these six regencies (Central Bureau of Statistics [2]). The data above indicates that Central Aceh Regency has great potential for developing Gayo Arabica coffee. This is in line with Tambarta's research (2020), which states that Gayo coffee is quite famous globally due to its distinctive aroma and flavor when cupping or taste tested [4].

Despite the crisis in Europe, it does not reduce the demand for highland Gayo coffee in the world market. The existing opportunities to grow the insight of this coffee agroindustry include various aspects such as strategic environment, demand, resources, and technology. The applied agroindustry development is sustainable. The built and developed agroindustry must consider management aspects and conservation of natural resources as a manifestation of Indonesia's comparative advantage. All technologies used and institutions involved in the development process need to be directed towards driving Indonesia's coffee agroindustry competitive advantage [4].

In line with Tambarta's research, Angkasa (2019) in his research stated that public interest in coffee from time to time is increasing. The increase in coffee consumption worldwide even helps some coffee-producing areas such as Bondowoso, Indonesia, to reduce the poverty rate from 24 percent to 14 percent [1], cited by the Minister of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions Development, and Transmigration of Indonesia.

The 'Ngopi' culture is a manifestation of millennial culture, especially in metropolitan cities where coffee is believed to increase the productivity of the younger generation [3]. However, besides millennials, people of all ages also enjoy coffee for various reasons, including as a social lubricant in discussing business, as a hangout place, as a place to work on assignments, and as an art to share on social media. Despite its simplicity, this beverage has great culinary tourism potential. Furthermore, Praza (2017) mentioned that Gayo Arabica coffee has a high development potential because it has been marketed to several countries such as America, Germany, the Netherlands, Korea, Cambodia, China, and Saudi Arabia [7].

Culinary tourism has its characteristics compared to other types of tourism because it emphasizes culinary experiences, including food and beverage offerings, taste sensations, and the uniqueness of dishes. Central Aceh is famous for its breathtaking natural panoramas and the existence of enchanting coffee plantations, as well as various coffee-based culinary tourism. Research by Maulina et al. (2020) revealed that about 73% of respondents are coffee enthusiasts, while the remaining 27% are not. The presence of various factors contributes

to the development of coffee culinary tourism potential in this area. The diversity in coffee culinary tourism options has made Central Aceh renowned as a leading destination for coffee lovers [5].

The culinary tourism potential of coffee and the reputation of Gayo Arabica coffee products have solidified their positions, both nationally and internationally, thanks to their distinctive taste and aroma. However, the significant impact of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has struck since March 2020, has penetrated various tourism sectors in Indonesia in general, particularly in the province of Aceh, especially in the socio-cultural tourism sector. This massive pandemic wave has caused a significant decline in the coffee culinary tourism industry due to a drastic reduction in the number of visitors.

This is mainly triggered by social distancing policies and lockdowns implemented in several countries to stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This situation has impacted various aspects of the Gayo Arabica coffee culinary tourism industry and has repercussions on the lives of coffee farmers in Central Aceh Regency. The decline in visits to coffee culinary tourism places not only threatens their income but also reduces opportunities for coffee bean sales.

Therefore, it is important to understand the impacts faced by the coffee culinary tourism industry and the general public in Central Aceh Regency so that appropriate solutions can be prepared to optimize untapped potential in coffee industry development. It is important to understand that the oil palm plantation is not just a business entity but also a part of the daily life of the people in Kecamatan Seruway. The presence of these companies has raised awareness among the community that they should benefit from the company's presence, especially through corporate social responsibility, local labor recruitment, and efforts to empower the local economy.

## 2. METHOD

This research applies a descriptive qualitative research method. The qualitative research method is an approach used to examine phenomena in natural conditions, where the researcher acts as the key instrument [8]. Moleong (2005) states that qualitative research aims to understand phenomena, such as behaviors, perceptions, motivations, barriers, actions, and so forth, holistically, by describing them in words and language, within a specific natural context, and using various natural methods [6].

This research was conducted in Central Aceh Regency, which is one of the main production centers in Aceh. The

subjects of this research are Arabica Gayo Coffee culinary tourism practitioners who have businesses in the Arabica Gayo coffee culinary field. The data used in this research consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data collection was carried out through observation techniques, where the researcher directly participated in data collection by observing, listening, smelling, and feeling the objects being studied [9]. By using this observation technique, it is expected that the obtained data are more accurate and in line with the realities in the field.

Furthermore, in-depth interview techniques were also used to delve into the findings of the data. This technique involves face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the informant, with or without interview guidelines, thus creating intense social interaction [9]. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also used as a data collection method, where key informants from various parties, including representatives from the Gayo coffee culinary tourism industry and the Department of Tourism, Youth, and Sports of Central Aceh Regency, participated in group discussions to discuss specific issues. The data or information obtained from FGDs not only reflect the group's opinions but also represent joint decisions.

Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from literature studies and documentation, by collecting data from archives or written documents obtained from the Department of Tourism, Youth, and Sports of Central Aceh Regency. This activity was carried out simultaneously with field observations. The data analysis method used is the USG method (Urgency, Seriousness, Growth) to evaluate the impact of culinary tourism and the scoring method to assess the impact of coffee culinary tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. The USG method is used to prioritize addressing impacts, considering the urgency, seriousness, and potential growth of these impacts. The USG assessment indicators include Urgency: how urgent the issue needs to be discussed, analyzed, and addressed. Seriousness: how serious the issue needs to be discussed in relation to the consequences it causes. Growth: how likely the issue is to worsen if not handled properly.

The USG assessment is done using values ranging from 1 to 5 (Likert scale). The higher the impact with the highest scoring indicates that the impact is very important and very serious to be addressed immediately. Data analysis using scoring techniques was carried out to determine the classification of the level of attractiveness of tourism impacts, starting with the following stages: a. Selection of research indicators and variables.

b. Scoring stage, which involves assigning values or scores to predetermined research variables. Giving relative scores from 1 to 5 for several research variables.  
c. Classification of tourism impacts consists of: Internal Impact, where the total score is 14 high. External Impact,

where if the total score is 21 high. Combined Impact, where if the total score is 33 High.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Central Aceh is a tourist destination sought after by both local and out-of-town visitors. The area offers many attractive tourist destinations that capture visitors' interest. Moreover, its diverse cultural richness and traditions also serve as an attraction for visitors from outside the region. Not to be overlooked, the presence of coffee commodities, which have gained fame even internationally, also plays a significant role in the development of the tourism sector here. The distinctive and high-quality image of coffee makes it an additional attraction for tourists from various regions. With efforts to develop tourism and culinary aspects that continue to respect the sustainability of local culture, Central Aceh has become a primary destination for weekend getaways [10].

The significance of coffee commodities as the main ingredient in coffee culinary tourism industry products demands stakeholders, including the government through agricultural, plantation, and tourism departments, coffee culinary tourism sector entrepreneurs, coffee farmers, and the general public in Central Aceh, to devise alternative strategies to address the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The formulation of these strategies is necessary to mitigate the pandemic's impact on the coffee culinary tourism business in the area. The main objective of this research is to conduct a condition analysis to understand the impacts faced by the coffee culinary tourism industry in Central Aceh so that appropriate alternative strategies can be formulated.

The development of tourism in the Central Aceh region by the Central Aceh Tourism Department always considers three things: 1) area development such as paying attention to the attractions that attract tourists to continue visiting Central Aceh by considering the facilities and infrastructure for tourists to travel in Central Aceh, 2) Promotions can be done through social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and Tiktok, this is done so that the latest information and news about tourist attractions can be quickly known by the wider community out there; 3) creative economic development. In addition to utilizing the beautiful natural conditions as tourist attractions, the next step is to utilize the natural resources available in the Central Aceh region by conducting further processing to produce something that has economic value that can increase the income of the local community. The creation of a product with high economic value by utilizing natural resources around can be traded to the community as souvenirs from the Central Aceh region. Thus, to create the principles of creative economy, training is needed for the local community, so that the available natural resources can collaborate well

with human resources in developing the Central Aceh region.

The Covid-19 pandemic did not have an impact on tourism activities as a whole. Interestingly, tourist visitors in Central Aceh increased significantly during the pandemic. This is because of the territorial restrictions in Aceh, which limit Acehnese people from leaving Aceh. As a result, all departments, offices, and institutions in Aceh can only carry out annual activities such as meetings, training, seminars, etc., in the Aceh province. The main destinations for these activities are Sabang and Central Aceh. However, at the same time, Sabang implemented stricter health protocols compared to Central Aceh due to differences in topography. Therefore, Central Aceh became the only best alternative at that time. This certainly had a significant impact on tourism activities in this area.

The high potential of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic did not have an impact on the high spread of COVID-19 cases in Central Aceh. This is because the tourism department, local government, and other relevant agencies in Central Aceh have taken quick steps to implement health protocols to the maximum extent compared to other areas in Aceh. This was done due to awareness of the ease of exposure to COVID-19 brought by visitors from outside. Some health protocols implemented include the presence of restriction and surveillance posts, mandatory use of masks in certain areas, hand washing, and hand sanitizer use.

This broad tourism potential, however, contrasts with the condition of coffee culinary tourism potential during the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Aceh. Although the potential of coffee culinary tourism and the position of Gayo Arabica coffee products themselves have a strong position both nationally and internationally because of their distinctive aroma and flavor. However, the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic that has occurred since March 2020 has had a very significant impact on various coffee culinary tourism sectors in this area. The increasingly massive coronavirus outbreak recently has greatly disrupted the momentum of the coffee culinary tourism industry to the point of significance due to the limited movement of visitors. The various impacts felt by coffee culinary tourism entrepreneurs and coffee farmers as suppliers of coffee culinary tourism raw materials are as follows:

USG Analysis Table

Issues	U	S	G	Score
The regulation on restricted opening hours for coffee culinary tourism businesses.	4.9	5.0	4.8	14.6
Decrease in income for Arabica Gayo coffee farmers.	4.5	4.4	4.6	13.5
Minimal tourists in Central Aceh due to lockdown or territorial restrictions.	3.8	4.0	3.5	11.3
Decrease in processed coffee prices will reduce income for coffee culinary entrepreneurs and coffee farmers.	4.3	4.5	3.9	12.6
Complexity of entry procedures into Central Aceh due to the establishment of visitor inspection posts in several places	4.0	4.3	4.1	12.4
Implementation of Social Distancing regulations during the pandemic period.	4.4	4.9	4.4	13.6

One of the most impactful indicators for coffee culinary tourism entrepreneurs is the regulation limiting the opening hours of coffee culinary tourism businesses, scoring 14.6. The regulation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Aceh is the restriction on the operating hours of coffee culinary tourism businesses. This rule is considered inappropriate for the community engaged in culinary tourism businesses. Additionally, the government of Central Aceh district's enforcement of operational hour restrictions also affects the income earned by coffee business operators.

Before the pandemic, cafes operated until the early hours of the morning, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, cafe owners were required to close their businesses at 9 p.m. Another impact resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is that coffee culinary business operators cannot export coffee abroad due to strict government restrictions. The export of Arabica Gayo coffee itself was the main and largest source of income before the pandemic. To survive, coffee culinary tourism entrepreneurs in the Central Aceh district rely on selling Arabica Gayo coffee powder to coffee entrepreneurs in several regions in Indonesia.

This will also impact the income of local residents who work as coffee farmers as the quantity of coffee beans sold decreases. While it's true that during the Covid pandemic, the income of people in Central Aceh experienced a decline compared to before Covid in Indonesia, the decrease wasn't too significant. This is because during the pandemic, residents and tourists still visited Central Aceh, albeit adhering to government-mandated requirements.

The decrease in tourists in Central Aceh due to lockdown/territorial restrictions is caused by regulations on social distancing and lockdowns in several areas to break the chain of Covid-19 spread. This situation will lead to various impacts on Arabica Gayo coffee culinary

tourism itself. Additionally, some activities resulting from the formation of new regulations to prevent and minimize the spread of Covid-19 in Central Aceh actually have a negative impact on coffee culinary tourism in this area.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

One of the most impactful indicators for coffee culinary tourism entrepreneurs is the regulation limiting the opening hours of coffee culinary tourism businesses, scoring 14.6. The regulation during the Covid-19 pandemic in Central Aceh is the restriction on the operating hours of coffee culinary tourism businesses. Indeed, during the Covid pandemic, the income of people in the Central Aceh region did experience a decline compared to before Covid in Indonesia. The decrease in tourists in Central Aceh due to lockdown/territorial restrictions is caused by regulations on social distancing and lockdowns in several areas to break the chain of COVID-19 spread.

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