

PRESERVATION OF SACRED TRADITIONS IN HERITAGE TOURISM IN BALI: BETWEEN COMMERCIALIZATION AND SACREDNESS

Ni Komang Fitri Suarnadi*, Nyoman Diah Utari Dewi & Ni Putu Tirka Widanti

Universitas Ngurah Rai, Denpasar, Indonesia

*Email: komang.fitri27@gmail.com**

Article History

Received: 23 January 2026

Accepted: 25 February 2026

Published: 18 April 2026

Abstract

Heritage tourism in Bali is a strategic sector that not only underpins the regional economy but also plays a critical role in safeguarding the cultural identity of local communities. Bali is globally recognized for its rich tangible heritage, including temples, traditional architecture, and customary villages, as well as its intangible heritage, such as religious rituals, performing arts, and local craftsmanship. This study aims to analyze the governance dynamics of heritage tourism in Bali by highlighting the roles of local communities, government policies, and the pressures of globalization and cultural commodification. The research adopts a qualitative approach through a literature review and case study analysis of key destinations, including Besakih Temple, Tanah Lot, Uluwatu, Penglipuran Village, and traditional performances such as the Kecak and Barong dances. The findings indicate that heritage tourism generates significant economic value through job creation and the growth of the creative economy, while simultaneously strengthening Bali's cultural diplomacy at the international level. However, challenges such as overtourism, unequal benefit distribution, and environmental degradation necessitate a more sustainable management framework. The strategies identified include strengthening community-based tourism, enforcing strict development regulations, educating tourists on Balinese cultural values, and leveraging digitalization for heritage promotion and preservation. By adopting a holistic, community-centered approach, heritage tourism in Bali can function as a scalable instrument for sustainable development while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Keywords: Bali, Culture, Customary Villages, Heritage Tourism, Sustainable Tourism.

A. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors, contributing significantly to social, cultural, and environmental development. In recent decades, tourism has become more than just a recreational activity, but also an instrument for sustainable development (Fattah, 2023). One form of tourism that is gaining increasing attention is heritage tourism, or heritage-based tourism. Heritage tourism emphasizes the tourist experience of visiting, understanding, and appreciating cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible (Anggratyas et al., 2025).

Tangible cultural heritage includes archaeological sites, historic buildings, monuments, temples, and cultural landscapes. Meanwhile, intangible cultural heritage encompasses traditions, languages, performing arts, rituals, and local knowledge (Nugroho, 2024). These two aspects complement each other and shape a community's identity. Heritage tourism serves as a bridge between the past and the present, enabling tourists to understand history while simultaneously participating in cultural preservation (Hidajat, 2025).

Globally, UNESCO has designated various world heritage sites as prime destinations for heritage tourism. These sites are not only tourist attractions but also important symbols of national identity and pride. In Indonesia, Bali holds a special position as a tourism destination rich in cultural heritage. The island is known for its magnificent temples, Balinese Hindu traditions, dance, and traditional villages that still maintain traditional values (Fahrurrozhi & Kurnia, 2024).

Bali is known as an international tourist destination for its natural beauty, arts, and unique culture. However, beyond its popularity as a tourist island, Bali also holds a rich cultural heritage that is a major draw for tourists. Heritage tourism, or heritage-based tourism, includes visits to historical sites, temples, traditional traditions, performing arts, and the daily lives of the Balinese people.

Heritage tourism in Bali is not just an economic activity but also an arena for social, political, and cultural interaction. It serves as a means of preserving local identity while addressing the challenges of globalization. In the context of sustainable development, heritage tourism is crucial because it integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Heritage tourism is defined as a form of tourism that focuses on the cultural experiences, history, and traditions of a community (Ramlan & Dewi, 2025). According to Timothy & Boyd (2003), heritage tourism encompasses both tangible heritage (buildings, monuments, archaeological sites) and intangible heritage (traditions, language, performing arts).

Since the 1970s, Bali has developed as an international tourist destination. The Indonesian government designated Bali as a national tourism icon. However, this rapid development presents a dilemma: while it increases revenue, it also has the potential to erode cultural values.

Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism emphasizes the importance of preserving local culture. In Bali, the Regional Regulation on Traditional Villages strengthens the position of indigenous communities in managing culture-based tourism.

Research by Wiriantari & Yulianasari (2023) emphasizes the importance of sustainable architectural strategies in preserving Bali's cultural heritage. Tourism development often threatens traditional architecture, necessitating regulations and designs that maintain local identity. Balinese architecture is not only a physical form, but also a spiritual symbol that must be preserved (Wilantara, 2024).

Rizkikkadduhani (2024) highlights how Balinese people experience ambivalence towards heritage tourism. On the one hand, they see tourism as an economic opportunity and a means of sharing their culture. On the other hand, there are concerns that sacred rituals and traditions will be transformed into commercial performances for tourist consumption. This creates a dilemma between preserving sacred values and adapting to the tourism market (Wirawan, 2025).

Mahagangga et al. (2025) emphasize that traditional Balinese myths and folklore have been a major draw since the beginning of tourist arrivals. Tourists are drawn to the unique culture, the exoticism of the community, and a way of life that differs from their origins. This research confirms that local myths and traditions serve not only as attractions but also as a means of cultural diplomacy and strengthening Balinese identity (Darmayasa et al., 2024).

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focus is on understanding the meaning, values, and socio-cultural dynamics inherent in heritage tourism practices in Bali (Haryono,

2023). Descriptive analysis is used to describe phenomena in depth, while interpretive analysis is used to examine the relationship between tourism, culture, and local communities (Hanyfah et al., 2022).

This methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of heritage tourism in Bali, emphasizing the role of local communities, government policies, economic impacts, and sustainability challenges (Nadirah et al., 2022). With a descriptive qualitative approach, the research is expected to produce in-depth and relevant analysis for the development of sustainable cultural tourism. The data collection techniques used to obtain the research include observation, interviews, documentation, and literature review (Waruwu, 2023).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Heritage Tourism in Bali

Historical and Architectural Sites:

Besakih Temple is known as the Mother Temple of Bali due to its status as the largest and most sacred temple on the island. Situated on the slopes of Mount Agung, it consists of a complex of over 80 interconnected smaller temples. The architecture of Besakih Temple reflects the Balinese Hindu philosophy that emphasizes harmony between humans, nature, and God (Tri Hita Karana). Tourists not only enjoy the beauty of the traditional architecture but also experience a strong spiritual atmosphere.

Tanah Lot Temple is one of Bali's tourism icons, famous for its location on a rock by the sea. This temple is dedicated to the sea god and symbolizes the Balinese people's connection with the forces of nature. The temple's unique architecture, combined with the panoramic sunset, makes it a favorite tourist destination. Tanah Lot also reflects the concept of Balinese Hindu cosmology, where the sea is considered a sacred element that must be respected.

Uluwatu Temple, an icon of religious architectural heritage, sits on the edge of a high cliff overlooking the Indian Ocean. This temple holds great spiritual value, believed to be one of Bali's spiritual pillars. Its architecture features distinctive Balinese carvings, a split-shaped gate, and guardian statues. Beyond their religious significance, the temples' dramatic locations make them popular spots for watching the Kecak dance at sunset.

These three temples are not simply tourist attractions, but rather religious architectural symbols that demonstrate the close connection between culture, religion, and nature. They are tangible representations of Bali's architectural heritage, still alive and functioning today.

Traditions and Traditional Ceremonies:

The Ngaben ceremony is a cremation ceremony in Balinese Hindu tradition that aims to free the spirit from worldly bonds so it can reach the realm of the ancestors. This ceremony is full of symbolism, from the procession, the burning of the bade (cremation tower), to the release of the spirit. For tourists, Ngaben offers a unique experience to understand Balinese Hindu philosophy regarding the cycle of life and death.

Galungan celebrates the victory of Dharma (righteousness) over Adharma (evil). On this day, Balinese people install penjor (decorated bamboo poles) in front of their homes as a symbol of prosperity and gratitude. Tourists can witness the colorful village atmosphere, with temple rituals and family gatherings.

Kuningan: Ten days after Galungan, Balinese people celebrate Kuningan to symbolize the return of ancestral spirits to their realm. This ceremony is marked by special offerings of tamiang (circular decorations) that symbolize protection.

Balinese traditions and ceremonies provide an opportunity for tourists to understand Balinese Hindu philosophy, which emphasizes cosmic balance. They are not simply spectacles, but spiritual experiences that enrich cultural insights.

- Performing Arts: Kecak, Barong, and Legong dances are cultural attractions packaged for tourists. Balinese performing arts are not just entertainment, but also a means of preserving cultural values. These performances are packaged for tourists without losing their philosophical meaning, thus serving as a bridge between local traditions and global consumption.
- Traditional Crafts: Balinese batik, wood carvings, and Celuk silver. Traditional Balinese crafts are not only products of the creative economy but also symbols of cultural identity. Tourists who purchase these crafts not only acquire goods but also take home a piece of Balinese cultural heritage.

The Role of Local Communities

Balinese communities play a central role in maintaining the sustainability of heritage tourism. Traditional villages are the primary managers, maintaining a balance between tourist needs and cultural preservation. Local communities play a key role in maintaining traditions such as the Ngaben, Galungan, and Kuningan ceremonies. Without their involvement, these ceremonies would lose their sacred meaning and become mere commercial spectacles. Furthermore, traditional villages and community groups are responsible for maintaining temples, such as Besakih, Tanah Lot, and Uluwatu. They ensure that these sites continue to function as places of worship, not simply tourist attractions. Traditional villages also have the authority to determine visiting regulations, entrance fees, and procedures for tourists to interact with local culture. This maintains a balance between economic needs and cultural preservation.

Heritage tourism creates employment opportunities for local communities, from tour guides and dancers to artisans and homestay managers. Local communities are the backbone of heritage tourism in Bali. They are not only cultural practitioners but also managers, beneficiaries, mediators, and determinants of sustainability. Without active community involvement, heritage tourism will lose its authenticity and meaning. Therefore, tourism management strategies in Bali must always place local communities at the center, not just objects.

Economic Impact

Heritage tourism is one of the largest contributors to Bali's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP). The tourism sector, including culture-based tourism, accounts for more than half of the regional economy. The presence of tourists drives the growth of other sectors such as transportation, culinary, accommodation, and local trade. Hotel and restaurant taxes, as well as entrance fees to cultural sites (e.g., Besakih Temple, Tanah Lot, Uluwatu) provide significant revenue for the local government. The economic impact of heritage tourism in Bali is significant, increasing regional income, creating jobs, and developing the creative economy. However, challenges such as distribution inequality, the commercialization of culture, and dependence on tourism must be addressed with sustainable strategies. With proper management, heritage tourism can become an economic driver while preserving Bali's cultural identity.

Challenge

- Commercialization of Tradition: Many rituals and performing arts, originally sacred, are now packaged for tourist consumption. For example, the Barong or Ngaben dances, some elements of which are presented as attractions. This creates a dilemma between preserving sacredness and meeting market demands. Intensive interaction with tourists brings the influence of global lifestyles. Bali's younger generation risks losing their connection to local traditions due to a greater attraction to modernity. Globalization encourages the uniformity of tourist attractions. There is a risk of

Balinese culture being packaged in a standardized manner, thus losing its local uniqueness.

- Overtourism: The surge in tourists to popular sites like Tanah Lot and Uluwatu causes physical damage, pollution, and a decline in the quality of the tourist experience. The development of hotels, villas, and tourist infrastructure often sacrifices agricultural land and forest areas. The growth of tourism increases waste production and clean water consumption, often out of balance with environmental capacity.
- Globalization: The influx of foreign cultures can shift local values. Modern tourists tend to seek authentic experiences, but if attractions are overly commercialized, they may turn to other destinations. Bali must compete with other heritage tourism destinations such as Angkor Wat (Cambodia), Kyoto (Japan), or Borobudur (Indonesia).

Management Strategy

- Community-Based Tourism: Involving local communities in decision-making. Traditional villages are given the authority to regulate spatial planning, entrance fees, and visiting regulations. Local residents become tour guides, dancers, artisans, and homestay managers. This ensures sustainability because the community feels ownership of the destination. Reducing economic inequality by providing direct opportunities to local residents.
- Strict Regulation: Local governments and traditional villages establish regulations to prevent damage to heritage sites due to overdevelopment. This can be done by establishing conservation zones around temples and traditional villages. Limiting the number of tourists at certain sites to prevent overtourism. Supervising the construction of hotels and villas to ensure they comply with cultural spatial planning. These efforts can maintain a balance between economic needs and cultural preservation.
- Educating tourists by providing an understanding of Balinese cultural values with the aim of reducing disrespectful behavior or damage to cultural sites.
- Digitizing heritage, such as digital documentation for promotion and preservation. Creating digital archives of temples, dances, and traditional ceremonies, and promoting them through social media, official tourism websites, and international platforms. Digitalization can expand promotional reach to the global market and become an educational tool for Bali's young generation.

E. CONCLUSION

Heritage tourism in Bali is a strategic sector that plays a role in both cultural preservation and economic development. The main challenge is maintaining a balance between commercialization and conservation. With a community-based approach, strong regulations, and the use of technology, Bali can make heritage tourism an instrument for sustainable development.

REFERENCES

- Anggratyas, P. A. R., Prayuda, D. S., & Kosala, M. D. H. (2025). Potensi Dan Tantangan Heritage Tourism Di Kota Mataram. *Jurnal Riset Multidisiplin Edukasi*, 2(1), 454-470.
- Cole, S. (2012). *Tourism, culture and development: Hopes, dreams and realities in East Indonesia*. Channel View Publications.
- Darmayasa, D., Pracintya, I. A. E., Judijanto, L., Nugraha, P. A., Anas, M., Dethan, A. G., ... & Yusri, Y. (2024). *INDONESIA TOURISM: History and Cultur*. PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia.

- Fahrurrozhi, A., & Kurnia, H. (2024). Memahami kekayaan budaya dan tradisi suku bali di pulau dewata yang menakjubkan. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya Indonesia*, 2(1), 39-50.
- Fattah, V. (2023). *Ekonomi pariwisata: Teori, model, konsep dan strategi pembangunan pariwisata berkelanjutan*. Publica Indonesia Utama.
- Hanyfah, S., Fernandes, G. R., & Budiarmo, I. (2022, January). Penerapan metode kualitatif deskriptif untuk aplikasi pengolahan data pelanggan pada car wash. In *Seminar Nasional Riset dan Inovasi Teknologi (SEMNAS RISTEK)* (Vol. 6, No. 1).
- Haryono, E. (2023). Metodologi penelitian kualitatif di perguruan tinggi keagamaan Islam. *An-Nuur*, 13(2).
- Hitchcock, M., King, V. T., & Parnwell, M. J. G. (1993). *Tourism in South-East Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Mahagangga, I. G. A. O., Suardana, I. W., & Suryawan, I. B. (2025). *Traditional myths as tourism attraction in Bali*. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 45–60.
- Nadirah, S. P., Pramana, A. D. R., & Zari, N. (2022). *metodologi penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, mix method (mengelola Penelitian Dengan Mendeley dan Nvivo)*. CV. Azka Pustaka.
- Nugroho, P. H. (2024). *Pendekatan Lanskap Kota Bersejarah Dalam Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Budaya Bendawi Di Kota Palembang* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Jambi).
- Picard, M. (1996). *Bali: Cultural tourism and touristic culture*. Singapore: Archipelago Press.
- Ramlan, R., & Dewi, A. K. (2025). Modalitas Budaya Sebagai Potensi Cultural Heritage Tourism: Studi Reflective Observation Dusun Cipanjal, Desa Palintang, Kecamatan Ciporeat, Kabupaten Bandung. *Jurnal Desain Indonesia.*, 7(1), 60-71.
- Rizkikkadduhani, R. (2024). *Community ambivalence in heritage tourism: The case of Bali*. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(2), 210–225.
- Suardana, I. W. (2019). *Heritage tourism and community participation in Bali*. *Jurnal Kajian Pariwisata*, 19(2), 87–102.
- Timothy, D. J., & Boyd, S. W. (2003). *Heritage tourism*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- UNESCO. (2011). *Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
- Waruwu, M. (2023). Pendekatan penelitian pendidikan: metode penelitian kualitatif, metode penelitian kuantitatif dan metode penelitian kombinasi (Mixed Method). *Jurnal pendidikan tambusai*, 7(1), 2896-2910.
- Wilantara, M. (2024). *Rekonstruksi Komunikasi Pariwisata Bali Mengubah Pandangan Budaya Dari Globalitas Ke Lokalitas*. Deepublish.
- Wirawan, P. E. (2025). Pariwisata Berbasis Kearifan Lokal di Desa Wisata Ubud: Antara Komersialisasi dan Pelestarian Budaya. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pariwisata*, 30(2), 249-262.
- Wiriantari, N. M., & Yulianasari, N. M. (2023). *Sustainable architecture strategies in preserving Balinese cultural heritage*. *Journal of Architecture and Tourism Development*, 8(3), 155–170.