



## Spiritual Tourism as Sustainable Tourism in Bali

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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In 2000, spiritual tourism began to develop in Bali. The development of spiritual tourism started to occur in Ubud, which is a rural tourism area. This spiritual tourism is an alternative to the mass tourism developing in Bali, which is in Denpasar and Badung. Mass tourism has brought various environmental, social, and cultural problems to Bali, such as reducing green areas. During these environmental, social, and cultural problems, spiritual tourism has emerged that is pro-environment, pro-local communities, and pro-local economy. Therefore, this article will reveal spiritual tourism's potential, development, and role in sustainable tourism development. Tourist destination theory, life cycle theory, and sustainable tourism theory will be used to explain the phenomenon of spiritual tourism. This article results from qualitative research with data collection methods through literature study, observation, and interviews. The analysis technique is done qualitatively. The results show Bali has attractions, facilities, access, and management organizations to develop spiritual tourism. This spiritual tourism is a builder of sustainable tourism because it is pro-environment, pro-local community, and pro-local economy.\*\*

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## Introduction

The romantic atmosphere before the Industrialization era made Bali a tourist destination. The rice fields, mountains, and beaches are natural tourist attractions in Bali. Its cultural attractions are ancient objects, ancient buildings such as temples, religious activities, dances, and the daily life of Balinese people. The nature and culture of Bali impress the nature and pre-industrial society that builds the romanticism of European civilization in Bali.

Picard (2008) notes that Europeans and Americans are attracted to Bali because of books about Balinese nature and culture. Culture has become a prominent factor in tourism development in Bali since the 1920s until now, so Bali is well-known as a cultural tourism destination. In this cultural tourism, mystical stories of Balinese people are recorded, for example, about the *leak* (black magic), shamanism, and astrology.

These mystical stories develop the search for tourists to Bali. In the 1970s – 1980s, new-age tourists came to Bali to do yoga and various spiritual practices. Tourists come with their teachers from Europe and America. In the 1980s - 1990s, local Balinese people began to become yoga teachers because they received training from European and American gurus. From 1990 until the 2000s, local Balinese people started to develop various variations of Balinese ethnic yoga (Sutarya, 2016).

From 2000 – 2010, local Balinese people started to develop local spiritual centers such as Guru Ketut Arsana and Guru Made Sumantra in Ubud. Arsana develops Kundalini Yoga Tantra Bali, and Sumantra develops Markendya Yoga Bali. The development of local Balinese yoga is related to various research on yoga in Bali. Research on yoga in Bali shows that Bali has known yoga since around the 12th century AD with the introduction of ancient yoga texts such as the Vrespati Tatva, Ganapati Tatva, and other tatva texts talk about the path of yoga as liberation (Acri, 2013).

These studies developed Bali as a spiritual tourism destination around 2010 – 2020. Various kinds of spiritual tourism, both local and international, are growing in Bali. Mann (2015) noted various healing facilities in Bali, including spiritual healing. Sutarya (2018) revealed that spiritual quests to Bali are for health; spiritual tourism intersects with healing tourism.

Spiritual tourism in Bali relies on Balinese nature and culture as its main carrying capacity, distinguishing it from spiritual tourism in European countries, America, Australia, and Canada, which rely on natural support (Warren, 2001). Spiritual tourism in Bali competes with Thailand and India in using the carrying capacity of nature and culture (Herrald, 2006; Nasing et al., 2013). India has a historical advantage (Aggarwal et al., 2008), and Thailand has the advantage of traditional Buddhist schools (Nasing et al., 2013). Bali has the benefits of tourism facilities, access, and professional management compared to India and Thailand.

Bali tourism has great potential to develop spiritual tourism because of the support of natural and cultural attractions. The support of facilities, access, and professional management will encourage Bali to be able to win this competition. The Balinese touristic community (Picard, 2008) will also support this development. Spiritual tourism that requires natural and cultural support is very close to the environment, local economy, and local communities. Therefore, this article reveals spiritual tourism's potential, development, and role in sustainable tourism development.

The potential for spiritual tourism is approached with the theory of tourist destinations. This theory states that tourism potential has four elements: attractions, access, facilities, and management organizations. The development of spiritual tourism destinations is approached with the tourist area life cycle theory. This theory states the development of a tourist area from exploration to rejuvenation. The theory of sustainable tourism approaches the role of spiritual tourism in sustainable tourism development. This theory states that tourism development has a sustainable dimension if it meets the criteria for the pro-environment, local economy, and local communities (Fair, 2015; Robinson et al., 2020).

## **Method**

Spiritual tourism is a tourism phenomenon based on tourist experiences. Therefore, this article is derived from qualitative research conducted from 2020 – 2021. The study explores the experiences of managers and spiritual trainers in the development of spiritual tourism in Bali. Bali is a famous tourist place in Indonesia, a 5,780 Km<sup>2</sup> wide area. Bali has eight regencies: Denpasar, Badung, Gianyar, Bangli, Klungkung, Karangasem, Buleleng, Jembrana, and Tabanan. This research is done at Ubud-Gianyar Regency, Sidemen-Karangasem regency, and Sudaji-Buleleng regency. Ubud and Sidemen are famous cultural village destinations, and Sudaji will start to develop as a village destination.

The data collection method was carried out by literature study, observation, and in-depth interviews. The literature studies are done by learning some literature related to spiritual tourism. Observations are done by observing some practicing spiritual tourism at Munivara Ashram, Cevik Villa, and OmUnityBali. In-depth interviews are done by interviewing three spiritual masters with a big center in Bali. They are Ketut Arsana (owner of Munivara Ashram), Gusti Ayu Suciani (owner of Cevik Villa), and Ketut Susana (owner of OmUnityBali). Arsana and Suciani are also Master of Yoga, and Susana is a retreat guide at his village. These data were analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative analysis is done by categorizing the data, and connecting categories, interpretations, and conclusions.

## **Spiritual Tourism**

Spiritual tourism is travel to tourist destinations for spiritual purposes. Norman (2014) divides spiritual tourism into healing, experiment, quest, collective, and retreat. Healing is to seek holistic health. Experiment to seek spiritual experience. Quest is a journey to find solutions to life's problems. A collective is a trip to attend a particular event. The retreat is a trip to do spiritual activities for a specific time at a place designated for it.

Spiritual tourism activities continue to grow due to various spiritual activities around the world. Norman & Pokorny (2017) added meditation activities as spiritual tourism in the meditation retreat category. These retreat activities are facilitated by various luxury hotels and villas, thus giving rise to spiritual commodification (Bone, 2015). In recent developments, ashrams have also become places for retreats. In the case of Thailand, the Buddhist Monastery became a place for the retreat (Nasing et al., 2013).

Based on these cases, spiritual tourism is tourism with spiritual goals to obtain holistic health, namely body, mind, and spirit. Spiritual tourism intersects with wellness tourism, but wellness uses various methods other than spiritual such as massage and relaxation (Dryglas & Salamaga, 2018). Therefore, there is a specification called spiritual wellness. Spiritual wellness is very close to spiritual tourism, but spiritual tourism has a unique characteristic: using local spiritual resources as the primary means to achieve spiritual goals. Because of this, spiritual tourism is very close to local culture and society, while star hotels and luxury villas are developing spiritual wellness.

## **Sustainable Tourism**

Sustainable tourism is the application of sustainable development in tourism. Sustainable development is born of criticism of global capitalism that develops economic greed. Global capitalism has caused various damages to the environment, culture, and local communities. Therefore, the concept of development oriented towards sustainability was raised.

This sustainable development began to emerge in 1980. In 1980, the concept of sustainable development influenced tourism development, so there was the concept of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is a tourism concept that aims to protect the future of tourism (Liu et al., 2003). In subsequent periods, the idea of sustainability entered cultural sustainability (Ristić, 2018), environmental sustainability (Hardy et al., 2002), and management sustainability (Choi & Turk, 2011).

Sustainable tourism has three aspects: protecting the environment, respecting local communities, and empowering the local economy (Hardy et al., 2002). Therefore, tourism based on environmental preservation is oriented toward local communities, and the local economy is seen as sustainable tourism. Butler (1999) started this concept by stating that sustainable tourism should be oriented to the natural

and human environments. The human environment develops into local communities and economies (Choi & Turk, 2011).

## Discussion

Almost all types of spiritual tourism have developed in Bali. Healing is created in various services such as yoga healing, qigong, and *malukat* (holy bathing). Quest set in the form of Balinese astrology services, as did the Ketut Liyer family in Ubud, Bali. Experiments are provided through Hindu ashrams such as the Munivara Ashram (Ubud), Ratu Bagus Ashram (Muncan, Karangasem), and the Gandhi Puri Ashram. A collective is held annually in Ubud, Bali, through the Bali Spirit conference. Various luxury hotels and villas offer retreats with yoga healing, qi-gong healing, and spiritual healing programs.

The first case is Ketut Arsana (59 years old) developing yoga healing. His career started as a yoga teacher in 1990. On July 10, 2006, he founded Ashram Munivara in Ubud, Bali. This ashram provides a simple residence, yoga practice, a meditation place, and experienced yoga teachers. In 2016, Arsana established Omham Retreat Hotel for tourists who need luxury services. The hotel provides luxury lodging facilities, a swimming pool, a yoga room, a spa, and a restaurant.

Arsana said he emphasized Kundalini Yoga Tantra as yoga healing. This yoga combines with the tantric tradition in Bali to awaken kundalini, which will build holistic health (body, mind, and spirit). The yoga program is carried out every morning at Omham Retreat Resort and Arsana's house. Every afternoon it is held at the Munivara Ashram. Every six months, a yoga retreat program is held for five days. This program is equipped with detox and massage.

The natural environment supports this yoga healing program near the ashram and hotel, consisting of a large rice field expanse. The ashram provides vegetarian food whose vegetables come from the surrounding environment. Arsana admitted to buying it at the people's market in Ubud, Bali. While Omham Retreat Resort provides chicken and fish dishes, all these ingredients are found in local markets. Arsana also offers additional programs for doing *malukat* at holy water places in Bali, such as Tampak Siring, Mangening, Tegallalang, and Campuhan. This *malukat* ceremony uses assets belonging to the surrounding traditional village called Pakraman.

Sebenarnya ini program dharma yang merupakan pengabdian kepada Tuhan, budaya Bali, dan lingkungan Bali melalui pariwisata. Dengan program ini, saya ingin menyebarkan ide-ide dharma tentang pembangunan diri dan lingkungan untuk kesehatan holistik (Arsana, wawancara 31 Juli 2020).

(Actually, this is a dharma program dedicated to God, Balinese culture, and the Balinese environment through tourism. With this program, I want to spread dharma ideas about self-development and the environment for holistic health) (Arsana, interview 31 July 2020).

The second case is Gusti Ayu Suciani (49), who has a qigong healing program at Cepik Villa, Sidemen, Karangasem. Suciani was originally a yoga teacher. In 2010, she started cultivating qigong. Qigong has a vast international network in China, Japan, Australia, the United States, and European countries. These qi-gong networks market their qi-gong retreat packages overseas. This marketing network led him to create a qi-gong retreat package at Cepik Villa.

Cevik Villa is a villa owned by the Suciani family. This villa stands in the rice fields of Subak Tebola, Sidemen. This rice field environment is a supporting capacity for developing qigong practices and retreats. The Subak Tebola rice fields are a sacred area in Sidemen. Local Balinese hermits in the past built many hermitages in this area. Its relics in the form of holy stones are still well preserved.

Suciani said Cevik Villa also provides pure vegetarian food in the holiest areas but also non-vegetarian food in certain regions. The beef menu is strictly prohibited in the Subak Tebola area because it is a sacred area. Tourists who secretly bring beef often get into trouble unexpectedly, which comes from the supernatural power that resides in this area.

In certain months, Cevik Villa provides a three-day qi-gong retreat package. The package includes qigong practice, lodging, vegetarian meals, and visits to holy sites around Sidemen. This package uses environmental sustainability, local food, local assets, and services from the surrounding local community. He also provides consultation on various health problems and their solutions through qigong and yoga.

Lokasi persawahan dan tempat-tempat suci di sekitar wilayah ini mendukung kegiatan qigong retreat di Cevik Villa, milik keluarga saya ini. Perkembangannya cukup bagus karena jaringan qigong di seluruh dunia (Suciani, wawancara 12 Juni 2020).

(The location of rice fields and sacred places around the area supports the qi-gong retreat at Cevik Villa, which my family owns. The development is quite good because of the worldwide network of qigong) (Suciani, interview 12 June 2020).

The third case is Ketut Susana (51 years old), who developed the OmUnityBali villa in Sudaji, Buleleng. This villa is used to hold regular international meetings every year. The Shri Chinmooy spiritual network conducts regular activities every year at this place. The activities consist of spiritual workshops and social activities. The spiritual workshop was held in the villa, while the humiliation of the participants was shared between OmUnityBali and the surrounding community, which had empty rooms. Therefore, a large workshop attended by hundreds of tourists can be held in its place.

The natural environment of rice fields and plantations supports OmUnityBali. The surrounding scenery is a mountain shaped like an elephant. This elephant-shaped mountain is called Indrakila, which is the place where Arjuna meditated in the story of the Mahabharata. Susana also provides tourists with local foods such as vegetables and tubers. He also invites tourists to visit local handicrafts.

Wisatawan spiritual ini yang sebagian besar adalah murid Guru Shri Chinmoy sangat senang dengan lingkungan sekitar, makanan lokal, dan suasana pedesaan Sudaji yang merupakan kawasan suci pertapaan di masa lalu, sehingga disebut Sudaji yang artinya tempat untuk melakukan penyucian diri (Susana, wawancara 8 Agustus 2020).

These spiritual tourists, most of whom are disciples of Guru Shri Chinmoy, are delighted with the surrounding environment, local food, and the rural atmosphere of Sudaji, which was a sacred area of asceticism in the past, so it is called Sudaji, which means a place for self-purification (Susana, interview 8 August 2020).

These three cases of spiritual tourism show that Bali is a spiritual tourism destination. The theory of tourist destinations states that an area can become a tourist destination if it has attractions, amenities, access, and management organizations (Hall, 2003). Spiritual tourism attractions in Bali are sacred areas and local yoga gurus. Amenities or facilities are hotels, villas, and ashrams that meet international standards to provide tourist services. Access is direct flights to Bali, good roads, and good transportation. The managers are local Balinese people who previously had experience working at international chain hotels in Bali. This spiritual tourism manager is used to being the organizer of global events. For example, Susana has experience managing large international gatherings in the Ubud Tourism Area, Bali.

In destination theory, Bali is a spiritual tourism destination that competes with spiritual tourism destinations abroad, such as Rishikesh-India, Thailand, and modern destinations in Europe and America. The advantages of Bali with Rishikesh-India are more luxurious hotel facilities. Most tourists complain about hotel facilities in Rishikesh-India (Aggarwal et al., 2008), while tourists get adequate facilities in Bali. Bali has an advantage in the variety of types of spiritual tourism, while Thailand only offers spiritual tourism based on Buddhism (Nasing et al., 2013).

The advantages of Bali with modern spiritual tourism destinations in Europe and America are local teachers. Local Balinese teachers are seen as having the charisma to teach yoga compared to American and European teachers because local Balinese yoga teachers are born into the Hindu tradition and have received yoga teaching from generation to generation as a local Balinese way of life (Sutarya, 2018). Teachers in Europe and America rely on modern practice venues and equipment to support yoga practices (Coskuner-Balli & Ertimur, 2017).

The development of spiritual tourism entered the development stage based on the tourist area life cycle theory in 2000 - 2020 because, at that time, local people such as Arsana, Susana, and Suciani developed facilities for spiritual tourism in Bali. The tourist area life cycle (TALC) theory states that the development of tourist destinations consists of stages of exploration, community involvement,

development, collaboration, stagnation, and rejuvenation (Putra & Hitchcock, 2006; Patrick Brouder (Editor), 2017).

The exploration stages occurred around 1980-1990 when tourists sought local teachers in Bali. In 1990-2000, local Balinese people were involved as yoga teachers in spiritual tourism in Ubud and its surroundings. In 2000 - 2020 it entered the development stage because local Balinese people began to develop spiritual tourism facilities independently. Arsana built Ashram Munivara in 2006, then developed Omham Retreat Resort in 2014. Suciani developed Cepik Villa in 2012, and Susana developed OmUnityBali in 2010.

Inbound tourist visits to Bali in 2015 – 2019 increased sharply. In 2015, the number of inbound tourists visiting was 4,001,835. In 2016 it increased to 4,927,937. In 2017 it increased to 5,697,739. In 2018 it increased to 6,070,473. In 2019 it increased to 6,275,210 (Bali Province Central Statistics Agency, 2020). This increase in inbound tourist visits has encouraged various collaborations to manage spiritual tourism. Still, Covid 19 hit foreign tourist visits to Bali in 2020, so this collaboration stage has not yet matured. The development stage is the right stage for local communities to make improvements.

At this stage of development, spiritual tourism must be maintained for the pro-environment, local economy, and the local community. Based on the theory of sustainable tourism (Hardy et al., 2002) that pro-environmental elements, the local economy, and local communities are elements to support sustainable tourism. The cases of developing spiritual tourism in Bali show their dependence on the environment. For example, Arsana depends on the rice fields in Ubud, Suciani depends on the rice fields in Sidemen, and Susana depends on the rice fields in Sudaji, Buleleng. Therefore, environmental factors are the primary support for spiritual tourism in Bali.

Spiritual tourism is also close to the local economy, for example, in providing vegetarian food ingredients from local markets, souvenirs from local people's crafts, and using local community assets such as holy places. Dependence on local communities is huge in the development of spiritual tourism due to the use of traditional village assets and the provision of local yoga teachers.

**Table 1. Elements of Sustainable Tourism in Spiritual Tourism (Sutarya & Astrid Krisdayanthi, 2020)**

No	Elements	Spiritual Tourism
1	Pro-Environment	Need the support of the surrounding natural environment
2	Pro-Local Economy	Local Food: Vegetarian Souvenir
3	Pro-Local Community	Local community shrines Local yoga trainer

Spiritual tourism as sustainable tourism has also been proven in research on spiritual tourism in Thailand (Sirirat, 2019), but this research emphasizes dependence on natural and cultural resources. The cases in Bali demonstrate that dependence also occurs on local food ingredients and local community assets, as spiritual tourism requires more vegetarian food ingredients and visits to sacred places managed by local people.

In the case of Susana in Sudaji, Buleleng, there was a collaboration with the local community in borrowing rooms for accommodation for tourists. This pattern only occurs in Sudaji, Buleleng. Other areas, such as Ubud and Sidemen, have many room facilities so that collaboration occurs with hotel owners in the vicinity. Yoga gurus such as Arsana stated that they often become partners with five-star hotels to conduct spiritual tourism programs at five-star hotels. Therefore, the Sudaji pattern is the only pattern in Bali that needs attention in developing sustainable tourism.

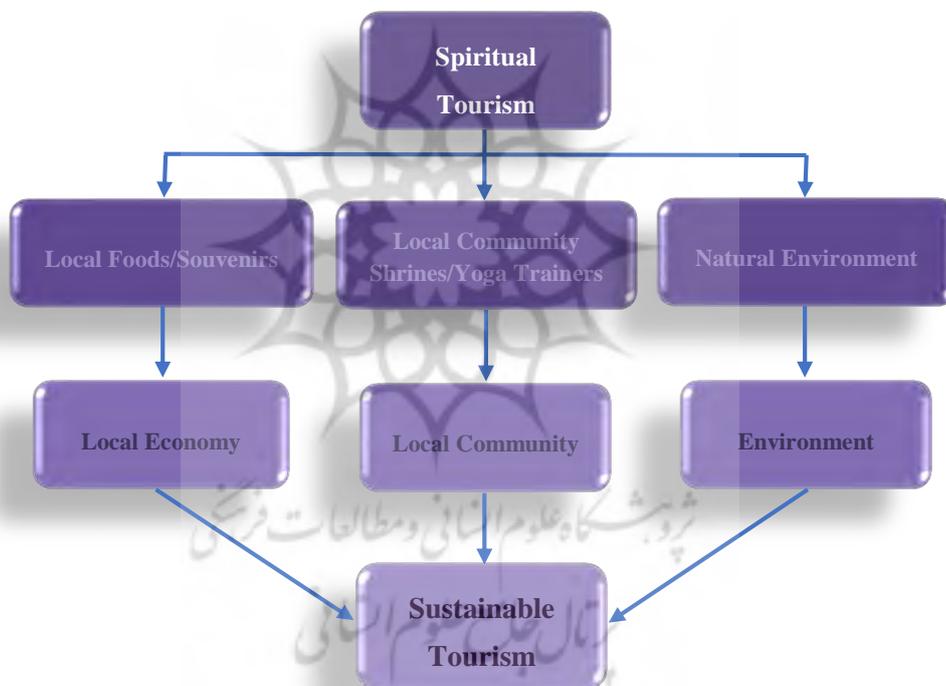


Figure 1. The Processing Spiritual Tourism as Sustainable Tourism

## Conclusion

Bali has the potential to become a spiritual tourism destination because it has attractions, facilities, access, and professional managers. This potential has grown to the stage of development that has involved the local community to the maximum. This stage is heading for the collaboration stage in 2020,

but COVID-19 has stopped the development of spiritual tourism in Bali. This stage of development, which is paused, should be used to strengthen the sustainability elements of spiritual tourism.

The potential for spiritual tourism to become sustainable is huge because spiritual tourism requires the support of the natural environment, local food ingredients, local crafts, local community assets, and local yoga teachers. These supports are elements of sustainable tourism: pro-environment, local economy, and local communities. Therefore, the potential for spiritual tourism to become sustainable tourism in Bali is vast if future collaborations are not dominated by global tourism capitalism, which develops luxury hotels into luxurious spiritual tourism centers with artificial environments and artificial cultures.

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