

# Tourists' Perceptions of Geotourism Development in Sumedang: A Qualitative Social Tourism Study

*Tourists' Perceptions  
of Sumedang  
Geotourism*

Irena Novarlia

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia; Bandung, Indonesia

E-Mail: irenanovarlia@upi.edu

**5259**

## **ABSTRACT**

*Sumedang Regency, rich in geological and cultural heritage, holds significant potential for geotourism development, yet faces challenges in delivering meaningful visitor experiences. This study aims to explore tourists' perceptions of geotourism development in Sumedang from a social tourism perspective, focusing on their emotional, cognitive, and cultural interactions with key sites. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with eighteen tourists, participatory observations, and visual documentation, including photographs and visual interpretations. Analysis revealed three main themes: the natural beauty of sites like Mount Tampomas and Jatigede Reservoir lacks educational narratives, limited infrastructure hinders access and diminishes satisfaction, and tourists desire greater involvement with local culture and narratives. These findings highlight the need for enhanced interpretive media and community engagement to transform superficial experiences into meaningful ones. The study, limited to domestic tourists and a short observation period, concludes that Sumedang's geotourism can thrive by integrating geological education, improving infrastructure, and empowering local communities as storytellers. These insights contribute to understanding geotourism as a socially constructed process and offer practical strategies for sustainable destination development in Sumedang.*

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## **ABSTRAK**

*Kabupaten Sumedang, yang kaya akan warisan geologi dan budaya, memiliki potensi signifikan untuk pengembangan geowisata, namun menghadapi tantangan dalam memberikan pengalaman wisatawan yang bermakna. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi wisatawan terhadap pengembangan geowisata di Sumedang dari perspektif pariwisata sosial, dengan fokus pada interaksi emosional, kognitif, dan budaya mereka dengan situs-situs utama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan delapan belas wisatawan, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi visual, termasuk foto dan interpretasi visual. Analisis mengungkapkan tiga tema utama: keindahan alam situs-situs seperti Gunung Tampomas dan Waduk Jatigede kurang memiliki narasi edukatif, keterbatasan infrastruktur menghambat akses dan mengurangi kepuasan, serta keinginan wisatawan untuk lebih terlibat dengan budaya dan narasi lokal. Temuan ini menyoroti perlunya peningkatan media interpretatif dan keterlibatan masyarakat untuk mengubah pengalaman yang dangkal menjadi bermakna. Studi ini, yang terbatas pada wisatawan domestik dan periode observasi singkat, menyimpulkan bahwa geowisata Sumedang dapat berkembang dengan mengintegrasikan edukasi geologi, meningkatkan infrastruktur, dan memberdayakan masyarakat lokal sebagai pendongeng. Wawasan ini berkontribusi untuk memahami geowisata sebagai proses yang dibangun secara sosial dan menawarkan strategi praktis untuk pengembangan destinasi berkelanjutan di Sumedang.*

**Kata kunci:** Pengembangan Destinasi, Geowisata, Pariwisata Sosial, Sumedang, Geowisata Berkelanjutan, Persepsi Wisatawan, Dokumentasi Visual.






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## INTRODUCTION

Geotourism has emerged as a transformative approach in the tourism sector, emphasizing not only the aesthetic appeal of landscapes but also geological education, environmental conservation, and active community involvement. Unlike mass tourism, which often exploits local resources and diminishes cultural values, geotourism offers a reflective and meaningful travel experience by integrating geological narratives with local wisdom (Dowling & Newsome, 2018). In Indonesia, a country rich in geological and cultural diversity, geotourism holds significant potential to foster sustainable tourism. Sumedang Regency, located in West Java, exemplifies this potential through its diverse geotourism sites, including Mount Tampomas, an inactive stratovolcano with a lava dome; Jatigede and Panenjoan Reservoirs, showcasing geological transformations; Citengah Waterfall, highlighting erosion and hydrological dynamics; Tenjolaut and Pasir Pabeasan, revealing ancient stratigraphic layers; and the Kabuyutan Citembong Girang, a cultural site linking geology with local cosmology. These sites, as outlined in Table 1, combine scientific and cultural value, positioning Sumedang as a promising geotourism destination (Hadian et al., 2021a; Munir, 2022).

Table 1. Geotourism Locations in Sumedang Regency

Location Name	Scientific Description	Photo
Mount Tampomas	An inactive stratovolcano with a dome-shaped lava peak. It has high geodiversity value and stunning natural panoramic potential, and is often used as a destination for hiking and geological education.	
Jatigede Reservoir	One of the largest dams in Indonesia, submerging several villages. The dam's landscape offers a combination of human-made structures and the geological transformation of the surrounding hilly terrain.	
Citengah Waterfall	A natural waterfall with hard rock formations and lush vegetation. This waterfall shows the process of erosion and weathering of rocks and is important in mapping geological water flows.	
Tenjolaut – Pasir Pabeasan (Conggeang)	Cone-shaped hills and unique soil outcrops in the Conggeang area. These are indications of sedimentation and weathering processes from the past that are important for local geological education.	
Kabuyutan Citembong Girang	A cultural and spiritual site housing megalithic remains. It combines the geological value of ancient rocks with historical significance as a place of worship and local culture.	

Despite its potential, Sumedang's geotourism development faces significant challenges. Field observations and exploratory interviews reveal that tourists often appreciate only the physical beauty of these sites without grasping their geological or cultural significance, largely due to the absence of interpretive media, information boards, or knowledgeable local guides. According to Widiyastuti et al. (2024), the lack of interpretive media in geotourism destinations results in superficial visitor experiences, a gap also evident in Sumedang. Similarly, Marlina (2022) notes that conventional tourism studies often rely on quantitative measures of satisfaction, such as service quality, neglecting the subjective and emotional dimensions of tourist experiences. Kurniawan and Rahmawati (2023) further highlight that without geological narratives, destinations fail to convey their educational value, reducing their impact. This disconnect between visual appeal and meaningful engagement represents a critical research gap in understanding how tourists construct meaning from their geotourism experiences in Sumedang, particularly from a social tourism perspective, which emphasizes social

interactions, community involvement, and cultural narratives in shaping travel experiences (Kim & Brown, 2012; Hadian et al., 2021b; Novianti et al., 2023).

The social tourism perspective, as applied in this study, views tourism as a social process where meaning is co-created through interactions between tourists, places, and local communities (Awaritefe, 2004). This perspective is particularly relevant in Sumedang, where local government policies aim to integrate community participation into tourism development (Munir, 2022; Anwar et al., 2024). However, the limited empowerment of local communities as storytellers of geological and cultural narratives hinders the creation of authentic and memorable experiences (Wulan, 2022; Novianti et al., 2023). Previous studies, such as those by Indrayati and Setyaningsih (2017) and Pamungkas et al. (2020), focus on branding or physical potential of geotourism sites in Indonesia but rarely explore tourists' subjective perceptions or the role of local narratives in enhancing experiences. This study addresses this gap by examining how tourists perceive geotourism development in Sumedang from a social tourism perspective, capturing their emotional, cognitive, and social interactions with the destination.

This study aims to explore tourists' perceptions of geotourism development in Sumedang Regency, focusing on elements such as visual appeal, accessibility, facilities, service quality, and sustainability, while emphasizing the social and cultural dimensions of their experiences. By adopting a qualitative approach with a case study design, the research seeks to uncover the subjective meanings tourists derive from their visits and identify barriers to meaningful engagement. This study contributes to geotourism literature by framing tourism as a socially constructed process, expanding beyond visual consumption to include narrative and community-driven experiences. This paper offers recommendations for local governments and stakeholders to develop educational, participatory, and sustainable geotourism strategies, aligning with Sumedang's vision as a Tourism Regency. Through this lens, the study seeks to bridge the gap between physical potential and socio-cultural meaning, fostering a more inclusive and impactful tourism ecosystem.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Tourist Perception Theory**

Tourist perception theory posits that visitors' experiences are shaped by a dynamic interplay of sensory, emotional, and social factors, extending beyond mere visual appreciation of a destination. According to Murtadha (2025), perceptions in tourism emerge from the integration of sensory inputs, such as the sounds of nature, with emotional responses and social interactions, which collectively define a destination's appeal. In Sumedang, this theory is critical as tourists often describe sites like Mount Tampomas as visually stunning but lacking depth due to the absence of geological explanations. Hanif et al. (2023) highlight that in West Java, social interactions with locals significantly influence tourists' perceptions, yet such engagement is minimal in Sumedang, leading to superficial experiences. This framework enables the study to explore how cognitive and affective dimensions shape tourists' understanding of geotourism sites, emphasizing the need for interpretive media to enhance meaning.

The application of tourist perception theory also draws from global and Indonesian contexts to contextualize Sumedang's challenges. Kim and Brown (2012) argue that tourists' expectations in geotourism are met when destinations provide educational content alongside aesthetic appeal, a gap evident in Sumedang's underdeveloped signage. In Indonesia, Li and Cao (2022) demonstrate that qualitative approaches uncover nuanced consumer behaviors, revealing tourists' desires for educational and cultural connections. For example, studies on Geopark Ciletuh in West Java show that well-designed interpretive media enhance visitor satisfaction, a model Sumedang could adopt. By focusing on tourists' subjective experiences, this theory underscores the importance of addressing emotional and social dimensions to transform Sumedang's geotourism into a more meaningful experience.

### **Geotourism Theory**

Geotourism theory emphasizes destinations as educational platforms that integrate geological heritage with environmental conservation and community involvement, distinguishing it from mass tourism. According to Dowling and Newsome (2018), geotourism fosters ecological awareness and cultural appreciation by providing interpretive narratives that highlight a site's scientific and historical significance. In Sumedang, sites like Jatigede Reservoir and Citengah Waterfall offer rich geological features, but the lack of guides or signage limits their educational impact, as noted by Supriyanto et al. (2023). In Indonesia, Pamungkas et al. (2020) highlight the success of Geopark Batur Bali in using branding to emphasize geological uniqueness, a strategy Sumedang could emulate to enhance its appeal. This theory frames Sumedang's geotourism sites as potential learning spaces that require robust interpretive frameworks to realize their full potential.

Comparisons with other geotourism destinations further illuminate Sumedang's challenges and opportunities. Rahman (2024) notes that Maros-Pangkep Geopark struggles with similar issues of underdeveloped interpretive media, yet its community-driven initiatives offer a model for Sumedang. Globally, Mikhailenko and Ruban (2019), Elvera et al. (2025), and Lanh and Lan (2025) emphasize that the visibility of geoheritage, such as through signage or guided tours, is crucial for visitor engagement, a gap evident in Sumedang's sites. Chrobak et al. (2020) add that tourists' motivations in geotourism are often tied to educational value, underscoring the need for trained local guides in Sumedang to narrate geological stories. By integrating these insights, geotourism theory highlights the importance of combining scientific education with local wisdom to create impactful visitor experiences in Sumedang.

### **Meaning Construction in Tourism**

The theory of meaning construction in tourism views travel experiences as narratives shaped by cultural symbols, social interactions, and local contexts (Nuraeni & Setiawan, 2021; Keindahan et al., 2023). According to Cohen (2023), meaningful experiences arise when tourists engage with destination-specific narratives that connect physical landscapes to cultural or historical significance. In Sumedang, the absence of local storytellers at sites like Kabuyutan Citembong Girang limits such meaning-making, leaving tourists with disconnected experiences. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that social interactions create shared meanings, a concept applicable to geotourism where local communities can serve as narrative stewards. Hutagalung and Nasution (2024) demonstrate that in Toba Caldera Geopark, community storytelling enhances regional identity, a model that could enrich Sumedang's cultural offerings and foster deeper visitor connections.

This theory also draws from global and Indonesian contexts to highlight the importance of cultural narratives. Obradović et al. (2023) show that in Serbia's Fruška Gora National Park, community involvement creates authentic experiences, a practice Sumedang could adopt to integrate local myths with geological features. Saluja et al. (2022) note that sustainable tourism in India relies on cultural narratives to engage visitors, a gap evident in Sumedang, where cultural stories are underutilized. In Indonesia, Hadian et al. (2025) emphasize that community participation in West Java's geotourism can bridge geological and cultural narratives, as seen in Citarum's initiatives. These insights underscore the need for Sumedang to empower local communities to share cultural and historical narratives, transforming geotourism into a socially meaningful experience.

### **Key Factors Shaping Tourist Perceptions**

The integration of tourist perception, geotourism, and meaning-construction theories highlights the key factors that shape how visitors experience Sumedang. Urry's (2022) concept of the tourist gaze emphasizes that perception is formed through social and cultural interactions, aligning with geotourism's emphasis on educational narratives and community engagement. In the Indonesian context, Indrayati and Setyaningsih (2017)

show that effective interpretive frameworks, linking physical landscapes with visitor understanding are essential for shaping perception, a need that remains unmet in Sumedang's underdeveloped geotourism sites. Štrba et al. (2018) further stress that geological education and direct visitor engagement significantly influence how tourists interpret and value geological heritage, underscoring the importance of interpretive signage and trained local guides.

Global studies reinforce these determinants of tourist perception. Tavallaei et al. (2012) demonstrate that community-based narratives meaningfully shape visitors' interpretations of geological features, while Arora et al. (2020) highlight the role of geomorphosite assessments in clarifying a site's geological uniqueness, thereby improving visitor appreciation. Georgousis et al. (2022) show that understanding geoenvironmental concepts enhances engagement, and Gou (2020), along with Chen et al. (2021), emphasize that contextualized and culturally grounded interpretations help visitors construct meaningful experiences. Together, these insights position Sumedang's geotourism as a social and interpretive process in which perception is influenced by cultural interaction, educational quality, community narratives, geological clarity, and site development, providing a framework for analyzing visitor experiences and informing sustainable tourism strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply and contextually explore tourists' perceptions of geotourism development in Sumedang Regency. The case study method is chosen for its ability to capture the social dynamics, meaning construction, and subjective experiences of tourists within the real-world context of Sumedang's geotourism sites. The research focuses on five key locations: Mount Tampomas, Jatigede and Panenjoan Reservoirs, Citengah Waterfall, Tenjolaut and Pasir Pabeasan, and Kabuyutan Citembong Girang. These sites, selected for their geological and cultural significance, align with the study's aim to understand how tourists interpret their experiences in these diverse settings. By grounding the research in these specific locations, the study ensures a comprehensive exploration of Sumedang's geotourism potential.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, involving eighteen individuals who visited the aforementioned geotourism sites within the past two years. The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 17 years old, have direct experience exploring Sumedang's geotourism destinations, and be willing to reflect on their experiences. The participant group primarily consisted of domestic tourists, reflecting the predominant visitor demographic in Sumedang, though a small number of international visitors were included to capture diverse perspectives. This sampling approach ensured that the data reflected a range of experiences while maintaining focus on those with direct engagement in the study's context. Participants were assigned codes to protect their confidentiality, and all provided written informed consent, with the option to withdraw at any time.

Data collection utilized three techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and visual documentation. Interviews were conducted to capture tourists' subjective narratives, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim to preserve authenticity. Participatory observation involved the researcher engaging with tourists at the sites, noting their affective expressions and interactions with the environment and local community. Visual documentation included landscape photographs and interpretive sketches, which were analyzed to complement interview findings by capturing spatial and aesthetic elements of the sites. For example, photographs of Citengah Waterfall's rock formations were paired with tourists' descriptions to identify gaps in interpretive signage. All data collection adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participant privacy and voluntary participation.

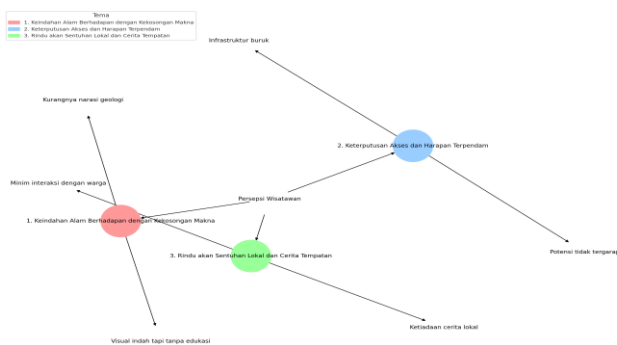
The data analysis followed a thematic approach, beginning with transcription of interviews, followed by coding and theme identification using NVivo 14 software to map patterns of meaning. Visual data, such as photographs and sketches, were coded for

recurring aesthetic and spatial themes, such as the absence of educational signage, and integrated with interview and observation data to triangulate findings. Validity and reliability were maintained through triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants to verify interpretations, and detailed audit trails to document the analytical process. Peer review and researcher reflection further ensured the rigor of the findings. This methodological framework enabled a robust exploration of tourists' perceptions, grounding the study in the authentic and contextual experiences of Sumedang's geotourism landscape.

**RESULTS**

**Key Themes from Tourist Perceptions**

This study uncovers tourists' perceptions of geotourism development in Sumedang Regency through a qualitative lens, revealing the complex interplay of visual appeal, accessibility, and socio-cultural engagement in shaping their experiences. By analyzing data from in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and visual documentation, three central themes emerged: natural beauty without meaning, limited access and unmet expectations, and longing for cultural involvement and local narratives. The findings highlight not only the strengths of Sumedang's geotourism sites but also critical gaps in educational narratives, infrastructure, and community integration, offering insights for sustainable destination development (Kim & Brown, 2012).



**Figure 1.** Tree Diagram of Tourist Perceptions of Geotourism Development in Sumedang Regency

The theme of natural beauty without meaning captures tourists' appreciation for Sumedang's stunning landscapes, such as the dramatic cliffs of Citengah Waterfall and the volcanic vistas of Mount Tampomas, yet reveals a pervasive sense of emptiness due to the lack of educational narratives. Participants frequently described their experiences as visually captivating but lacking depth, as geological and historical contexts were rarely conveyed. For instance, participant W3 remarked, "The place is absolutely beautiful, with a tall waterfall surrounded by cliffs. But that's it, just for photos. There's no explanation about what kind of rock this is or why it looks like this. So, it feels kind of empty." This sentiment was echoed across interviews, with many noting the absence of information boards or guides to explain the geological significance of sites like Tenjolaut's stratigraphic layers or Jatigede Reservoir's transformed terrain. Visual documentation, including photographs of rock formations and interpretive sketches of Mount Tampomas's lava dome, reinforced this gap by highlighting the lack of signage to contextualize these features. This finding aligns with Dowling and Newsome (2018), who emphasize that geotourism requires interpretive media to transform visual appeal into educational value, ensuring visitors gain a deeper understanding of the landscape.

The second theme, limited access and unmet expectations, underscores the challenges posed by inadequate infrastructure, which significantly detracts from tourists' experiences. Participants frequently cited damaged roads, unclear signage, and limited public transportation as barriers to enjoying Sumedang's geotourism sites. For example, participant W7 described the journey to Panenjoan Reservoir: "The trip to Panenjoan was

like a struggle. The roads were bad, the signs were unclear, so we got lost. But the view was really beautiful when we arrived. It's a shame." Observations at sites like Tenjolaut revealed narrow, poorly maintained paths, which frustrated visitors despite the area's geological allure. Visual data, such as photographs of eroded trails at Citengah Waterfall, corroborated these accounts, showing physical barriers that hindered accessibility. Participants also expressed that these sites, while visually spectacular, failed to meet expectations due to underutilized potential. As W7 noted, "If managed better, it would definitely be crowded. It's such a shame that there is so much potential but it's not being utilized." This theme resonates with Mahyuni and Rachmawati (2024), who argue that poor accessibility exacerbates inequalities in tourism experiences, particularly for domestic tourists seeking comfort and convenience.

The theme of longing for cultural involvement and local narratives highlights tourists' desire for deeper engagement with Sumedang's local culture and community, which is currently absent from their experiences. Participants expressed disappointment over the lack of interaction with local residents or narratives that connect the geological features to cultural or historical significance. For instance, participant W1 stated, "I wish there were locals who could explain about this place. Like why the rocks are unique, or what myths exist. But it's really quiet. Only us tourists come, then go home." At Kabuyutan Citembong Girang, a site rich with megalithic relics, tourists noted the absence of guides to share stories about its spiritual and geological importance. Visual documentation, including sketches of the site's ancient rocks, underscored the missed opportunity to link these features to local cosmology. This lack of cultural narrative renders the experience sterile, as W1 further noted, "No one tells the history, so the place feels empty." Participatory observations confirmed minimal community presence at these sites, with tourists often exploring in isolation. This finding aligns with Hanif et al. (2023), who emphasize that community-driven narratives are essential for creating authentic and memorable tourism experiences in West Java.

### **Synthesis and Implications of Findings**

The thematic analysis, summarized in Table 2, integrates data from interviews, observations, and visual documentation to provide a comprehensive view of tourists' perceptions. Table 2 outlines the main themes, sub-themes, descriptions, and illustrative quotes, capturing the complexity of tourists' experiences. For instance, the sub-theme of "visual beauty without education" under natural beauty without meaning is supported by photographs showing unlabelled rock formations, reinforcing participants' calls for interpretive signage. Similarly, sketches of inaccessible trails at Tenjolaut visually depict the infrastructure challenges noted in limited access and unmet expectations. Figure 1, a tree diagram, further visualizes the interconnectedness of these themes, illustrating how cognitive (understanding geology), affective (emotional connection), and socio-cultural (community engagement) dimensions shape tourists' perceptions. The integration of visual data was critical, as photographs and sketches provided spatial context that complemented verbal accounts, such as the contrast between Jatigede's scenic beauty and its poorly maintained access roads.

**Table 2.** Thematic Analysis of Tourists' Perceptions of Geotourism Development in Sumedang Regency

<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>Participant Quotes</b>
Natural Beauty Without Meaning	Visual beauty without education	Tourists are impressed by the natural beauty, but do not gain an understanding of the geology of the place	"The place is absolutely beautiful, with a tall waterfall surrounded by cliffs. But that's it, just for photos. There's no explanation about what kind of rock this is or why it looks like this. So it feels kind of empty." (W3)
Limited Access and Unmet Expectations	Lack of geological narrative	The absence of geological information makes the place lose its scientific value	"There is no information about why the rocks are like that, or their history. So I'm confused." (W3)

Main Theme	Subtheme	Brief Description	Participant Quotes
	Inadequate infrastructure	Damaged roads and unclear signage make the experience uncomfortable	"The trip to Panenjoan was like a struggle. The roads were bad, the signs were unclear, so we got lost. But the view was really beautiful when we arrived. It's a shame." (W7)
	Potential Not Fully Utilized	The destination has high appeal but hasn't been managed to its full potential	"If managed better, it would definitely be crowded. It's such a shame that there is so much potential but it's not being utilized." (W7)
Longing for Cultural Involvement and Local Narratives	Minimal interaction with the community	Tourists do not feel the presence of local residents as part of their travel experience	"I wish there were locals who could explain about this place. Like why the rocks are unique, or what myths exist. But it's really quiet. Only us tourists come, then go home." (W1)
	No cultural narrative	No cultural or historical narratives accompany the tourist journey	"No one tells the history, so the place feels empty." (W1)

These findings indicate that tourists' experiences in Sumedang's geotourism sites are not solely defined by visual aesthetics but are profoundly influenced by the availability of educational information, quality of access, and opportunities for cultural connection. The absence of geological narratives limits the educational value of sites, as noted by Dowling and Newsome (2018), who advocate for interpretive frameworks to enhance geotourism's impact. Similarly, infrastructure barriers, as highlighted by Mahyuni and Rachmawati (2024), create disparities in visitor experiences, particularly for domestic tourists who dominate Sumedang's visitor demographic. The lack of community involvement, as emphasized by Hanif et al. (2023), results in a socially disconnected experience, undermining the potential for authentic cultural engagement. The integration of visual data, such as photographs and sketches, strengthens these findings by providing tangible evidence of the gaps in signage and infrastructure, aligning with Kim and Brown (2012), who stress the importance of holistic destination management to meet tourists' expectations.

The three themes, such as natural beauty without meaning, limited access and unmet expectations, and longing for cultural involvement and local narratives, reveal the multidimensional nature of tourists' perceptions in Sumedang's geotourism context. These findings, supported by Table 2 and Figure 1, underscore the need for integrated strategies that combine educational interpretation, improved infrastructure, and community empowerment to create meaningful and sustainable geotourism experiences. By addressing these gaps, Sumedang can transform its geotourism sites into spaces that not only captivate visually but also educate and connect visitors with the region's rich geological and cultural heritage.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that tourists' perceptions of geotourism in Sumedang Regency are shaped by a complex interplay of visual appeal, accessibility challenges, and a desire for cultural engagement, highlighting critical gaps in the region's tourism ecosystem. According to Dowling and Newsome (2018), effective geotourism requires robust interpretive frameworks to transform aesthetic experiences into educational ones, a principle that resonates with the theme of natural beauty without meaning. The absence of geological narratives at sites like Mount Tampomas and Citengah Waterfall mirrors challenges observed in Indonesia's Geopark Batur, where Pamungkas et al. (2020) note that limited signage diminishes educational value. Similarly, Hanif et al. (2023) argue that West Java's tourism often fails to convey scientific or cultural significance, rendering experiences superficial. In Sumedang, this gap is evident in tourists' accounts of stunning landscapes lacking context, suggesting a need for information boards or trained guides to

narrate the geological history, such as the volcanic origins of Mount Tampomas or the sedimentary layers at Tenjolaut.

The theme of limited access and unmet expectations underscores structural barriers that hinder Sumedang's geotourism potential, aligning with Mahyuni and Rachmawati's (2024) observation that poor infrastructure exacerbates tourism inequalities. Participants' frustrations with damaged roads and unclear signage echo findings from Maros-Pangkep Geopark, where Rahman (2024) highlights accessibility as a key challenge to sustainable tourism. Globally, Trihas (2024) notes similar issues in Crete's geotourism sites, where inadequate infrastructure limits visitor satisfaction. To address this, Sumedang could implement practical solutions, such as paved pathways to Citengah Waterfall or directional signs to Panenjoan Reservoir, drawing on successful models in the Toba Caldera Geopark, as Hutagalung and Nasution (2024) emphasize infrastructure upgrades to enhance visitor experiences. These improvements would not only improve access but also align with tourists' expectations for convenience, as noted by Kim and Brown (2012), who stress the importance of holistic destination management.

The longing for cultural involvement and local narratives theme reflects tourists' desire for authentic connections with Sumedang's communities, a sentiment supported by Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social construction, which views meaning as co-created through interactions. In Sumedang, the lack of local guides at sites like Kabuyutan Citembong Girang contrasts with successful community-driven models in Fruška Gora National Park, where Obradović et al. (2023) highlight the role of residents in enriching visitor experiences. According to Hadian et al. (2025), community participation in West Java's geotourism can bridge cultural and geological narratives, as seen in the Citarum River's participatory initiatives (Novianti et al., 2023). Practical strategies, such as training local storytellers to share myths about Citembong Girang or organizing cultural festivals at Jatigede Reservoir, could foster these connections, aligning with Urry's (2022) concept of the tourist gaze as a socially constructed experience.

These findings contribute to geotourism literature by framing tourist experiences as socially constructed processes, extending beyond visual consumption to include educational and cultural dimensions (Sotiriou & Nunes, 2024; Delamontano et al., 2025). The study's emic perspective, rooted in the researcher's local knowledge, adds depth to this analysis, resonating with Cohen's (2023) emphasis on contextualized meaning-making. The implications are twofold: theoretically, this study enriches geotourism scholarship by integrating social constructionism with geological education, offering a model for qualitative exploration of tourist perceptions. It provides actionable recommendations for Sumedang's stakeholders, including the development of interpretive signage detailing geological processes, infrastructure upgrades like paved roads and clear signage, and community training programs to empower locals as cultural narrators. These strategies, inspired by successful initiatives in Rembang and digital marketing approaches in Kabaena Island, can transform Sumedang into a sustainable geotourism destination that balances education, accessibility, and cultural engagement.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that tourists' perceptions of geotourism in Sumedang Regency are shaped by three key themes: the appreciation of natural beauty marred by a lack of geological narratives, dissatisfaction due to limited access and unmet expectations, and a strong desire for cultural involvement and local stories. These findings highlight that geotourism in Sumedang is experienced as a visual spectacle but lacks the educational and cultural depth needed for transformative experiences. Sites like Mount Tampomas, Jatigede Reservoir, and Kabuyutan Citembong Girang hold immense potential as spaces for learning and cultural exchange, yet their value is diminished by absent interpretive media and minimal community engagement. By framing geotourism as a social process, this study underscores the importance of integrating geological education and local narratives to create meaningful visitor experiences that go beyond surface-level enjoyment.

The findings offer practical implications for Sumedang's stakeholders, including the local government and tourism operators, by recommending the development of interpretive signage detailing geological features, improved infrastructure such as paved roads and clear directional signs, and training programs to empower local communities as storytellers of geological and cultural narratives. These strategies can enhance visitor satisfaction and promote sustainable tourism. However, the study is limited by its focus on domestic tourists, a relatively short observation period, and a specific geographic scope within Sumedang. Future research could adopt an ethnographic approach to explore long-term interactions between tourists and local communities, investigate seasonal variations in visitor experiences, and compare Sumedang with other Indonesian geotourism destinations to identify unique challenges and opportunities. These efforts would further refine strategies for developing Sumedang as a leading geotourism destination.

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