

Destination management solution post COVID-19: Best practice from Bali – A world cultural tourism destination

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Destination Management Solution Post COVID-19: Best Practice from Bali – A World Cultural Tourism Destination

I Nengah Subadra

Abstract

Bali tourism faces a great threat from the pandemic issue. COVID-19 causes a sharp decline of domestic and international tourist arrivals since many countries issued travel bans. All tourism sites in Bali are closed for tourists during the pandemic as ordered by the governing law. The research investigates the solution planned and applied by the cultural tourism destination managements during and post pandemic and understands how cultural tourism in Bali adapts the new norm tourism landscape from the locals' and tourists' perspectives. The research uses qualitative method wherein the data were collected in two Hindu temples in Bali namely Goa Lawah and Tirta Empul, where tourists regularly gaze at authentic cultural tourist attractions through field observations, face-to-face interviews with tourism sites managers and tourists who purposely selected to ensure they understand the case. The data were triangulated by comparing and contrasting the informant's viewpoints to understand the case. The research finds that tourism site managements have applied the international health procedures prepared by management through intensive workshops and trainings to develop their competencies dealing with tourists during and post pandemic. This research claims that collaborative managements involving temple management, *pecalang*, police and soldiers have been dynamically adapted in mitigating the risks of COVID-19 outbreaks within the temple sites during the pandemic which distinct from the mainstream managements.

Keywords: Destination management solution; COVID-19; cultural tourism; Tirta Empul temple; Goa Lawah temple; international health procedures

Introduction

Tourism is very susceptible on disease threats. Novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic influences the tourism industries worldwide including Bali. As an international cultural tourism destination, Bali has experienced a number of threats such as terrorist attacks and bomb blasts in 2002 and 2005, killing hundreds of tourists and local people; natural disasters – the Mount Agung eruptions in 2017–2018, which caused massive chaos and closure of Bali airports; and epidemics such as Avian Influenza in 1997, SARS in 2002 and Swine flu in 2019. Bali could manage such treats well by conducting a number of cultural events, offering special holiday discounts and promoting the island consistently as an endless rites island which offers opportunities to any tourists gazing these authentic cultural attractions. Those measures have been successfully done, and aided Bali tourism was recovered very quickly. However, facing the most recent and severe threat ‘COVID-19’, Bali tourism seems very hard to be recovered soon as it affects all countries in the world and consequently has much greater the impacts than the aforementioned issues.

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The pandemic has shut Bali tourism down. It closed the entire tourism destination operations including tourism sites and attractions, accommodation services, food and beverage service and flights and land transportations. The number of tourist arrivals fell dramatically from millions to tens tourists only which best termed as ‘the pause of Bali tourism’ since the number of visits were much fewer than the early development phase of Bali tourism in 1920s. COVID-19 pandemic has brought tourism in Bali into the worst condition ever and forced local people and tourists adapting new norms by practicing strict health protocols to anticipate the coronavirus spreads. These severe impacts can be served as evidence of tourism crises which need measures to mitigate the risks (Laws, Prideaux, & Chon, 2007).

Based on the background, the research is aimed at investigating the techniques planned and applied by the managements of cultural tourism sites of Goa Lawah and Tirta Empul temples during and post pandemic. Additionally, it also attempts to understand how cultural tourism in Bali adapts the new norm of tourism life from two perspectives i.e. local people and tourists.

Theoretical Background

Cultural Tourism, COVID-19 and Crisis Destination Management

Cultural tourism is one of the complex terms to define. Subadra (2015) defined cultural tourism as a tourism development which uses cultural resources as attractions wherein tourists can gaze at and engage with the local cultures being presented for tourism in a destination. The definition covers the entire aspects of cultural tourism: product – the existing cultural elements in the destination which

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attract tourists to visit; people – the tourists pushing to travel to certain destination; and process – the act of tourists witnessing and experiencing the culture (Subadra, Sutapa, Artana, Yuni, & Sudiarta, 2019). Cultural tourism is universal as its attractions can be consumed by any tourists without distinguishing their social and demographic backgrounds (Hall, Prayag, & Amore, 2018; UNWTO, 2020a, b, c, d).

Cultural tourism is susceptible on health issue threats. COVID-19 is the most recent health disaster shutting all tourists' businesses down in the world. It is an infectious disease which is categorised as the family of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and which has also similar symptoms and mainly causes respiratory failure which leads to death (Zhong, Mu, Li, Wang, Yin, & Liu, 2020). Contemporarily, COVID-19 has become hot debates among tourism scholars due to the great impacts generated from this issue which were investigated from different perspectives. COVID-19 successfully stopped the overtourism issues wherein tourism destinations which used to have too many tourists and rapid developments of tourism amenities destroying local environment and cultures are now collapsed and very difficult to recover. The study suggests that tourists' behavioural intentions for holidaying are affected by COVID-19 issue (Bae & Chang, 2020). Nowadays, tourists prioritise their health rather than forcing to travel during the pandemic. Certainly, no tourist mobilities have resulted world tourism destinations mourning and closing down and also impacted the local economic.

Health safety is served as the most important factor considered by tourists to visit destinations (Timothy, 2006). Thus, destination managements require preparing particular technique in managing visitors during the pandemic. Benjamin, Dillette, and Alderman (2020) argue that pandemic has initiated the tourism stakeholders to reflect and reset tourism business into more equitable and sustainable ways. Similarly, Ioannides and Gyimothy (2020) and Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) argue that the global tourism shutdown by COVID-19 is the best time to change the future direction of tourism developments heading to responsible tourism and the vision of sustainable development goals. This suggests that destination managements are required being dynamic adapting the current phenomena to survive from the COVID-19 crises. Thus, the rise of COVID-19 demands global changes which alter common systems applied in entire world communities and tourism businesses (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Laws et al. (2007) argued that tourism destination managements adapt and apply precise strategies facing crisis which distract tourism including epidemic (Sifolo & Sifolo, 2015), pandemic (Gössling et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020), terrorist attack (Hitchcock & Putra, 2007), earthquake and tsunami (Subadra, 2020).

Hindu temples designated as cultural tourism in Bali apply particular management systems which distinct from Eurocentric approach wherein the temples functioned as tourism sites are active public temples and worshipped by all Hindus in Bali who come to the temple at uncertain times which unable the temple managements determining definite temple service timetable as applied in most churches in the Europe (Subadra, 2015). This study extends such finding and attempts to understand the visitor management strategy adapted at the temple tourism during the pandemic.

Research Method

This research applies qualitative research approach to understand the phenomena of destination managements in two public Hindu temples, namely Goa Lawah which is located in Klungkung Regency and Tirta Empul which is located in Gianyar Regency, which are officially designated as cultural tourism sites in Bali as case studies (Ardika & Subadra, 2018; Subadra, 2015). The data were collected through observations, in-depth and face-to-face interviews with two tourism sites managers and nine tourists who purposely selected to ensure they understand the case. The collected data are triangulated by comparing and contrasting the informant's perspectives to understand the case.

Finding and Discussion

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Bali tourism is regulated under Regional Regulation 5/2020 regarding Management Standard of Bali Cultural Tourism which is adapted from the National Act of Republic of Indonesia 10/2009 regarding tourism. This regulation asserts that Bali tourism is developed based on the indigenous Hindu Balinese cultures including religion and belief system, arts, earning system, culinary, language and costumes (Fung & McKercher, 2016). These cultural elements and the magic of Bali attracted million domestic and international tourists visiting this divine island each year (Subadra et al., 2019). As Bali Statistic Agency (BSA) recorded, the number of domestic tourists travelled to Bali between 2016 and 2018 increased. There were 8,643,680 national tourists visiting Bali in 2016. This continued to incline steadily to 8,735,633 people in 2017 and remained to rise until 9,757,991 in 2018 (Bali Statistics Agency [BSA], 2020a, b). Similarly, the same increase also occurred for international tourists wherein almost 5 million tourists visiting Bali in 2016. It continued to grow gradually to 5,697,739 (2017) and 6,070,473 (2018) (Bali Statistics Agency [BSA], 2020a, b).

COVID-19 impacted tourism destinations worldwide including Bali which is recognised as a world cultural tourism destination. All tourism businesses like tourism objects, hotels, villas, restaurants, cafés, bars, art shops, travel agents, etc. closed to anticipate the spreads of COVID-19 through tourism. The closures caused massive job dismissals and tourist arrival decline which stopped the economic growth. Generally, the number of international tourists declined since January to June 2020. There were 528,883 tourists in January 2020. It declined moderately to 363,937 (February 2020) and continued to fall until reached 156,877 (March 2020) when COVID-19 case firstly confirmed in Bali infecting local people and foreign (Bali Statistics Agency [BSA], 2020a, b).³⁹ Moreover, when Bali tourism was totally closed down since 1 April 2020 when Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Republic of Indonesia issued Regulation 11/2020 regarding Temporary Prohibition of Foreigner Entering Indonesian Territories. This caused dramatic decline of 327 (April), 36 (May) and 32 tourists in June 2020 (Bali Statistics Agency [BSA], 2020a, b). These dramatic⁴⁴ ps were due to massive holiday cancelations to Bali which declined the hotel occupancy rates and forced the hotel and villa managements closing their accommodation services to save the

operational costs. This confirms that COVID-19 has great negative impacts on Bali tourism.

Contemporarily, the number of coronavirus infected cases increased over the last six months. The first confirmed cases were found in March 2020 of 13 people which continued to increase closely to 500 cases in May 2020. The confirmed cases inclined drastically to nearly 1,500 cases in June and continued growing to 5,207 (August), 8,878 (September) and 11,764 (October). The same pattern also occurred for the death cases wherein there were only 4 deaths during the first three months when COVID-19 found in Bali. This grew continuously to 14 cases in June and rose dramatically to 387 deaths in October 2020 (Bali Health Department, 2020).

The COVID-19 has impacted approximately 1,285,000 people in Bali who work in tourism sectors: hotels and restaurants, transportations and tourism-related trades and business (Maya, 03/04/2020). More than one-fourth of Bali's current populations of 3,890,757 people are dependable on tourism (Subadra, 2019; Bali Statistics Agency [BSA], 2020a, b). Thus, tourism must be reopened to speed up the pause of Bali tourism during the pandemic even if there are ongoing debates among Balinese scholars in academic seminars and published newspaper regarding the emergency of relaunching Bali tourism. Subadra (2020) asserted in the *Telegraph* – the United Kingdom's well-recognised newspaper:

1 ... the government's initiative was meant simply to stimulate the tourism life here ... 'The goal is to revive the tourism machine, even though the scope is domestic' ... There they [tourists] shop at the restaurant, at the bar and 1 on, to eat snacks at the restaurant, it [tourism] can live again ... visitors would not be as free in visiting tourist sites, adding only 'risk takers' and 'brave' tourists would insist on exploring the island during the pandemic. (Mulyanto, 2020)

The notion of restarting tourism during the pandemic potentially stimulates Bali's economic growth which has paused since COVID-19 outbreaks in early 2020. However, it remains in high risk of virus spreads for both local people and tourists visiting Bali. The tourism relaunching cannot attract all types of tourists visiting Bali and very specific to highly challenging tourists only. Meanwhile, the bourgeois tourists postpone their holidays for safety and health reasons and wait until the safe travel time comes. Nowadays, health safety issues are being the most important factors for the tourists visiting tourism destinations (Timothy, 2006). Benjamin et al. (2020) argued that pandemic initiated the tourism stakeholders reflecting and resetting tourism business into more equitable and sustainable ways as well as adapting health aspects which had not been concerned before COVID-19 issue. This suggests that tourism is dynamic and subject to unpredictable occasion and/or current issue (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2006).

The reopening of Bali tourism is ruled under Bali's government Circular 3355/2020 regarding New Living Norm Protocols. Tourism is a major sector which requires immediate recovery to normalise the tourism businesses: tourism

destination, marine tourism, accommodation services, food and beverage services, travel agency, event organisers, tourism transportations and staged tourism attractions. The relaunching of those hospitality businesses ruled under the Presidential Decree 6/2020 ⁴¹ regarding Discipline Increase and Law Enforcement of Health Protocols in Prevention and Control of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in which the tourism managements are obliged to involve in government's measure programmes preventing and controlling the spreads of COVID-19. The obligations include commitments of the tourism businesses ⁴³ complying the health protocols and protection of public health which aimed at mitigating the risks of COVID-19 in tourism destination, ensuring local people can host the tourists safely and allowing tourists enjoying their holidays healthily and conveniently.

The reopening of Bali tourism was officially announced by Bali's governor on 5 July 2020 which set to restart in three phases. The first phase was opened on 19 July 2020 for local tourists residing on Bali island. The second phase was opened on 31 July 2020 for national tourists. The opening of Bali tourism for local and national tourists started the beats of Bali tourism wherein businesses began to operate and started producing money from the tourist visits and hospitality service purchases. The third phase which planned to open international tourists has not been set yet as the decree of the Ministry Regulation 11/2020 which prohibits foreign tourists entering Indonesian territories is still ruled. Consequently, foreign tourists remain unable to enter Bali during the pandemic.

The designations of Bali's public temples as cultural tourism sites are challenging in this pandemic. Temple tourism managements required being dynamics adapting the current issue and policy to reopen the temples for worshippers and tourists (Subadra, 2015). The temple manager of Goa Lawah temple argued:

Tourism destination shall be operated pursuant to the regulations ruled by the regional government ... We have established a number of supporting facilities relating to preventions and mitigation of COVID-19 in Bali as ordered in the circular. (Interview, 22/08/2020)

These dynamics affect the temple architectures wherein supplementary health supports developed within the temple sites which add up to the original temple design and layout. Additionally, they also shift the attitudes of the hosts and tourists touring around the temples. At Goa Lawah temple, supporting facilities like hand-wash basins, thermo scanner counters, hand sanitiser desks and plastic/glass-border information counters have been established within the temple sites to offer healthy and convenient atmospheres for both worshippers and tourists during the pandemic and minimising the risks of COVID-19 outbreak. Worshippers and tourists are obliged to wash hands for being sterile clinically before entering the temple. It is distinct from the procedures before the raise of COVID-19 wherein the physical cleanings were personally prepared by worshippers and tourists, and there was no obligation committing any further physical cleaning in the temples. These are the alternations made by the temple management to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 within the temple sites (Gössling et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2020).

Q4

There have been temple's elements called *Dwarapala* statues which built in the front of the temple split gates which believed by Balinese Hindus able to symbolically cleanse the human's mind spiritually in order to have good thoughts and divine spirits while entering the temple sites (Suyatra, 2018). Additionally, the temple managements also prepare *Tirtha* (holy water) in the temples' entrance gates that also aimed at cleansing the worshippers' and tourists' bodies and minds spiritually before entering the temple. Subadra (2015) argued that the sprinkles of purified water to temple visitors is one of the psychic measures of temple spiritual preservations in addition to daily, monthly and annual purification rites. This suggests that there have been alternations made upon the visitor behaviours wherein the cleanliness of worshippers and tourists entering the temples doubled since the COVID-19 issue.

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Furthermore, the temple managements also display signages to encourage worshippers and tourists being aware of the spread of the COVID-19. The signages directed tourists to follow the temple tour routes and regulations before COVID-19 issue. Currently, the signages are extended to educate worshippers and tourists practising 'healthy life' while entering the temples. The signage establishments are aimed at leading to quality temple tour experiences during pandemic. The displayed signages offer clear guidance and directions for the worshippers and tourists entering the temple and also advise them performing well attitudes and behaviours while inflowing the temples. Additionally, they are aimed at encouraging tourists to obey the temple regulations and to respect the highly respected temples possessing significant cultural values (Subadra, 2015) and also ensuring all worshippers and tourists comply the provisions of the COVID-19 health protocols as ruled by government of Bali.

Visitor Management System at Goa Lawah and Tirta Empul Temples

The temple managements altered and transformed the visitor management strategy since the reopening of Bali tourism for domestic tourists (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Destination managements which were impacted by COVID-19 are obliged to adapt some provision changes ruled in current government policies on pandemic mitigations (Sigala, 2020). The alternations are to meet the provisions of regional regulation to accelerate the recovery of the 'pause of Bali tourism' since the spread of COVID-19 in Bali. Bearing in mind, there were no limitations for worshippers and tourists entering the temples at once before the COVID-19. They mingled around the temple courtyards from the least sacred area (*Nista Mandala*) to the middle courtyard (*Madya Mandala*) and even to the holiest courtyard of the temple (*Utama Mandala*) where worshippers searched for serenity and spirituality and tourists looked for authenticity – the real life of Balinese people practising their cultures in the temples which Subadra (2015) termed as 'everyday culture'.

Nowadays, the visitor management for worshippers visiting Goa Lawah temple for praying is divided into two wherein independent worshippers can worship the Gods any time, and group worshippers of 10 and 30 worshippers are

required to enter the temple in turns or when other group of worshippers finished conducting rituals in the temple. Similarly, Tirta Empul temple's worshippers are limited to 30 worshippers per group for one term. Each group is coded with different colour entrance cards to distinguish one to another. This strategy is executed and monitored by *Pecalang* – the customary security guards assigned by the Chief of Manukaya Let Traditional Village as a part their obligations securing any rituals conducted within their territory. These visitor management systems allowed worshippers practising rites more conveniently and safely during the pandemic. Additionally, the worshipping place is relocated to the outer courtyard which used locate in the sacred bathing site of the temple to allow worshippers keeping their physical distancing and praying more comfortably during the pandemic. A temple worshipper and caretaker argued:

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I still feel convenient worshipping in this pandemic...health supports and signages have been developed here...*Pecalang* work very well supporting the temple caretakers in managing the worshipper groups praying in this the temple. (Interview, 08/08/2020)

We moved this worshipping place here because inside is very narrow...crowded...no distance...We have more space here...worshippers can keep their safe distance...Now worshippers just pray from here before they have sacred bathing there. (Interview, 22/08/2020)

Q7

Meanwhile, four tourists are limited to a group of 15 people to enter the temple for each term. The limitation is purposed for minimising close contacts within fellow tourists touring in the same slot. Currently, there are only few national tourists visiting both temples, and the visits are still dominated by worshippers who conduct rituals (Observations, 23/08/2020).

The temple managements involve government authorities in enforcing the newly visitor management system applied in both temples. At Tirta Empul temple, the community police officers and soldiers are involved to educate worshippers and tourists visiting the temples to being compliant with the provisions of the new norms and health protocols ordered by law. Similarly, Goa Lawah temple management also involved police officers and soldiers managing visitors to support the temple management monitoring the moves and compliances of worshippers and tourists practising the provisions ruled during pandemic. The direct involvements of state security forces in the visitor managements of both temples are very special case applied during the pandemic to ensure all people's activities are monitored and well-organised. These are parts of national and regional policies, and government concerns in accelerating Bali tourism recovery during pandemic crisis. Meanwhile, the day-to-day operational only use the existing staff to manage the visitors without involving them directly on sites as they are excluded in organisation structure of the temple management. This suggests that the temple managements are dynamic in adapting the most recent

government policy which approves government authorities involving in visitor management in emergency cases of COVID-19 even if they are structurally not parts of the temple managements.

Health Protocol Assessment and Practice

Bali's government formulated particular committees assigned for assessments on preparedness of the tourism sites reopening to meet the ruled provisions. The assessments were focused on the attentiveness of tourism site welcoming tourists during the pandemic which include the availability of health-related facilities prepared by the temple management such as hand-washing basins, hand sanitisers and social distancing signages, and the readiness of the staff serving tourists. Additionally, the governments also organised special trainings on mitigation of COVID-19 pandemic risks for reopening the temple tourism sites. The trainings involved all staff of the temple tourism and focused on cleanness, hygiene and sanitation (CHS), handling tourists standard operating procedures, emergency assistances and reporting cases, and aimed at increasing the officers' competencies (knowledge, skill and attitude) conducting their works pursuant to the ruled COVID-19 mitigation strategy. The trainings were offered by virtue of the provisions of prevention and control of COVID-19 as ruled under Bali Governor Regulation 46/2020 regarding Application of Discipline and Law Enforcement of Health Protocol in Preventing and Controlling Corona Virus Disease 2019 in the New Norm. This regulation stipulates the preventions and controls of COVID-19 spreads which must be applied by citizens, tourists and tourism enterprises during the recovery phase.

Furthermore, the temple opening hours were shifted to minimise the risks of COVID-19 spreads. Both temples used to open for 24 hours a day for worshippers without any restrictions. But nowadays, times of worshipping and ritual services are limited between 06:00 and 18:00 hours. Meanwhile, the opening times for tourism activities in both temples are limited between 09:00 and 17:00 hours which used to be from 08:00 until 19:00.

The last, but not the least, the COVID-19 has also encouraged Bali-based enterprises and charity groups to participate in Bali tourism recovery. The Regional Development Bank of Bali, for instance, supported the development of hand-washing basins in both temples as a part of its social corporate responsibility program. Additionally, the Bali Rotary Club also donated washbasins and staple food packages for priests, temple caretakers and local people working in the temple managements of Goa Lawah temple expressing their sympathies upon the pandemic crisis. This suggests that COVID-19 pandemic has raised the sense of humanity within Balinese communities wherein they hand-in-hand assist each other.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has great impacts on Bali tourism and forced tourism-related businesses shut down that led to massive unemployment. Bali's government reopened

tourism sites for local and national tourists during the pandemic to restart the life of Bali tourism to run the economic engine of Bali. Goa Lawah and Tirta Empul temples designated as cultural tourism sites have been publicly opened for tourists and applied international health protocols, alternated the visitor management strategy both for worshippers and tourists, displayed signages within the temple sites, involved customary and national security officers in managing visitors in the temple sites and shifted the operating hours in supporting government programs relaunching Bali cultural tourism and preventing and controlling COVID-19 spreads in the temple tourism sites. These measures and visitor management strategies are adaptable for other cultural tourism sites. However, the applied strategies do not represent the entire tourism sites in Bali since the research only used two temples as case studies.

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Q13

Queries and/or remarks

[Q1]	Please check the sentence "The number..." for clarity and correct if necessary.
[Q2]	In the reference list UNWTO 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, and 2020d are mentioned as separate references. Therefore we have changed all citations of UNWTO 2020 to UNWTO 2020a,b, c, d. Please amend the citations in the text if necessary.
[Q3]	In the reference list Bali Statistics Agency [BSA] 2020a and 2020b are mentioned as separate references. Therefore we have changed all citations of Bali Statistics Agency [BSA] 2020 to Bali Statistics Agency [BSA] 2020a,b. Please amend the citations in the text if necessary.
[Q4]	Please check the sentence "There have been..." for clarity and correct if necessary.
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