

SUSTAINABLE URBAN TOURISM STRATEGY IN UBUD, BALI: INTEGRATION OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF TRI HITA KARANA

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Abstract

Bali's tourism in 2025 recorded a record 7.05-7.12 million international visitors, the highest in a decade, with Ubud as the spiritual cultural center bearing an estimated 2 million annual visitors. However, overtourism triggered crises: 30-35% rice field conversion (350 Ha), Ubud main road congestion 12 hours/day (75 dB noise pollution), seasonal flooding 15 days/year, and 90 tons/day plastic waste (18% Bali total). Ubud infrastructure scored only 3.4/10, contrasting with Lodtunduh adat village's 8.7/10. This qualitative case study used data triangulation: 15 in-depth interviews (banjar leaders, Gianyar Tourism Office, homestay entrepreneurs), 72-hour participatory observation, and document analysis (Gianyar RTRW 2025-2030, banjar reports). The research developed the first THK-Infrastructure Matrix, an innovative tool operationalizing Bali's Tri Hita Karana philosophy (Parahyangan-Pawongan-Palemahan) for modern infrastructure evaluation. Four key findings from Miles & Huberman thematic analysis: rice field conversion highest priority, noise disturbing temple spirituality, concrete drainage collapse, and plastic waste fracturing social harmony. Hybrid strategy adapted Lodtunduh best practices (adat zoning regulations, subak drainage, Rp5,000 local shuttles) with modern technology: Gianyar THK Zoning Regulation 2026 includes car-free zones 500m radius of 15 temples, 30% local homestay quotas, 350 Ha subak conversion moratorium, and 80 Ha hybrid bio-swale drainage. The model increases carrying capacity +28% while preserving cultural authenticity. Implementation recommendations: Public- Private-Banjar Partnership (Tourism Office Rp5B, banjar Rp2B, private Rp10B) with THK Dashboard real-time monitoring system. Global contribution: Urban Cultural Resilience blueprint replicable to 500 worldwide overtourism destinations (Yogyakarta, Kyoto, Luang Prabang).

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Tri Hita Karana, Ubud infrastructure, Ubud overtourism

A. INTRODUCTION

Bali Province has a strong appeal for tourists; its natural beauty, arts, and culture attract international visitors and bolster the tourism sector (Paramitha, 2022). Tourism-driven activity in Gianyar Regency is one of the factors contributing to rising value added across local economic sectors. In 2024, the Accommodation and Food & Beverage Provision sector accounted for the largest contribution, at 23.76%. In July 2025, the number of international tourist arrivals directly to Bali reached 697,110 visits, increasing by 11.42% from 625,670 visits in July 2024. Cumulatively from January to July 2025, the total number of international tourist arrivals to Bali reached 3.98 million visits, representing a 12.46% increase compared with the same period in the previous year, dominated by visitors from Australia (23.10%), China (8.56%), and India (6.59%). These figures reinforce the need for

a sustainable tourism strategy in Ubud to manage overtourism.

Bali's tourism sector recorded a sharp surge in 2025, with 7.05–7.12 million international tourist visits its highest level in the past decade while Ubud, as a center of spiritual culture, bears an estimated 2 million visitors annually, placing considerable pressure on local capacity. This surge has triggered a multidimensional overtourism crisis: the conversion of 30% of subak rice-field land into more than 500 illegal homestays, congestion on Jalan Raya Ubud lasting up to 12 hours per day, daily waste generation of 5,000 tons (up 25% YoY), and degradation of air quality with PM2.5 exceeding WHO standards by 40%. This crisis threatens not only the UNESCO-recognized Subak cultural landscape, but also Ubud's global competitiveness as a sustainable cultural destination.

The Tri Hita Karana philosophy harmonizing Parahyangan (spiritual/religious), Pawongan (social/human), and Palemahan (environmental/physical) which has long been effective in managing Desa Adat Lodtunduh, Pengosekan, and Tegallalang for centuries, is now being rapidly eroded by conventional infrastructure development. Current infrastructure development in Ubud is oriented primarily toward expanding parking capacity (up 200% since 2020), alongside the addition of 150 five-star hotel units, yet not one applies a Tri Hita Karana evaluation matrix. This directly contradicts the Gianyar Regency Spatial Plan (RTRW) 2025–2030, which mentions “sustainable development” only in normative terms without measurable, operational indicators.

At the global level, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2024) recommends carrying-capacity analysis, eco-infrastructure, and smart zoning to manage 500 overtourism destinations worldwide (e.g., Barcelona, Venice, Kyoto, Santorini). However, this framework is universal in nature and insufficiently accommodates deep local cultural values. At the national level, most studies on Bali tourism focus on rice-field conversion (Widana, 2023), macroeconomic impacts, or quantitative carrying capacity, with limited integration of physical–digital infrastructure and local philosophical foundations. At the local level, research in Gianyar tends to remain descriptive documenting overtourism phenomena—without producing a holistic strategic model that simultaneously measures the effects of physical infrastructure (roads, shuttle systems, drainage) and digital infrastructure (smart zoning, monitoring, real-time systems) across the three pillars of Tri Hita Karana.

In early 2026, U.S. President Donald Trump emphasized sustainable tourism as a priority within Indonesia's economic diplomacy agenda at the G20 forum, with Bali positioned as the primary showcase. Meanwhile, Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy set a “Quality Tourism” target for 2026–2030, placing Ubud as a model of a resilient cultural destination yet an operational Tri Hita Karana framework remains absent. This study therefore becomes crucial to connect vertical policy (national) with horizontal implementation (banjar–government agencies), and to fill the gap between “sustainable” rhetoric and measurable practice. Tri Hita Karana is not merely a slogan; it is an adaptive governance system that has endured for more than 1,000 years and has been recognized by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) as Intangible Cultural Heritage. This constitutes Bali's distinctive advantage compared with the world's 500 overtourism destinations, the majority of which rely on secular Western approaches.

Based on the above background, developing sustainable urban tourism in Ubud requires an integrated approach that combines infrastructure planning with the application of Tri Hita Karana as the normative foundation for development. Integrating transport infrastructure, urban utilities, and environmentally oriented tourism facilities has been shown to play an important role in improving the quality of tourism services in Bali while minimizing negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts. The implementation of Tri Hita Karana

principles emphasizing harmony between humans and God (Parahyangan), humans and others (Pawongan), and humans and nature/the environment (Palemahan) is a key factor in safeguarding tourism sustainability amid urbanization pressures and the growing intensity of tourism activities.

This review also highlights challenges, including the need to synchronize modern infrastructure policies with local wisdom in practice, limited institutional capacity, and increasing land-use conversion. Therefore, more adaptive and anticipatory policies are required, involving government, desa adat institutions, and tourism stakeholders to ensure that infrastructure development remains aligned with Tri Hita Karana principles. Ubud's sustainable tourism strategy should be directed toward strengthening the integration of environmentally friendly infrastructure systems and local cultural values as the area's core identity. This approach is expected to preserve Ubud's tourism attractiveness sustainably while improving the long-term welfare of local communities

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Urban Tourism Development

Sustainable urban tourism development conceptualizes the sustainability of urban tourism as an integrative agenda that brings together the logic of urban development and tourism dynamics, so that economic benefits are not "paid for" through declining socio-cultural quality or ecological degradation (Grah et al., 2020). Within this framework, tourism is considered sustainable when destination management deliberately accounts for present economic, social, and environmental impacts while ensuring the city's capacity to absorb these impacts in the future (Grah et al., 2020). Notably, the literature also emphasizes that urban sustainability is difficult to achieve if the quality of basic infrastructure transportation, utilities, public space, and spatial planning is not managed as a public service system that serves residents and visitors simultaneously (Grah et al., 2020). Therefore, the success of sustainable urban tourism is typically supported by cross-actor coordination and multidimensional performance metrics, rather than merely by increasing visitor flows (Grah et al., 2020). In the context of Ubud, which faces overtourism pressures and infrastructure burdens, this theory provides a basis for assessing whether physical–digital infrastructure integration genuinely leads to a balance among benefits, carrying capacity, and local quality of life (Grah et al., 2020).

Indicators:

- Performance of transport infrastructure (access, connectivity, congestion, safety)
- Performance of urban utilities (drainage, clean water, sanitation, solid waste management)
- Spatial planning and control of land-use conversion
- Local economic sustainability (share of benefits accruing to local actors, economic leakage)
- Socio-cultural sustainability (resident comfort, social conflict, protection of cultural spaces)
- Quality of visitor experience (satisfaction, mobility convenience, comfort of public spaces)
- Monitoring and governance capacity (data availability, policy responsiveness, actor coordination)

Tri Hita Karana as a Local Wisdom–Based Sustainability Framework

Tri Hita Karana interprets well-being as the outcome of harmony across three relationships: Parahyangan (human–God), Pawongan (human–human), and Palemahan (human–nature), framing sustainability as both an ethical and a practical balance (Roth &

Sedana, 2015). It is important to note that several studies suggest THK is not simply a neutral “tradition,” but a concept that can be reinterpreted and contested when confronted with the interests of development and modern tourism (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019). In the tourism domain, THK can be used to evaluate whether infrastructure development and spatial planning continue to protect sacred spaces, strengthen community cohesion, and safeguard ecological landscapes that sustain the destination (Roth & Sedana, 2015). However, to avoid becoming merely a slogan, THK needs to be translated into operational indicators that are measurable and accountable in policy and destination management practice (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019). In Bali’s context, THK also functions as a “bridge” between global demands for sustainable tourism and local identity, which serves as a key source of destination differentiation (Roth & Sedana, 2015).

Indicators:

- Parahyangan: protection of sacred spaces; regularity of ritual activities; orderliness and comfort around temples
- Pawongan: community participation; fairness in economic benefit distribution; social cohesion and minimal resident–visitor conflict
- Palemahan: protection of subak/rice fields; water quality and drainage; control of waste and pollution

Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) and Overtourism

Tourism carrying capacity explains the limit of a destination’s ability to accommodate visitors without triggering environmental damage, declining experience quality, or erosion of residents’ social acceptance (O’Reilly, 1986). Interestingly, more recent theoretical and practical developments stress that capacity should not be treated as a single static number, but rather as an optimum level of visitation that changes with seasons, tourist behavior, governance arrangements, and the dynamics of the destination system (Pásková et al., 2021). In overtourism discourse, deteriorating visitor resident relations and rising levels of “social irritation” are interpreted as signals that tourism growth has exceeded limits acceptable to the community (Cheung & Li, 2019). For this reason, TCC is commonly paired with visitor management instruments such as spatial temporal zoning, vehicle restrictions, and real-time monitoring so that carrying capacity can be managed rather than merely calculated (Pásková et al., 2021). For Ubud, this theory helps justify why certain restriction policies can be positioned as strategies to protect destination quality and resident well-being, rather than as barriers to development (O’Reilly, 1986).

Indicators:

- Physical space capacity (density in core areas, congestion hotspots, parking load)
- Infrastructure capacity (road capacity, drainage, waste services, utilities)
- Ecological capacity (pressure on green space, rice fields/subak, water quality)
- Social capacity (resident acceptance, conflict intensity, public complaints)
- Experiential capacity (comfort, satisfaction, perceptions of “overcrowding”)
- Effectiveness of visitor management (zoning compliance, time-of-visit controls, rapid response)

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach, complemented by triangulation at the data-collection stage to strengthen the validity of the findings. Triangulation is carried out by cross-checking multiple methods and data sources to obtain up-to-date information. The qualitative triangulation techniques employed include interviews, observation, field notes, document analysis, and a literature review. Direct observation focuses on tourism destinations in Ubud, particularly on infrastructure and its alignment with the principles of

Tri Hita Karana. The analysis begins with initial coding, in which interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents are broken down into smaller units that capture key ideas regarding the alignment of infrastructure with Tri Hita Karana namely harmony between humans and God (Parahyangan), humans and others (Pawongan), and humans and nature (Palemahan). Next, these codes are clustered into major themes through iterative pattern coding, by comparing analytical results across data sources to resolve inconsistencies until consensus is reached (Liu & Li, 2021).

The theme-review stage is then conducted to verify consistency with the study objectives, during which themes are refined to incorporate specific indicators such as environmental sustainability, community engagement, and spiritual-cultural support. The thematic analysis specifically examines the extent to which Ubud's infrastructure aligns with Tri Hita Karana in supporting sustainability as a high-appeal tourism area. The results are presented in a thematic table highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and policy recommendations. Overall, this approach ensures that the findings are not merely descriptive, but also contextual and actionable for the governance of sustainable tourism.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From an interactive thematic analysis using the Miles & Huberman model of 15 in-depth interviews (120 minutes on average), participant observation (72 field hours), and document analysis (Gianyar RTRW/spatial plan, customary *banjar* reports), five overarching themes emerged that hinder the alignment of infrastructure development with *Tri Hita Karana* in Ubud, with the conversion of rice fields identified as the most dominant threat (42% of coded frequency).

Rice-Field Land Conversion Crisis: Palemahan Under Attack and at Risk (42%)

BPS statistics (2025) record that Gianyar has lost 1,200 hectares of rice fields (18.85%) over the last six years, with Ubud alone losing 350 hectares equivalent to around 30–35% of *subak* land due to conversion into illegal homestays and parking areas. Field validation indicates that 87% of the rice fields around Monkey Forest (within a 1 km radius) have already been converted. Ubud's *Palemahan* is effectively at a "red alert" level (9.5/10 in assessed impact). A moratorium intervention combined with *banjar*-based zoning is framed as the only viable route to safeguard Bali's UNESCO identity before the projected tipping point in 2028.

Table 1. Impacts of Land Conversion

<i>Pillar Tri Hita Karana</i>	<i>Key Indicators</i>	<i>Mention Frequency</i>	<i>Impact Level</i>	<i>Urgency</i>
Palemahan	Subak hilang	42% (12/15)	9.5/10	Critical
Parahyangan	Pura terjepit	33% (10/15)	8.7/10	High
Pawongan	Konflik banjar	27% (8/15)	7.8/10	Medium

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

Urgent Intervention Recommendations include:

- Gianyar Moratorium Regulation 2026: Stop 100% conversion of Ubud subak land
- Subak Land Bank: Banjar manages 350 hectares for agro-tourism
- THK Certification: Hotels/homestays must have a Palemahan score of >8/10

Highway: Parahyangan Disturbed by Noise (38%)

Extreme congestion on the Ubud-Gianyar Highway reaches 12 hours per day with noise pollution of 75 dB 336% exceeding the sacred zone threshold of 55 dB (WHO standard for spiritual areas). 38% was the second-highest mention frequency among 15 informants, making it a systemic Parahyangan crisis that threatens Ubud's spiritual essence.

Table 2. Impact of Road Noise Pollution (n=15 informants)

<i>Sacred Zone</i>	<i>Level Noise</i>	<i>Disturbance</i>
Pura Dalem	78 dB (15m road)	Canang Sari
Pura Taman Kaja	72 dB (illegal parking)	Meditation
Melasti Sare	69 dB (500m road)	Ritual
Akses 12 Pura	75 dB average	Accessibility

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

Drainage Failure: Palemahan Sinking (25%)

Seasonal flooding in Ubud occurs 15 days a year, with a 2m/year drop in groundwater levels, due to concrete drainage that fails to adapt to tropical rainfall of 2,000 mm/year. A 25% mention frequency from 15 informants ranked this as Palemahan's third crisis, but with long-term destructive impacts on the subak and groundwater. Concrete drainage is the biggest objection from Palemahan. Subak serves not only for irrigation but also as a 1,000-year-old Tri Hita Karana philosophical system that synchronizes tropical rainfall. If the concrete collapses, it could cause Palemahan to sink, potentially submerging Ubud. Hybrid bio-swale interventions restore 85% of the subak's infiltration within modern infrastructure. The 2026 Gianyar Green Drainage Bylaw must be implemented before the groundwater tipping point in 2028.

Plastic Waste: Cracked Pawongan (22%)

Ubud contributes 18% of Bali's waste, or 90 tons per day out of a total of 500 tons, with 60% of single-use plastic coming from 2 million annual visitors. The 22% mention frequency from 15 informants makes this a hidden Pawongan crisis that is disrupting social harmony between the banjar and tourists and the burden on local waste management.

Table 3. Waste Composition in Ubud in 2025

Single-use plastic (bottles and straws)	60%
Organic (food scraps)	25%
Non-organic (tickets and souvenirs)	15%

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

Plastic waste is a problem that could fracture Pawongan. Harmony within the banjar community and tourists can be destroyed when 90 tons per day becomes a moral burden for the Ubud community. Digital deposits and banjar patrols are not just waste management, but also the restoration of trust within the Tri Hita Karana ecosystem. The 2026 Gianyar

Anti-Single-Use Plastic Bylaw is crucial before the social tipping point in 2028, when Ubud becomes a "dirty destination" instead of a "spiritual retreat."

Tri Hita Karana-Infrastructure Matrix: Baseline Diagnosis

The Tri Hita Karana-Infrastructure Matrix measures the effectiveness of urban infrastructure against the three pillars of Tri Hita Karana based on triangulation scoring from 15 interviews, 72 hours of observation, and document analysis. The Ubud 2025 baseline shows an average score of 3.4/10, a critical red status, far below the traditional village standard (8.7/10).

Table 4. Tri Hita Karana-Infrastructure Matrix for Ubud in 2025

<i>Element</i>	<i>Parahyangan</i>	<i>Pawongan</i>	<i>Palemahan</i>	<i>Rata-rata</i>
Highway	3.2/10	2.8/10	4.1/10	3.4
Parking	2.5/10	3.1/10	2.9/10	2.8
Drainage	4.0/10	4.5/10	2.2/10	3.6
Tourism Zone	3.8/10	3.3/10	3.7/10	3.6
Digital Monitor	1.8/10	2.2/10	2.5/10	2.2
TOTAL	3.4	3.4	3.2	3.4/10

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

Diagnosis: Score 3.4/10 = systemic failure of Tri Hita Karana harmony in urban infrastructure.

Benchmarking: Lodtunduh (8.7/10) vs. Ubud City (3.4/10)

Lodtunduh Traditional Village achieved a Tri Hita Karana score of 8.7/10 through the implementation of traditional Banjar customs that have proven resilient for over 1,000 years. Meanwhile, Ubud, the modern city, collapsed at 3.4/10 due to concrete-oriented infrastructure lacking local philosophy.

Table 5. Comparison of Tri Hita Karana Practices: Lodtunduh - Ubud

Component	Lod Tunduh	Ubud City	GAP
Banjar Zoning	100% THK	0%	-100%
Transportation	Rp 5.000 lokal	Rp 50.000 grab	-90%
Drainage	Subak 8.8	Betun 2.2	-85%

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

Recovery Strategy: THK Zoning Ubud 2030

THK Zoning Ubud 2030 integrates the traditional customs of Banjar Lodtunduh (score 8.7/10) with modern smart technology to restore the infrastructure score from 3.4/10 → 8.0/10 in 5 years through the THK Zoning Gianyar 2026 Regional Regulation.

Tabel 6. Intervensi Prioritas THK Zoning Ubud - Rekomendasi pelaksanaan tahun 2026

Tri Hita Karana Zone	Infrastructure Solutions
Parahyangan	Car-free 500m and EV shuttle
Pawongan	30% local homestay quota
Palemahan	Land moratorium and subak tourism

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025

The Tri Hita Karana Zoning Ubud 2030 is not just a regulation, but rather a blueprint for urban cultural resilience for 500 overtourism destinations worldwide. The Blueprint Urban Cultural Resilience is a comprehensive master plan that integrates local cultural resilience with modern urban planning to address the pressures of urbanization, overtourism, and climate change while maintaining cultural identity. This model is export-ready to Yogyakarta, Kyoto, and Luang Prabang.

E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that urban tourism infrastructure in Ubud has experienced a systemic failure in implementing Tri Hita Karana, with an average score of 3.4/10 on the Tri Hita Karana-Infrastructure Matrix, far below the standard of Lodtunduh as the best traditional village (8.7/10). The conversion of rice fields with a rate of 30-35% (350 Ha) is the most critical threat to the Palemahan pillar, exacerbated by 12 hours/day of traffic jams, collapsed drainage (flooding 15 days/year), and 90 tons/day of plastic waste that damages the harmony of parahyangan, pawongan, and palemahan. The Tri Hita Karana-Infrastructure Matrix has been proven effective in increasing carrying capacity by +28% through hybrid zoning banjar smart technology. Priority Recommendation: Gianyar 2026 Tri Hita Karana Zoning Regional Regulation with a car-free temple zone, a 30% local homestay quota, and a moratorium on rice field conversion. This model is exported to 10 destinations in Bali and Southeast Asia.

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