



# How to manage the perfect wave: Surfing tourism management in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia



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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable marine tourism management is significantly assisted by the involvement of all relevant stakeholder groups including the local community. Co-management is an effective approach to marine tourism management in Indonesia, integrating government policy, sound business practices, customary laws and local territorial rights. This paper examines the current management approach to the Mentawai Islands surfing tourism industry by exploring multiple stakeholder perspectives. Field research was conducted in the period between July and September of 2010, through 108 in-depth interviews with surfing tourists, surf operators, government officials and NGO employees. The paper indicates that surfing tourists, resort and charter boat operators and local community perceived that the current management of the Mentawai surfing tourism industry was inadequate at protecting the marine resources it was based on. A key finding of this paper was that stakeholders identified that ingrained government corruption has led to a failure of the current surf tourism management scheme. In conclusion corruption, coordination of government resources, securing the trust of stakeholders, and incorporating local community knowledge into the management framework are seen as the major barriers to effective management of the Mentawai Islands surfing tourism industry.

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia has a history of poorly managed marine and coastal resources (Purwaka, 2001). Denying the local community access to resources, and the lack of acknowledgement of local residents' needs, have resulted in a considerable conflict between government and the community (Down to Earth, 2000). Indonesian government policies have focused on maximising profits, and being largely uncoordinated, they often overlap and are incompatible with local-level management schemes. Local governments have minimal decision-making power and lack authority to regulate coastal resources of their regional. Compounding the challenges for local governments is their limited mechanisms for raising revenue directly and being solely dependent upon funding from the central government, which maintains the latter's financial and political control (Siry, 2011, p. 470).

Surfing tourism is a relatively recent activity in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia, and it is a rapidly growing industry with the

number of surfing resorts and charter boats increasing every year. The economic benefits that surfing tourism brings to destinations around the world have been significant (Gough, 1999; Nelsen et al., 2007; Lazarow, 2007; Lazarow et al., 2008; Ntloko and Swart, 2008; Martin and Assenov, 2012). However, in some locations the benefits that the local community receives have been limited (Ponting et al., 2005; Ponting, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, indications from two studies, in Costa Rica and Indonesia, suggest surfing tourism at a local scale can be responsible for adverse environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts (Lazarow et al., 2007; Ponting, 2008; Ponting and Obrien, 2014). Therefore, effective management and regulation of the Mentawai surf tourism industry is vital for future sustainable development.

## 2. Literature review

Over the last decade, the management coastal zones in Indonesia has moved into a new phase due to a fundamental shift in the Indonesian politics. Once President Suharto fell from power in 1998, Indonesia went through a period of rapid reform, and decentralisation emerged as the redesign of central–local government relationships (Siry, 2011, p. 471). The most significant changes

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were the enactment of two new laws in 1999 which focused on administrative and fiscal decentralisation. The Autonomy Act 22/1999 and the Financial Distribution Act 25/1999 delegated management duties to provincial, district and local administrations (Wever et al., 2012, p. 66). These two laws delivered openings for a change in coastal management (Patlis, 2005, p. 455). Indonesian government structure has three sub-national administrative levels: provincial; district; and local (Fig. 1).

The Autonomy Act (22/1999) allowed the administrative decentralisation principle to be applied to coastal zone management, through the process of devolving regulatory power to the individual provinces and districts (Pratikto, 2001). Under Law 22/1999, provincial authorities have the rights to control coastal zones that extend 12 nautical miles from the shoreline, while district governments manage one-third of the provincial management area (i.e. four nautical miles from shore) (Wever et al., 2012, p. 66). Local governments are charged with the management of the coastal resources within their region, for example aquaculture activities (Kay and Alder, 2005). Law 22/1999 removes the earlier hierarchical framework between city, district and provincial governments, giving local villages' greater power to adapt policy to fit localised settings. The law also promotes the incorporation of local territorial rights and customary laws into district government policy, as well as encouraging community-based and collaborative approaches to managing coastal resources (Siry, 2011, p. 471).

An example of the impacts of the decentralisation law can be found in North Sulawesi, where the provincial government ratified a innovative provincial ruling (*Perda*), No. 4/2000, to manage the Bunaken Marine National Park through the establishment of an integrated management organisation (Pratikto, 2001). The *Perda* gives the bulk of the revenue collected from entrance fees to the newly created authority, that are used for enforcement, joint surveillance and conservation programmes in the reserve. The Coastal Zone and Small Islands Management Act (Law 27/2007) adopted in 2007 is the basic management tool concerning oceans, beaches and small islands (Siswanto et al., 2011). Law 27/2007 has four goals: to encourage the growth of community-based marine parks; to support the distribution of local administration income to fund implementing decentralised management of coastal zones; to empower local villages to safeguard their coastline; and to administer the necessary requirements for integrated coastal management (Siry, 2011, p.472).

Siry (2011, p.476) notes that community-based marine resource management in which the administration is shared between the local communities and government is the most suitable approach to protecting coastal environments in rural Indonesia, allowing a fair balance of power. The central government plays a crucial role in successful community-based management schemes and must

endorse and deliver training for government of all levels (Siry, 2006). Technical support can be required by local governments, non-governmental groups, private enterprises in the financing, planning and management of decentralised functions (World Bank, 2002). Community-based marine resource management empowers the host population, supports community learning and integration, and allows an extensive range of stakeholders to contribute equally in management processes (Jentoft, 2006).

The success of any community-based approach involves the participation of all relevant stakeholders, shared responsibility (Siry, 2006), constant and dependable relationships between the local tourism stakeholders and the planning authorities (Haukeland, 2011), and frequent and effective communications (McCool, 2009). Active involvement and self-regulation and in management approaches by local communities have yet to materialised in Indonesia; therefore, greater stakeholder involvement and the gradual implementation of a co-management approach is required. Strong intervention by previous centralist governments and the legacy of a controlling administration have made the local population cautious of participation and involvement, hindering the management of coastal resources in the region (Siry, 2011).

### 2.1. Case study area: Mentawai Islands, Indonesia

The Mentawai Islands are located off the West Sumatran coast, Indonesia (Fig. 2). The island chain has four islands - North and South Pagai, Siberuta and Sipora, which have a combined land area of approximately 7000 square kilometres (Whittaker, 2006). Siberut, the largest of the Mentawai Islands, has a huge rainforest in the interior and a maze of inland waterways, which support diverse wildlife. The smallest island, Sipora is sandwiched between North Pagai and Siberut. It is home to the administrative capital, Tuapejat, and is the base of most government activity and industry for the Mentawais. North and South Pagai, the southernmost islands, are divided by a narrow strait and are the most remote of all the island group, linked to the other islands via a weekly ferry service.

The Mentawai Islands have an estimated population of 70,000 people, including of up of 90% indigenous Mentawai (SurfAid International, 2008). There are, however, many other ethnic groups present in the Mentawai Islands, most notably Minangkabau, Javanese and Batak (Persoon, 2003). The major towns on the four main islands service the outlying villages. On Sundays, the local food markets draw a flotilla of small dugouts and motor boats from all over the island, with villagers intent on buying their fresh fruit and vegetables imported from mainland Sumatra. The larger towns are very similar to elsewhere in Indonesia. They have paved roads with hundreds of scooters and small buses rushing around, Internet cafes with children playing games, large mosques and diverse food eateries full of spicy Padang food. The majority of inland villages are a stark contrast from their coastal counterparts, with the Mentawai people living in traditional villages (*uma*) along river banks within the dense jungle. Mentawai people in these isolated areas live a largely hunter-and-gatherer lifestyle; however, they have domesticated chickens and pigs and cultivated perennial crops, with sago, banana and taro being the staple foods. Employment opportunities in these traditional villages are scarce. The economy is agriculture based, with bananas and copra being the main exports, which are ferried to Padang on mainland Sumatra.

The Mentawai Islands are home to some of the finest waves for surfing found anywhere in the world, created by a perfect blend of long-range swell, light offshore winds and coral reefs. The waves break in very shallow water, creating long, hollow, high-performance waves, allowing surfers to complete multiple manoeuvres. What makes the Mentawais even more marketable is that there are such a large number of good waves in close vicinity,

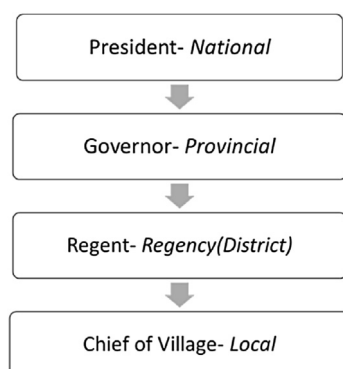


Fig. 1. Indonesian administrative structure.

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