

THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN CREATING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG GEN Z IN BATU

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of tourism in improving mental health, with a focus on its impact on Generation Z in Batu. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the world since early 2020, led to an increase in mental health issues across various groups, particularly among the younger generation. One of the responses to this situation was the growing awareness of the importance of "healing" or mental recovery, which encouraged individuals, especially Generation Z, to seek new ways of coping with stress and anxiety. One increasingly popular approach is traveling, which is believed to offer benefits for mental health. This study aims to explore whether traveling activities have a positive impact on mental health and how tourist destinations and Memorable Travel Experiences (MTE) can contribute to mental recovery. Batu was chosen as the research destination due to its variety of tourist attractions that promote relaxation and recreation. The research methodology is qualitative, with in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method and secondary data analysis through documentation and interview recordings. The study focuses on the perspectives and experiences of Generation Z regarding traveling as a way to improve their mental health. Based on the findings, traveling activities can serve as an effective means to reduce stress, enhance emotional well-being, and provide individuals with an opportunity for mental recovery. Overall, the results of this study provide deeper insights into the mutually beneficial relationship between the tourism sector and mental health, particularly among Generation Z. Therefore, the tourism sector can play an important role in supporting the psychological well-being of the younger generation by creating experiences that contribute to their mental recovery process.

Keywords: Batu, Generation Z, Memorable Travel Experience, Mental Health, Traveling

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in March 2020, had a significant impact on various sectors of life in Indonesia, including business, the economy, education, and healthcare. The government-imposed social mobility restrictions led to significant changes in public behavior, with people now paying closer attention to their health in daily activities. This change includes increased

awareness of mental health, which influences individuals' decisions about activities, including tourist destinations (Astuti & Lemy, 2022).

Prior to the pandemic, mental health issues had already been a global concern. According to the World Health Organization (2023), more than 450 million people worldwide suffer from mental health disorders, while in Indonesia, Riset Kesehatan Dasar shows over 19 million people aged 15 and above

were reported to have emotional mental disorders (Widyawati, 2021).

In this context, mental health literacy becomes a key element in addressing mental health issues. Jorm (2000) defines mental health literacy as the knowledge and understanding required to recognize, manage, and prevent mental disorders. Further research has shown that mental health literacy also reduces stigma, improves help-seeking behavior, and promotes positive mental health (Kutcher et al., 2016). With the arrival of the post-epidemic era, tourism has seen a significant surge worldwide. The connection between tourism and mental health has become a widely discussed issue. Tourism positively impacts personal mental health, with the most notable benefits observed in unmarried, childless middle-aged and young individuals (Tian et al., 2024). And with the increased attention to mental health during the pandemic, many individuals began seeking ways to reduce stress and anxiety, one of which is through activities like traveling and exploring new places, now commonly referred to as "self-healing" (Astuti & Lemy, 2022).

This phenomenon aligns with findings that traveling can provide mental health benefits, improving individuals' well-being through experiences that renew energy and reduce stress (Mirehie & Sharayevska, 2022). Tourism, typically associated with pleasure and an escape from routine, has a deeper role in enhancing psychological well-being, particularly for individuals seeking ways to cope with mental health issues (Ettema et al., 2012; Sirgy et al., 2010). This has spurred research on how travel experiences can affect mental health, particularly among younger generations, such as Generation Z, who increasingly

rely on online reviews and social media in selecting tourist destinations (Ayu Aryasih et al., 2023). Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010 (Barhate & Dirani, 2022), is an important demographic to study in this context.

Batu City, known as one of the tourist cities in East Java, serves as a relevant example in this research context. With its stunning natural beauty and various available tourist attractions, Batu City has attracted both domestic and international tourists.

Tabel 1. Data on Number of Visitors

No	Year	Foreign	Local	Total
1	2016	3.392	2.412.097	2.415.489
2	2017	4.622	4.184.288	4.188.910
3	2018	10.557	4.977.784	4.988.341
4	2019	11.736	6.035.724	6.047.460
				17.640.200

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Batu (processed 2020)

The natural beauty and the tranquility of its mountainous air make this city an ideal place for those looking to escape from the daily hustle and seek peace. Along with the tagline "Shining Batu," which portrays the city as a comfortable, safe, and prosperous place, Batu not only attracts tourists for its natural beauty but also offers comfort that supports mental recovery for its visitors (Alvianna et al., 2022).

Research on tourism in Batu City in the last 7 years is as follows, the actor network model in tourism management in Batu City during the Covid-19 pandemic included internal government actors, as well as external government actors, such as investors/private sector (community organizations), society, academics, and the mass media (Lestari et al., 2021). The state remains responsible for managing tourism development policy and progress in Batu City (Wijayanto et al., 2023). The

key to MCR2030's (Making Cities Resilient) success lies in fostering resilience among stakeholders and local organizations (Sholeha et al., 2022). Changes in spatial planning that prioritize capital interests have impacted the cultural values and mindset of Batu's residents (Kodir, 2018). Several strategies will be chosen as the best alternative solution for the agro-business situation in Punten Village, Batu (Gunarta & Hanggara, 2018). The potential areas for development in Gunungsari, Bumiaji, Batu include cultural tourism, agrotourism, accommodation, and infrastructure (Sugihariyanto et al., 2019).

This study aims to understand the extent to which travel and tourism experiences can enhance mental health, with a particular focus on Batu City, a tourist destination known for memorable experiences. In this context, the research will examine three main questions: (1) Does travel affect mental health? (2) Does the tourist destination affect mental health? and (3) Does a memorable travel experience influence mental health? These questions are expected to provide deeper insights into the relationship between tourism and mental health and contribute to the development of knowledge in this field, particularly in the context of Batu City as a tourist destination with great potential for providing mental health benefits.

With this background, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the impact of tourism on mental health and enrich the existing literature on the relationship between travel experiences and mental recovery, especially in the post-pandemic era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covid-19 pandemic has altered people's behavior, with significant impacts on the tourism industry. The social restrictions implemented forced people to pay more attention to their health and change their travel destination choices (Astuti & Lemy, 2022). One emerging phenomenon is the increased focus of tourists on self-healing and activities related to mental recovery, such as traveling (Astuti & Lemy, 2022; Jorm, 2000).

Before the pandemic, mental health had already been a major global concern, with over 450 million people experiencing mental health disorders (World Health Organization, 2023). The significance of tackling job insecurity within the tourism industry and its effects on employees' mental well-being (Elshaer & Azazz, 2023). It connects the fear of a crisis with the poor mental health of employees. Additionally, the employability of cruise ship workers in other industries can serve as a resource that either mitigates or amplifies the impact of crisis-related fear on their mental well-being (Arjona-Fuentes et al., 2022). There were notable associations discovered between body mass index and bullying, internet addiction and body mass index, as well as internet addiction and mental health (Dana Nindrea et al., n.d.). Stress may significantly influence the decision-making process of employees considering leaving their job because of social loafing. This suggests that efforts to reduce social loafing could also improve mental well-being and lower the intention to leave the organization (Elshaer et al., 2023).

Healthy food options, essential facilities, and staff service had a significant impact on perceived quality. This perceived quality played a key role in shaping

perceived mental health, which, in turn, affected eudaimonic well-being. Overall satisfaction was directly influenced by perceived quality, mental health, and eudaimonic well-being (Chua et al., 2024).

Traveling can be one way to reduce stress and improve psychological well-being (Mirehie & Sharayevska, 2022). Poor mental health accounts for roughly 10% of global GNP. For many individuals, spending time in nature helps enhance mental well-being (R. Buckley, 2020). Governments and policymakers should enhance mental health interventions, increase access to counseling services, promote economic growth, and expand local employment opportunities (He et al., 2023).

Traveling and Mental Health

Traveling can be an activity that supports an individual's psychological well-being. Travel activities allow individuals to reduce stress and anxiety and to escape monotonous routines. Several studies have shown that travel has a positive impact on psychological well-being, including stress reduction and increased positive feelings (Mirehie & Sharayevska, 2022).

The self-healing phenomenon associated with travel includes benefits such as stress reduction, increased self-confidence, and enriching cultural experiences (Yuniawati & Finardi, 2016). Travel, whether solo or in groups, has been shown to enhance individuals' psychological well-being (Rasouli & Timmermans, 2014).

Tourism plays a role in promoting mental health. We could: acknowledge, assess, appreciate, and promote these benefits; analyze key elements and create products to enhance mental health outcomes; and incorporate mental health

benefits into tourism marketing and advocacy efforts (R. Buckley, 2023).

Destinations and Mental Health

Batu City is an attractive tourist destination, offering a wide variety of attractions and comprehensive facilities, including accommodations, restaurants, and shopping centers. The city offers a peaceful and natural atmosphere, far from the hustle and bustle of large cities, making it an ideal place for relaxation and mental recovery (Alvianna et al., 2022; Imad, 2023).

The increasing demand for mental health services, coupled with obstacles in accessing care, has led individuals to explore alternative approaches for improving their well-being. Purposeful forms of tourism, especially nature-based and regenerative tourism, could play a significant role in addressing this growing need in ways that traditional mental health efforts may not fully meet (Thornton et al., 2024).

Based on the increasing mental health issues and the relationship between travel and its positive impact, this research aims to examine the extent to which travel can help address mental health problems. Although this issue has been studied previously, my research offers a different solution by suggesting travel to Batu, which offers various attractions and easy accessibility, thus creating a memorable experience for visitors. This can foster a desire for repeat visits, particularly among Generation Z.

Memorable Travel Experience and Mental Health

Having a memorable travel experience positively impacts not only the recovery process during the trip itself but also contributes to recovery in everyday life after the trip. While the recovery

experience during the trip is significant, it is important to note that recovery after returning to daily life is more closely related to an individual's overall well-being. This emphasizes how an extraordinary travel experience can influence routine activities in everyday life (Kawakubo, 2022). On the other hand, a negative tourism experience is associated with reduced mental health (Han et al., 2021).

This study uses a qualitative method. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research explores and understands the meaning derived from a number of individuals or groups regarding social issues, with a case study examining Batu City as a tourist destination. The model used is the Self-Healing through tourism model, which links travel with improvements in mental health and psychological well-being. In practice, it is essential to integrate tourism products and services into mental health care and create tourism experiences based on the principles of positive psychology (Chen et al., 2024).

This model was chosen because Batu City has characteristics as an attractive tourist destination suitable for self-healing activities. With various tourist attractions and easy accessibility, Batu can serve as a good example for testing the influence of travel on mental health.

To obtain relevant data, the primary data sources used in this study are in-depth interviews. The criteria for informants include one psychologist or mental health expert, one professional in the tourism and travel field, and five tourists who have visited Batu City, all aged 12 to 27.

The data collected from interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes

related to self-healing experiences through travel.

Based on the theoretical review outlined above, the hypotheses proposed are as follows:

1. Does traveling affect mental health?
2. Does the destination affect mental health?
3. Does a memorable travel experience affect mental health?

The research model, developed based on these hypotheses, aims to test the relationships among travel, tourist destinations, memorable travel experiences, and mental health. This study will focus on Batu City as a tourist destination that offers memorable experiences for Gen Z tourists, thereby positively influencing their mental health. Thus, this research will not only examine the impact of travel on mental health but also contribute to a deeper understanding of how travel experiences can serve as an effective means to improve individuals' psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research conducted by the researcher, which involved interviews with one expert in the field of tour and travel, one expert in psychology, and five other individuals who had previously visited Batu.

Tabel 2. Informants Identities

No	Informant Name	Gender	Age	Description
1	IO	Male	56	Tour & Travel Professional
2	CL	Female	41	Psychologist Expert
3	KS	Female	19	Tourist
4	MA	Female	23	Tourist

5	PL	Female	25	Tourist
6	SA	Female	22	Tourist
7	DG	Male	21	Tourist

Source: Interviews

Based on the table provided, the researcher selected informant samples according to the predetermined criteria that are relevant to the objectives of this study.

Informant 1 (IO) a Tour and Travel Professional, and informant 2 (CL) a Psychologist Expert, both stated that traveling can improve the quality of life and reduce stress.

Traveling Affects Mental Health

Traveling has a significant impact on mental health, with all participants agreeing that traveling serves as an outlet or escape from the pressures of work and daily tasks. As stated by the informants below:

"This activity can help reduce stress levels and trigger the release of hormones that contribute to feelings of happiness (CL)"

"Moreover, the type of travel whether in a group, with family, or solo, also influences its effects on individuals. A travel is considered leisure if it's with family or alone. Group or family travel strengthens social bonds and enhances teamwork. In contrast, solo travelers are able to address personal life challenges, leading to an expansion of their mindset (IO)"

These statements are also supported by previous research showing that travel experiences offer various benefits to individuals and families. Traveling alone allows one to break free from daily routines, reduce stress, try new things, practice control and freedom, and improve

both mental and physical health. Ultimately, this enhances individual well-being (Mirehie & Sharayevska, 2022).

Religious and cultural tourism activities serve educational, leisure, and recreational purposes and also offer stabilizing, stress-relieving, and consensus-building benefits, all of which contribute to enhancing physical and mental health (Lin, Lin, et al., 2022). Families who spend on tourism are less likely to experience negative emotions or mental health issues. Additionally, there are positive effects between family tourism activities and the mental health of its members. This highlights tourism as an effective method for addressing national mental health challenges (Sun et al., 2022).

Destination Affects Mental Health

Gen Z travelers choose Batu as a destination for relaxation or stress relief because of the wide variety of attractions in the area. Informants who have visited mentioned:

"Activities that are usually done include taking photos, exploring food, looking for new atmospheres, playing at Jatim Park 123, and BNS as well (KS)"

"Coffee, eating, family time (MA)"

"First, go to Alun-Alun for food, enjoy the city view from the top of the hill, mountain views, flower gardens, and for games, BNS and JTP (PL)"

"When arriving in Batu, I definitely try the local food and visit the amusement parks BNS/JTP (SA)"

"Just go to Paralayang, have coffee, and explore food (DG)"

This suggests that Batu offers a diverse range of tourism experiences, including culinary, nature, theme parks, and cafes. This statement is also supported by previous studies, stating

that Batu City offers a variety of highly appealing tourist attractions, including natural tourism, artificial tourism, fruit tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, culinary tourism, sports tourism, wildlife tourism, and shopping tourism (Alvianna, et al., 2022).

Completely new results encompass: psychological recovery, the discovery of a previously absent life element, and positive effects on family members. Psychological transformation, which has been reported for extreme sports but not for hiking in nature, is also a noteworthy outcome. Other outcomes identified previously include: happiness, gratitude, relaxation, clarity and insights, appreciation of nature, a sense of challenge and personal capability, and the effects of companionship and community (R. Buckley & Westaway, 2020).

In addition to its diverse and attractive destinations, one of the key factors that Gen Z travelers consider when choosing Batu is its relatively cool and refreshing climate. The mild temperatures in Batu create a calming environment, helping soothe both the mind and emotions. As stated by the informants:

“The temperature in Batu is also lower, but it's different from Bromo, where the temperature is hard to handle. In Batu, we can handle it comfortably because it's not too cold. With the refreshing cold, the vacation becomes more enjoyable compared to the heat (PL)”

“Of course, because in the city there's already a lot of pressure, but in nature, it's fresher, especially in Batu, where it's cooler, so it's more refreshing (MA)”

“It definitely helps a lot, especially in Surabaya, which is densely populated and has quite hot

weather, that's why we usually go to Batu to refresh and get rid of stress (SA)”

Previous research also supports this statement, noting that the mountain environment is cooler, more natural, tranquil, and far from the hustle and bustle of urban areas, with varied topography. This indicates that people living in mountainous regions have higher cardiac function efficiency in pumping blood compared to those living in coastal or lowland areas (Ahmad, 2016). And The healthcare industry acknowledges the importance of nature in promoting mental health (R. C. Buckley & Cooper, 2022). On the other hand spiritual tourism services can be developed to effectively combine the need for natural surroundings, psychological connection, and social engagement, providing sustained mental health support for young people (Dong et al., 2025).

Factors that encourage Generation Z to choose Batu as a tourist destination, despite the availability of various other options and its cool climate, include ease of access, with roads leading to the location easily navigable and accessible via map applications. As stated by the informants:

“It's very easy, it's already on Google Maps, and there are signs on the road as well. For example, if you want to go to BNS, there are directions on where to turn left and where to turn right (SA)”

“It's easy, now the roads are wider, so access is much easier (MA)”

“It's easy, there's Waze, and the road signs are clear (DG)”

The Theory of Planned Behavior model can be expanded by adding two new key elements (psychological capital and mental health/well-being factors) that

may influence the promotion of tourists' intention to continue volunteering (Demirović Bajrami et al., 2023).

Memorable Travel Experience Affects Mental Health

According to experts, such as Informant 1 (IO) a Tour and Travel Professional, it is agreed that

“Memorable experiences are difficult to forget, and positive memories can influence one's mental well-being. Generation Z, in particular, tends to capture these meaningful moments through social media (IO)”.

Similarly, Informant 2 (CL) a Psychology Expert, concurs that:

“Positive experiences during travel contribute to happiness. When individuals experience happiness while traveling, it positively impacts their overall well-being. For instance, visiting a traditional village allows individuals to reflect on themselves, cultivate gratitude, and enhance their psychological well-being. In essence, travel provides an opportunity to break from routine, gain new perspectives, and increase happiness, thereby improving life satisfaction and overall well-being (CL)”.

Age has a notable impact on the physical and mental health benefits of village tourism for tourists. Additionally, the duration of the tour significantly affects tourists' state of mind (Li & Xu, 2024). Although the villages were not highly developed economically, environmentally, or ecologically, as long as community security remained stable, living conditions could be safe and convenient. This would allow people to maintain their daily routines and leisure activities, helping them stabilize their

emotions and mindset while preserving their physical and mental health, ultimately meeting their living needs and reducing stress (Lin, Ting, et al., 2022).

Having a memorable travel experience positively impacts not only the recovery process during the trip but also recovery in daily life after the trip. While the recovery experience during the travel is significant, it is important to highlight that it is the recovery after returning to everyday life that is more strongly linked to an individual's overall well-being. This emphasizes how extraordinary travel experiences can influence routine activities in everyday life (Kawakubo, 2022). People's interest in returning to a destination is also influenced by their experience during the trip. Sirgy et al., (2010) created a scale to evaluate the positive and negative effects of vacations on different areas of life, such as social life, family life, recreational activities, cultural experiences, health and safety, and psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Does Traveling Affect Mental Health?

Based on the research and discussion regarding the role of tourism in improving mental health among Gen Z in Batu, it can be concluded that traveling to Batu is considered an effective means of enhancing mental well-being for this generation. Gen Z believes that travel offers a valuable opportunity to escape daily stressors, enabling them to gain new perspectives and experiences that enhance their overall quality of life. The variety of attractions, cool climate, and ease of access in Batu create an environment where positive experiences can trigger the release of happiness hormones, ultimately reducing stress levels. Thus, Gen Z perceives Batu as an ideal destination to foster mental relaxation and well-being.

Does the Tourist Destination Affect Mental Health?

Batu, as a destination chosen by Gen Z for its potential to enhance mental health, proves to be an attractive option for this generation. In addition to its diverse tourism offerings, such as culinary experiences, nature spots, theme parks, and vibrant cafes, Batu also provides a cool climate that supports relaxation and emotional well-being. Ease of access is another key factor influencing Gen Z's decision to visit, as the roads leading to Batu are easily navigable and can be accessed via modern map applications. The combination of diverse attractions, refreshing air, and convenient access makes Batu an ideal destination for Gen Z travelers seeking a vacation that also promotes mental health.

Does the Memorable Travel Affect Mental Health?

Gen Z strongly believes that a memorable travel experience in Batu significantly enhances mental health. Enjoyable experiences during travel not only provide a break from daily routines but also have a lasting impact, encouraging tourists to revisit and continue fostering happiness. The recovery process during the trip itself is important, but the recovery after returning to everyday life plays an even more significant role in an individual's overall well-being. Gen Z perceives that traveling to Batu, with its diverse attractions, cool climate, and accessible location, creates lasting positive memories that help reduce stress and improve mental health in the long run.

To further develop this work, future research could investigate and explore specific types of tourist destinations in Batu that are most effective in reducing stress or improving mental health for Gen Z. For example, it could examine whether nature tourism, cultural tourism, or educational tourism

has the most significant impact on enhancing their happiness and quality of life. Additionally, future researchers could explore the long-term effects of tourism activities on Gen Z's mental health. While traveling provides quick positive effects, the question remains whether these impacts are temporary or can persist over a longer period. This would allow future researchers to develop policy recommendations that support mental health-friendly tourism, particularly for the younger generation. These recommendations could include developing tourism facilities that better support mental well-being, or creating tourism programs specifically designed to reduce stress and enhance mental health.

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