



Tourism Development in Ulee Lheue Village After the 2005 Tsunami-2024

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Abstract:

This study examines the development of tourism in Ulee Lheue Village, Meuraxa Subdistrict, Banda Aceh City, following the 2004 tsunami over the period 2005–2024. Ulee Lheue, a strategic coastal area, was previously known as a center for maritime ports, marine tourism, and local economic activities. However, the 2004 tsunami caused severe damage to tourism infrastructure, residential areas, and led to a decline in economic activity and tourist visits. Through post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction involving the government, relevant institutions, and the local community, Ulee Lheue gradually experienced recovery and transformation into a tourism area. This study employs a qualitative approach using historical methods, including the stages of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected through interviews, documentation, and literature review from primary and secondary sources. The results indicate that tourism development in Ulee Lheue progressed through several phases, beginning with the reconstruction of basic infrastructure, development of tourism facilities, and diversification of tourism attractions such as marine, culinary, religious, and historical tourism. The designation of Ulee Lheue as a tourist village marked a significant milestone in strengthening the area's identity as a post-disaster tourist destination. These developments have positively impacted local economic activities, social changes, and the utilization of the tsunami's historical value as an educational and tourism resource. The study concludes that the synergy between the government and local community is the key factor in the successful and sustainable development of tourism in Ulee Lheue after the tsunami.

Keywords: Tourism, Ulee Lheue, Tourism Village.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors that plays an important role in improving the local economy and promoting regional development, particularly in coastal areas. Tourism is not only related to recreational activities but also encompasses social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects that are interconnected. In the context of coastal areas, tourism development is greatly influenced by geographical conditions, the natural potential of beaches, and the socio-economic activities of local communities. Therefore, tourism is a relevant sector to study, especially in regions that have experienced significant changes due to natural disasters, as such events impact not only physical infrastructure but also the sustainability of social and economic life.

Ulee Lheue Village, located in Meuraxa Subdistrict, Banda Aceh City, is a strategic coastal area that played an important role in community life before the 2004 tsunami. The village was known as a center for maritime ports, fishing activities, and marine tourism frequently visited by the public. The presence of Ulee Lheue Port made the area a main transportation route connecting Banda Aceh City with Weh Island (Sabang) and also promoted the growth of economic activities in trade, services, and tourism. Ulee Lheue Beach served as a recreational space for the community and became an integral part of the coastal identity of Banda Aceh City. These conditions made Ulee Lheue Village one of the important areas in the development of coastal tourism in Banda Aceh before the disaster (Meutia et al., 2023).

In 2004, Ulee Lheue was among the areas most severely affected by the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh. The disaster caused extensive damage to port infrastructure, tourism facilities, and residential areas, halting almost all economic activities and tourist visits. The tsunami not only destroyed tourism facilities but also altered the lifestyle of coastal communities who had long depended on maritime and tourism sectors. This situation led to a decline in local economic activity and changes in the functional use of the coastal area in Ulee Lheue.

Following the tsunami, since 2005, Ulee Lheue Village began undergoing a process of rehabilitation and reconstruction involving the government and various related institutions. The rebuilding of basic infrastructure, coastal area planning, and restoration of port functions became the initial steps in the village's recovery. As the physical condition of the area improved, community activities gradually resumed, and the tourism sector began to grow again. The coastal area started to be utilized as a space for recreation and tourism, accompanied by the development of culinary activities and supporting tourism services. In addition, the tsunami event also became part of the area's history, which was later utilized as an educational and historical tourism resource (BRR Aceh-Nias, 2005–2009).

The development of tourism in Ulee Lheue Village became increasingly evident with the addition of tourism support facilities and the rising number of local and regional visitors. The area developed not only as a marine tourism destination but also as a center for culinary, religious, and historical tourism. This development reached a significant milestone when Ulee Lheue Village was officially designated as a Tourism Village by the Banda Aceh City Government. This designation marked the transformation of the area from a post-disaster coastal zone into a tourism destination with economic, social, and historical value. Overall, the development of tourism in Ulee Lheue Village demonstrates a process of post-tsunami recovery and transformation, with the tourism sector continuing to grow up to 2024.

Methods

The use of research methods in a study is very important because it aims to assist the research process. In this study, the method employed is the historical method. According to Kuntowijoyo, there are several procedures in the historical method, including: 1) Topic Selection, 2) Heuristics or Source Collection, 3) Verification or Criticism, 4) Interpretation, and 5) Historiography or Historical Writing (Kuntowijoyo, 2018:69). The approach and type of research used in this study is qualitative. This approach attempts to describe the focus of the study by collecting documents, conducting interviews, and performing observations. The type of research employed is historical research, which aims to reconstruct past events from historical sources in an objective manner.

Data Sources

1. Primary Data

According to Kuntowijoyo (2013:75), primary data are data obtained directly from eyewitnesses or actors involved in historical events. In this study, primary data consist of written and oral sources. Written sources include the Decree (SK) establishing Ulee Lheue Village as a Tourism Village, the Aceh Museum Library, the Banda Aceh City Tourism Office, as well as newspaper and magazine articles covering the development of tourism in Ulee Lheue Village. In addition, the researcher also used statistical data on tourist visits from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Banda Aceh City, as well as visual documentation such as photographs of tourism activities and tourism infrastructure before and after the tsunami. Meanwhile, oral sources were obtained through direct interviews with historical actors and relevant figures. The oral sources in this study were obtained from informants, namely Busriadi Bustamam, Sofian, Imam Hasikin, and Tina.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data serve as complementary and supporting sources to primary data. In this study, secondary data consist of books, articles, journals, and reports that discuss the development of tourism in Aceh, particularly those focusing on tourism in Ulee Lheue Village after the tsunami.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is the stage of searching for and obtaining the necessary data for research, with the goal of acquiring accurate and relevant information. In this study, three procedures were employed:

1. Literature Review

The literature review was conducted through the examination of documents, books, journals, articles, and scientific reports relevant to the study. Sources were collected from the Banda Aceh City Tourism Office, Aceh Museum Library, Ulee Lheue Village Office, and the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Banda Aceh City, and were supplemented with online sources from the official website of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the Jadesta portal (Tourism Village Network).

2. Dokumentation

Documentation was conducted to obtain credible information in the form of archives, photographs, and literature. The researcher collected data through visits to the Banda Aceh City Tourism Office (tourist visit data and promotional documents), Ulee Lheue Village Office (village profile archives), Aceh Museum Library (pre-tsunami literature), and the Central Statistics Agency of Banda Aceh City (population and livelihood data). In addition, the researcher also utilized online sources from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf), the Jadesta portal, and the official website of the Banda Aceh City Government to obtain up-to-date information on the status of Ulee Lheue Village as a tourist destination and the development of its supporting facilities.

3. Interviews

Interviews are a step in collecting information from informants by conducting direct or indirect dialogues based on an interview guide. The informants interviewed in this study included Busriadi Bustamam, Sofian, Imam Hasikin, and Tina.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is the process of interpreting the collected data and organizing it into a historical narrative. In this study, three steps were employed:

1. Verification

Verification is an essential stage in historical research for critically examining data sources. According to Kuntowijoyo (2018:77), source criticism is divided into external and internal criticism. External criticism is applied to test the authenticity and authority of sources; for example, archives from the Banda Aceh City Tourism Office, Ulee Lheue Village Office, and the Banda Aceh City Statistics Agency (BPS) are verified by checking the legality of the institution and the year of publication. Meanwhile, for online news articles or official web pages, such as those from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) and Jadesta, internal criticism is conducted by assessing the content and credibility of the publishing platform.

2. Interpretation

Interpretation is the process of analyzing verified data. This stage involves analysis and synthesis (Kuntowijoyo, 2003). In this study, the researcher connects all the collected data, combining quantitative data, such as population statistics and the number of tourist visits, with qualitative data from interviews and literature.

3. Historiography

The final stage in historical research is historiography, or the writing of history. At this stage, the researcher uses a chronological approach by arranging historical facts according to the sequence of events, starting from the profile and development of Ulee Lheue Village before the tsunami, up to its current condition as a tourist destination and the development of its supporting facilities.

Results

The Impact of the 2004 Tsunami on Tourism in Ulee Lheue Village

1. Tourism Conditions in Ulee Lheue Village Before the Tsunami

Ulee Lheue was a coastal area on the western side of Banda Aceh City, facing the Malacca Strait and Weh Island, with a strategic position in terms of maritime access and tourism potential. The peri-urban study area was estimated to cover approximately 67.5 hectares, while the operational port area before the tsunami was around 8 hectares (Dishub, 2021). The gently sloping coastline, white sand, and calm waters made this area safe and comfortable for public recreation (Hasikin, interview: July 20, 2025).

Before the tsunami, Ulee Lheue had become one of the favorite destinations for Banda Aceh residents, especially in the late afternoon, offering expansive sea views, small islands in the distance, and green hills as a backdrop (Bustamam, interview: July 20, 2025). Physically, the area consisted of lowlands with a green belt and limited coastal vegetation, making it vulnerable to large waves (Meutia, 2019). Since the late 19th century, the Dutch built a pier and the Ulee Lheue–Koetaradja railway line as military facilities, which later developed into a center for trade and population mobility (Sudirman et al., 2007). Port activities remained vital until the early 2000s, including crossings to Sabang, Lhokseumawe, and other coastal cities, which also attracted domestic and international tourists (Dishub Aceh, 2021).

In addition to its function as a port, Ulee Lheue was known as a recreational area. Pantai Cermin was crowded every weekend for swimming, playing in the sand, or simply enjoying the scenery (Bustamam, 2025). Historical and religious values were also significant, with the 17th-century Baiturrahim Mosque serving as an icon of the community's spiritual and social identity (Meutia, 2023:31–32). Local economic activities, such as traditional fishing, small kiosks, and boat repairs, completed the dynamics of the coastal area. Thus, before the 2004 tsunami, Ulee Lheue functioned dually as a strategic port, a trade hub, and a recreational destination, integral to the socio-economic life of Banda Aceh residents.

2. The Impact of the Tsunami on Tourism in Ulee Lheue Village

The Aceh tsunami on December 26, 2004, brought significant changes to Ulee Lheue Village, an area previously known as a major port and a favorite tourist destination for Banda Aceh residents. Waves over 30 meters high destroyed nearly all settlements, port facilities, and tourist amenities along the coast. Community activities came to a complete halt, and the once-bustling area was transformed into a vast expanse of debris and mud (BRR NAD–Nias, 2006).

The port ceased functioning entirely. Ferries to Sabang could not operate due to severe damage to the pier and access routes. The fishing and traditional trade sectors were also completely paralyzed, as boats, fishing equipment, kiosks, and seafood warehouses were destroyed (FAO/WFP, 2005). The tsunami's impact on tourism was equally significant. Data from the Aceh Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism showed a drastic decline in visitor numbers in 2004, with only 294,528 domestic tourists and 83 international tourists, reflecting the paralysis of the coastal tourism sector, including Ulee Lheue (PPID Aceh, 2018). Destroyed infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and ports, worsened the economic situation for communities that had previously relied on tourism and maritime trade. For several months after the disaster, residents depended entirely on government and international aid for food, clean water, and medicine.

Amid this devastation, the Baiturrahim Mosque was the only large building to remain standing. Located just about 10 meters from the shoreline, the mosque suffered only minor damage (Syamsidik et al., 2019). The survival of Baiturrahim Mosque came to be seen as a symbol of Acehnese resilience, providing new hope for recovery while serving as a reminder to future generations of the tsunami's magnitude. Initial recovery efforts included clearing debris along main roads and reopening transportation access, even though the surrounding area remained filled with building ruins (AndyNelson/TCSM, 2005). This condition marked the beginning of a long reconstruction process and emphasized the importance of sustaining economic, social, and cultural life in Ulee Lheue after the disaster.

Discussion

Post-Tsunami Tourism Development in Ulee Lheue Village

1. Reconstruction of Ulee Lheue Village After the Tsunami

Ulee Lheue, located directly on the coast, suffered severe damage during the December 26, 2004 tsunami, with nearly all infrastructure from settlements and traditional markets to the port—destroyed, disrupting both the physical and socio-economic life of the community (Isnin, 2016). In response, the Indonesian government established the Aceh–Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) in April 2005 to coordinate comprehensive recovery, covering infrastructure, social, economic, and cultural aspects (ReliefWeb, 2005).

Restoring the port became the top priority, as it had been a vital hub connecting Banda Aceh to Weh Island and other coastal areas, facilitating trade, transport, and tourism (Bustamam, interview: July 20, 2025). Recovery began in mid-2005 with support from the Australian government through the Australia–Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development (AIPRD) and the UNDP, initially focusing on reopening land access to the port and utilizing tsunami debris as construction material (Dishub Aceh, 2021). This step was crucial in reviving small-scale trade and basic maritime transport services (Hasikin, interview: July 20, 2025). Spatial analysis by Ningrum et al. (2023) showed post-tsunami coastal area transformations in Meuraxa, including Ulee Lheue, where zones were repurposed for public spaces, evacuation routes, and green open areas. The reconstruction also emphasized disaster preparedness, marked by the establishment of the Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation Research Centre (TDMRC) in Gampong Pie, Meuraxa, in 2006, which serves both as a research facility and an emergency escape building for local communities (Febrian, 2019; Bustamam, 2025).

Reconstruction efforts extended to coastal areas such as Pantai Cermin, focusing on restoring fishing lanes and small economic facilities. Many residents returned to fishing or opened small roadside kiosks, utilizing available land to sustain their livelihoods. These efforts highlight a reconstruction strategy that integrates physical infrastructure development with socio-economic sustainability, reflecting the synergy between infrastructure, social aspects, and tourism development in post-tsunami Meuraxa (Ningrum et al., 2023).

2. Development of Tourism Infrastructure and Supporting Facilities in Ulee Lheue Village

The 2004 tsunami destroyed almost all public facilities in Ulee Lheue, including beaches, recreational areas, and tourism-supporting infrastructure, halting social and economic activities and eliminating community gathering spaces (Hasikin, interview: July 20, 2025). Recognizing tourism as a vital source of livelihood, the government, in collaboration with international partners, initiated reconstruction guided by the *build back better* principle, integrating disaster resilience into tourism development (Syamsidik et al., 2019). Initial rehabilitation focused on basic infrastructure to restore accessibility, such as roads to the beach and transport facilities. Early BRR reconstruction programs included repairing access roads, docks, and organizing beach areas to revive local economic activity. Community participation was encouraged, particularly in coastal cleanup and temporary kiosk construction to restart small-scale businesses (Bustamam, 2025). These efforts aimed not only to restore economic activity but also to create a safer and more resilient tourism destination.

Post-tsunami tourism development in Ulee Lheue incorporated dual functions: leisure and education. The integration of natural, historical, and disaster-educational tourism is exemplified by the preservation of Baiturrahim Mosque and the establishment of the Aceh Tsunami Museum as historical tourism icons (Disbudpar Aceh, 2017). Visitors are attracted not only by recreational opportunities but also by the symbolic resilience of the Acehnese community (Sofian, 2025).

The Masterplan for Ulee Lheue Village, developed by the Banda Aceh Public Works and Spatial Planning Office (2019), divides the coastal tourism area into three interconnected zones:

- a. Eastern Zone: Main entrance, transportation facilities, promenade, prayer facilities, and green open spaces serving as coastal buffer zones.
- b. Central Zone: Public interaction and leisure, including city parks, viewing decks, and boat docking areas for both cultural and economic activities.
- c. Western Zone: Religious and recreational tourism, including the Tauhid Monument, Nurul Arafah Islami Center, and Pantai Cermin with boardwalks and fishing areas.

Key tourism objects and their post-tsunami development include Pantai Cermin (colonial-era site, redeveloped 2005–present), Baiturrahim Mosque (17th century, reconstructed 2005), Galeri Reka Ulang Sejarah Tsunami (2009), Galeri Wisata Meuraxa (2017), Dermaga Wisata (2021), and Ulee Lheue Park (2021). These projects reflect physical reconstruction as well as strategic planning for disaster-resilient and sustainable tourism development in Ulee Lheue.

1. Pantai Cermin

Pantai Cermin, a popular coastal area in Ulee Lheue Village, Banda Aceh, was widely known as a recreational space accessible from the city center before the 2004 tsunami. Its name derives from the clear and calm waters that reflect the sky like a large mirror, making it a scenic spot for relaxation and family activities (Bustamam, 2025). The beach also supported local economic activities, with small fishing boats docking along the shore and informal markets operating nearby. The December 26, 2004 tsunami devastated Pantai Cermin, destroying nearly all facilities, displacing residents, and halting economic and social activities (Hasikin, 2025). The rehabilitation process began in 2005 under the coordination of the Aceh–Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR), with technical support from UNDP. Initial efforts focused on debris removal, restoring accessibility, and mitigating health risks. Physical reconstruction included shoreline management, building temporary embankments, and planting protective vegetation such as coconut trees and mangroves. Community participation was encouraged through the rebuilding of small kiosks and revival of local fishing activities (Bustamam, 2025; BRR Aceh–Nias, 2006).

By 2009, structural improvements included concrete embankments, wave barriers, and restored sand layers. Public amenities such as pedestrian pathways and tsunami memorials were added, integrating education and recreation. Subsequent urban planning policies, including the Banda Aceh Spatial Plan (2009–2029) and Qanun No. 2/2018, designated Pantai Cermin as a disaster-resilient tourism zone, incorporating breakwaters and multipurpose public spaces for emergency evacuation (Pemko Banda Aceh, 2018). From 2019 to 2021, tourism facilities were further enhanced, including the development of Ulee Lheue Park, four tourism docks, pedestrian paths, sanitation facilities, gazebos, and water recreation options like glass-bottom boats and small motorboats. Community-led initiatives, such as food stalls, paddle boats, and surfing activities, strengthened the beach's identity as a community-based tourism destination (Dispar, 2021).

Fishing has remained an integral activity, both as a local livelihood and recreational tourism. Documented events, such as the Banda Aceh Fishing Tournament (2011, 2025), highlight Ulee Lheue's role as a competitive and sustainable marine tourism site (Antara Foto, 2011; AcehOnline, 2025). By 2025, Pantai Cermin had fully recovered as a public recreational space, with clean sandy beaches, safe swimming areas, and scenic views of Pulau Weh and surrounding hills. Active sea routes remain in use, demonstrating the beach's integration into both local livelihoods and the broader tourism system of Banda Aceh. The post-tsunami rehabilitation of Pantai Cermin illustrates the successful combination of physical reconstruction, disaster mitigation, community engagement, and sustainable tourism development in Ulee Lheue.

2. Baiturrahim Mosque

Baiturrahim Mosque, located in Gampong Ulee Lheue, Banda Aceh, is a 17th-century heritage mosque from the Aceh Sultanate era, originally known as Masjid Jami' Ulee Lheue. Initially built of wood with Hindu-style architecture, it was later renovated by the Dutch using brick and cement with European design elements (Meutia et al., 2023). The mosque has functioned not only as a place of worship but also as a historical and religious tourism destination. During the 2004 tsunami, while almost all of Ulee Lheue was destroyed, Masjid Baiturrahim remained standing, though partially damaged with its courtyard buried under two to three meters of mud and major cracks in the main structure. Cleanup and initial restoration began immediately with the involvement of the TNI, local volunteers, and heavy machinery, coordinated by the Aceh–Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) (BRR Aceh–Nias, 2006). Reconstruction planning (2005–2006) involved domestic and international architectural consultants to design a disaster-resilient mosque. Upgrades included earthquake-resistant concrete foundations, underground drainage, and lightweight steel roofing. Physical reconstruction occurred from 2006 to 2009, encompassing reinforced walls, a new dome, electrical and HVAC installations, and expansion of the mosque courtyard (Hasikin & Bustamam, 2025).

The mosque's rehabilitation emphasized both physical recovery and the strengthening of its social and spiritual roles. It resumed functioning as a center for worship, religious education, and community gatherings, while also developing into a historical tourism site. The Tsunami History Reenactment Gallery within the complex provides visual documentation of the 2004 disaster, serving as both an educational and disaster-mitigation facility (Dispar, 2023). Post-BRR, maintenance and preservation have been managed by the Aceh Government and local community, including periodic renovations and sustainable energy installations. A major rehabilitation in 2024 involved repairs to floors, ablution areas, accessible stairways, structural reinforcement, and electrical upgrades, supported by TNI units and community groups (Bimnews, 2024). Baiturrahim Mosque stands as a symbol of resilience and spirituality, while also serving as a religious tourism destination. Its reconstruction reflects the integration of disaster resilience, cultural preservation, and sustainable tourism development in post-tsunami Banda Aceh.

3. Tsunami History Reenactment Gallery

The Ulee Lheue Tsunami Reenactment Gallery preserves the collective memory of the 26 December 2004 tsunami. Located next to the Baiturrahim Mosque, the only major building to survive the disaster, the gallery houses photos, news archives, miniatures, and chronological narratives that document the event and Aceh's recovery. Established by the Banda Aceh City Government with support from BRR Aceh–Nias (2006–2007), the gallery serves both as an educational space and a memorial tourism destination. Initial efforts included debris removal, artifact collection, and structural reinforcement with earthquake- and wind-resistant features. Renovations in 2011–2012 improved exhibition layout and added interactive educational panels. Today, the gallery functions as a center for learning, reflection, and disaster awareness, welcoming domestic and international visitors interested in Aceh's history, the 2004 tsunami, and community resilience.

4. Meuraxa Tourism Gallery

Tourism Gallery in Batu Cincin Market, Ulee Lheue, Banda Aceh, was established after the 2004 tsunami to revive local economic activity, especially through women's groups managing kiosks and showcasing Aceh's products (Prokopim, 2017; DP3AP2KB Kota Banda Aceh, 2017). Inaugurated in 2017, it serves as a space for community empowerment, local product marketing, and cultural tourism. Despite reduced activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the gallery remains part of Ulee Lheue's post-tsunami tourism landscape (Dispar Banda Aceh, 2020; Wawancara Bustamam, 20 July 2025).

5. Ulee Lheue Tourism Pier

The Ulee Lheue Tourism Pier was developed by Banda Aceh City Government to revitalize the coastal area after the 2004 tsunami, serving as infrastructure for recreational boating and fishing activities (Dispar Kota Banda Aceh, 2021). Construction began in late 2020 with a budget of IDR 1.5 billion, completed and inaugurated on 27 January 2021 (AJNN, 2021; Prokopim Banda Aceh, 2021). The pier functions not only as a docking area but also as a departure point for tourism boats offering sunset trips, fishing tours, and coastal explorations. It is integrated with supporting facilities such as pedestrian paths, boardwalks, gazebos, toilets, and water networks. The project also aims to boost local economic activity, with management considered for local enterprises or private operators to enhance regional revenue (Fajri, 2021). Currently, the pier operates alongside the regular ferry services, complementing Ulee Lheue's role as both a transport hub and tourism destination. Ticket prices for fast boats range from IDR 100,000–125,000, while Ro-Ro ferry tariffs follow official regulations (Dishub Aceh, 2024).

6. Ulee Lheue Park

Ulee Lheue Park is a modern public space developed post-tsunami 2004 along the coastal area of Ulee Lheue, Banda Aceh. Strategically located near the Banda Aceh Tourism Office and Ulee Lheue Port, the park functions as both a green open space and a culinary center, attracting local residents and tourists alike (Dispar, 2021). The park features a two-story culinary center supporting local micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM), children's play areas, pedestrian boardwalks, prayer facilities, and photo spots. It serves as a hub for social interaction, leisure, and economic empowerment, particularly for coastal communities. The park was planned and constructed between 2020–2021, alongside other coastal development projects such as the tourism pier, and officially inaugurated on 4 February 2021 (Prokopim Banda Aceh, 2020; Dispar Banda Aceh, 2021). Management involves collaboration between the city government, local businesses, and community members, aligning with Banda Aceh's tourism master plan (RIPPDA 2012–2026) and contributing to the designation of Ulee Lheue as a Tourism Village in 2023 (Surat Keputusan Walikota Banda Aceh, 2023). Ulee Lheue Park exemplifies post-disaster urban revitalization, integrating recreation, culinary tourism, and community development to enhance the coastal tourism landscape of Banda Aceh (Jadesta, 2025; AJNN, 2023).

Post-Tsunami Tourism Development in Ulee Lheue Village

The designation of Ulee Lheue as a tourism village reflects its historical significance, strategic coastal location, and post-tsunami social recovery. Historically, Ulee Lheue served as the main gateway of Banda Aceh, with infrastructure established during the Dutch colonial period, including a permanent port and railway connecting it to Kutaraja (now Banda Aceh). Masjid Baiturrahim, dating back to the 17th century, further strengthens its position as a religious and spiritual site (Meutia et al., 2023). The 2004 tsunami caused massive destruction, destroying homes, public facilities, and economic activity. Reconstruction efforts, led by the local government in collaboration with BRR Aceh–Nias and international partners such as AIPRD, prioritized rebuilding critical infrastructure, including Ulee Lheue Port, to restore both transportation and potential maritime tourism (Dinas Perhubungan Aceh, 2021).

As social and economic conditions recovered, the Banda Aceh government initiated strategies to develop Ulee Lheue as an integrated tourism area emphasizing maritime, religious, and post-tsunami historical tourism. This was formalized in the Banda Aceh Tourism Master Plan (RIPPDA 2018–2025), including projects such as Ulee Lheue Park, pedestrian pathways, thematic parks, and multiple tourism piers and boats (Dispar Banda Aceh, 2019). Community involvement has been central to this development. Through the formation of local tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis) and youth organizations, residents actively participate in maintaining public spaces, managing tourism services, and providing local culinary and cultural experiences (Hasikin, Wawancara: 20 July 2025). Regulatory frameworks, including spatial planning (RTBL) and Qanun Aceh, ensure that tourism development aligns with safety, environmental, and cultural preservation standards (RTBL Kawasan Ulee Lheue,

Pemerintah Kota Banda Aceh, 2018; Qanun Aceh No. 19/2013). Currently, Ulee Lheue offers diverse attractions, including Pantai Cermin, Masjid Baiturrahim with its Tsunami History Gallery, Ulee Lheue Park, Taman Wisata Meuraxa, cultural landmarks, and marine tourism services. Its designation as a tourism village is the result of coordinated government and community efforts, blending historical, religious, and cultural values with modern tourism development, symbolizing Banda Aceh’s post-tsunami recovery (Kemenparekraf, 2022).

Tourism Development in Ulee Lheue Village Post-Tsunami

In the immediate aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, tourist visits to Ulee Lheue were extremely limited. According to Hasikin (Interview: 20 July 2025), most visitors were volunteers or individuals directly involved in rehabilitation efforts. By the mid-2010s, tourism began to revive, driven not only by the restored coastal scenery but also by the promotion of tsunami history sites, adding cultural and historical dimensions to the previously marine-focused tourism sector. The Banda Aceh government supported this recovery by promoting community-based tourism programs, empowering local residents to actively participate in managing culinary, cultural, and touristic attractions. This approach helped Ulee Lheue transform into one of Banda Aceh’s leading tourist destinations. The village’s tourism potential was nationally recognized in 2022 when Ulee Lheue ranked among the top 50 nominees for the Indonesian Tourism Village Award (ADWI), highlighting its blend of historical, natural, and cultural tourism (Dispar Banda Aceh, 2022).

Tourism statistics from Banda Aceh indicate fluctuations over recent years. Visitor numbers dropped sharply in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but recovered by 2023, before slightly declining again in 2024. Ulee Lheue Port plays a key role as the main gateway to Pulau Weh, accommodating both local and international tourists. During the January 2025 long holiday, the port recorded 28,863 passenger movements, with peak daily traffic reaching 2,622 (Dishub Aceh, 2025). Peak holiday periods, such as Christmas and New Year 2023/2024, saw daily ticket sales exceed 1,500, with total passengers estimated at 3,000 per day (Dishub Aceh, 2023). These trends indicate the gradual recovery and diversification of tourism in Ulee Lheue, driven by infrastructure improvements, heritage promotion, and active community participation.

This increase aligns with the growing number of tourists visiting Ulee Lheue to enjoy various attractions around the port area. Direct observations conducted at Ulee Lheue Beach on two different days Thursday, 2 October 2025, as a weekday, and Sunday, 5 October 2025, as a weekend indicated higher visitor density during the weekend, reflecting typical patterns in tourist activity.

Tabel 1. Number of Vehicles Visiting Ulee Lheue Beach

No	Types of Vehicles	Number (Units)	
		Weekday	Weekend
1	Motorcycle	220	400
2	Car	105	180
	Total	325	580

Observations at Ulee Lheue Beach show parking fees of Rp2,000 for motorcycles and Rp4,000 for cars. On a weekday (October 2, 2025), 220 motorcycles and 105 cars were recorded, while on a holiday (October 5, 2025), numbers rose to 400 motorcycles and 180 cars, estimating 430 visitors on weekdays and 760 on holidays. The beach hosts around 50 permanent kiosks and 59 mobile kiosks selling food, drinks, and souvenirs. About 25 vendors are local residents, showing tourism supports the community economically. Vendors pay a monthly fee of Rp50,000 to the village, which funds maintenance, repairs, and parking management, ensuring cleanliness and organized facilities for visitors.

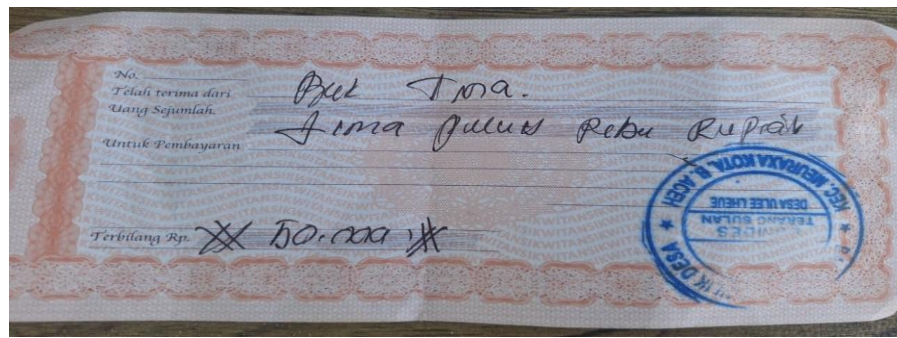


Figure 1. A payment receipt for kiosk fees at Ulee Lheue Beach Tourism Area
Source: Researcher Documentation, October 7, 2025

This receipt serves as official proof of the monthly fee collected by the village from vendors. The system not only increases community income but also supports the village in maintaining the sustainability and comfort of the tourism area. Field observations indicate that 109 kiosks operate in the area. With a monthly fee of Rp50,000 per kiosk, the village generates approximately Rp5,450,000 each month. These funds are used for facility maintenance, public infrastructure repairs, and environmental management to keep the beach clean and orderly. This demonstrates a positive reciprocal relationship between local economic activity and tourism management, where vendor contributions help strengthen the village's capacity to preserve the tourism area.

Although statistical data on tourist numbers is limited, Ulee Lheue shows significant development as a tourism destination. Visitors come to explore historical sites like Baiturrahim Mosque and the Tsunami Reenactment Gallery, enjoy the scenery at Pantai Cermin, and access family recreation facilities at Ulee Lheue Park. Observations confirm that Ulee Lheue has evolved from merely a port area into an integrated tourist destination with historical, educational, and recreational attractions. High visitor mobility, especially on weekends and holidays, highlights its strong potential as a key tourism hub in Banda Aceh.

Conclusion

First, before the 2004 tsunami, Ulee Lheue was a strategic port to Weh Island with popular beaches and historical-religious attractions like Baiturrahim Mosque. Tourism was limited and mainly served as a transit point with simple recreational activities. Second, the 2004 tsunami caused massive destruction, demolishing port infrastructure, flattening the coast, and halting tourism, while damaging mangroves and coral reefs further reduced the area's natural appeal. Third, from 2005 to 2024, Ulee Lheue successfully recovered, restoring infrastructure and developing diverse attractions including tsunami history, religious, beach, and culinary tourism. Recognition in the 2022 Indonesian Tourism Village Awards reflects its resilience and national acknowledgment. Overall, tourism in Ulee Lheue now functions as an economic, educational, and cultural space, demonstrating community and government collaboration in building a resilient post-disaster destination.

Suggestion

It is expected that the local government continue to maintain and improve public facilities, such as Ulee Lheue Park, piers, and pedestrian pathways, to ensure tourist comfort and safety. The community should also be actively involved through training and support for local businesses to enhance service quality and economic benefits. Sustainable tourism practices, including environmental conservation and cultural preservation, need to be strengthened. In addition, promotion and collaboration with national and international tourism agencies are important to attract more visitors while balancing tourism development with the needs of the local community.

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