

# VANAPRASTHA WELLNESS TOURISM: A CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS OF BALINESE TRADITIONAL VALUE

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## ABSTRACT

Humans are ancient creatures who live in the modern era; human evolution is closely related to the evolution of the natural surroundings. The concept of human connection to nature tradition of going into the forest is known almost throughout Asia by various names; in Japan, the ancient tradition of forest walks to reduce tension and mental fatigue is called Shinrin-yoku, translated in English as Forest Bathing. In ancient Bali, there was a tradition of spending one of the four stage of live (catur asrama) dealing with the forest, known as Vanaprastha. Bali have a great potential to develop eco-tourism and has no shortage of wellness retreats. This qualitative exploratory study, attempts to synthesize the concepts of forest bathing, ecotourism, wellness, and vanaprastha, as an initial proposal to mini theory development, with a typical qualitative approach adopting the five-phased cycle of data compilation, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding. Utilizing manual data analysis procedures. This study manages to disassemble concepts of the phenomena, subtract them down into distinctive elements, then reassemble the intersected elements into themes, to be then made into compounds to be interpreted and arranged as a new concept of sustainable nature and forest-based tourism aimed at improving the health of tourists through cultural healing while accelerating the capacity building of the host community on economic sustainability – practices that are geared towards

long-term economic growth, which minimize adverse impacts to social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the community.

**Keywords:** *vanaprastha wellness tourism; forest bathing; ecotourism; wellness.*

## Introduction

Naturally, the balance of human life should be in harmony with the balance of nature (Price, 2019). Thus, human contact with nature is an absolute requirement so that humans can live physically and mentally healthy. (Farrow, M. and Washburn, 2019). The concept of human connection to nature tradition of going into the forest is known almost throughout Asia by various names. For example, in Japan, the ancient tradition of forest walks to reduce tension and mental fatigue is called Shinrin-yoku, known in English as Forest Bathing. Bali's unique cultural landscape indicates that the forest is highly respected (Dwijendra, 2020). Philosophically, the Balinese symbolized the forest as Boma, the son of Vishnu (water), and Pertiwi (the earth), the powerful live protector, which etymologically means things that grow - on earth. (Wirawibawa, 2022), (Sarjana, 2018). Business today's publisher announced Bali as the world's best tourist destination of 2017. Not only famous for its unique culture, iconic beaches, coral reef, and world-class accommodation resorts but also for its volcanic mountains and the site of the tropical rain forest, where visitor exposed to and exceptional valuable experience within their exploration of Bali (Permana Budi, A. et al, 2022).

With these nature-based resources, Bali and Indonesia have great potential to develop ecotourism across the country. (Asmin, 2018; Budiarta, 2018; Sunarta, 2020). Departs from observations of ecotourism, wellness, forest bathing, and the Balinese vanaprastha tradition, the study aimed to cover a twin objective of devising a new tourism concept through synthesizing the concept of those phenomena and proposing the definition of Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism for academic and industry contributions. Qualified informants with the capacity for academics, cultural and

professional expertise will be the primary data source, and literature study will be the source of the secondary data compilation. Data processing and analysis are limited to the extracted data from interviews with key informants based on ten perspectives related to the vanaprastha tradition and identifying the relationship between each concept of the phenomenon. As is characteristic of qualitative research, the researcher is the locus and research focus who collaborates with informants in constructing data and information so that it can be explained in an interpretive and constructivist manner. Even data is a critique of researchers and informants on a reality. (Saldana, 2013; Wicks, 2017).

This research is expected to provide an academic contribution to the knowledge development of the Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism concept and its managerial aspect. Once it is turned into a realization, besides the tourism managerial application, it will elevate community awareness towards forest conservation and the ancient traditions of dealing with forests. It will also bring insight into understanding nature and forests' health and wellness benefits for human well-being.

## **Literature Review**

### **Vanaprastha**

It was the word of Wana (the forest) that intrigued and sparked my curiosity to explore further the existence of forests and how we can take as much as a possible advantage of the fact that Indonesia is covered with rain forest, and it would be an ideal as a place of learning, a place for contemplation or a place for mental recharge, and even a place to improve wellness. Interestingly, there are ancient Javanese and Balinese words of Vana-prastha or Vanaprastha, rooted in the ancient Hindu philosophy, commonly understood as the third of the four stages of human life (the catur-ashramas). The stage of pulling self away from mundane life into an inner journey towards essential consciousness. Also understood as a stage of starting to withdraw from material pursuits (Juni, 2020; Sarjana, 2018). The four life-learning

stages within one's life cycle in the Balinese and Javanese cultural repertoire; although it is not Mandatory, the complete stages are considered ideal. The four learning stages are:

1. The Brahmachari (childhood to teenager learning - it's a directed and coached learning),
  1. Brahmachari (adult learning - on becoming a self-leader, and away up to community leader)
  2. Vanaprastha is post-adult learning (independent learning, understanding the essence of life, the self-exploration)
  3. Bhiksuka (a wide-open learning exploration stage - frameless discovery of truth).

From the other perspective, although Vana (Wana - in Balinese & Javanese) means forest, and the term wana-prastha is popularly translated as the stage of an exercise to wandering into the forest; in nowadays context, what is meant by wandering in the middle of the forest is knowing more extended life; the forest is like a place where various life problems and challenges coexist in the cycle of the life chain – a perfect projection of one's self. Yogapedia, a web-based site on yoga information, explains Vanaprastha as a center transition stage where a person marks a profound shift in his life's goals. From material pursuits, such as pleasure, wealth and pride, into self-realization, where enough is enough and more is not always necessary. (Yogapedia, 2022). A slightly different perspective from Sadhguru, the modern spiritualist, as published in Sadhguru encyclopedia websites, is that Vanaprastha's essential meaning is to be in communion with the forest. Vana could also mean garden; in today's modern life, the idea is to withdraw the body from a four-walled place, as four-walled places create a false sense of immortality (Sadhguru, 2022). Despite that we wish to have a long life or even be immortal, the reality is that humans are mortal. Therefore, people must be conscious that they are mortal. This

consciousness alerts the body that each of its cells is mortal; once the body understands this phenomenon, it gradually calibrates itself better and will live much longer. Vanaprastha is about making a person conscious of his mortality (Sadguru, 2022). Realizing mortality is a critical stage of a paradigm shift in one's self-awareness of life. Entering a forest brings a deep sense of how small and delicate a human body is; it brings a deep sense of mortality to the body. Once the body knows it is mortal, each cell will regenerate itself faster. Its natural calls for survival will affect the body's efficiency in energy usage and detox itself through sweat and secretion. The lung will intake more oxygen, and the heart pumps blood circulation effectively.

Bali has a unique forest landscape, which is not too large and has always been part of a traditional (ancient) village. Traditionally, the forest is a source of livelihood and the responsibility given by the Balinese rulers in ancient times to a group of people living in that area. Until now, we can still find traces of these ancient villages, where every traditional village has its forest and shares the same name as legitimate proof. The Balinese affinity toward nature is imprinted in their philosophy of life in which each individual has responsibility in maintaining and striving for harmony in life, harmony between humans, humans and their environment, as well as humans and nature, where nature is an embodiment of the Almighty Creator. This human responsibility towards other humans, the environment and nature are referred to as Tri Hita Karana, which means three sources of harmonious life or welfare. When the harmonious triangle life of Tri Hita Karana is sublimated into tourism, it is pretty identical to the terminology of eco-cultural tourism of (Cajee, 2014) in (Soeroso, 2020), where the incorporation of ecological aspects of landscapes and culture will ignite the tourism economy. Study in Sabah and West Java shows that local communities inhabiting the area surrounding Mount Kinabalu and Mount Halimun have located the mountains and its forest areas as central sources for the development of cultural pattern and practices (Widiyanto, 2019).

Tourism is a concrete example of human harmony where interaction is always expected to be mutually beneficial. Tourism demands harmony between humans in the tourism destinations with their environment; if humans in destinations are negligent of the environment, then tourism will certainly not work well. Likewise, suppose the people at the destination do not understand the landscape as an embodiment of God who always accompanies humankind and does not prepare adequate mitigation. In that case, tourism will also not succeed well. In this study, to anticipate bias and promote mutual understanding, the meaning of *prastha* and *Vanaprastha* is limited to the following table:

Table 1. The etymology of *Vanaprastha*, based on identified sources

<b>The Words</b>	<b>The Meaning</b>	<b>The Literary Source</b>
<i>Prastha</i>	going on a march or journey	Mahabharata (Sanskritdictionary, 2022)
	Tableland; the top of a mountain.	Mahabharata (Sanskritdictionary, 2022)
	appointment	Veda base search (vedabase, 2022)
	destinations, objectives,	
<i>Vanaprastha</i> (1)	Journey into the forest	Mahabharata (Sanskritdictionary, 2022)
<i>Vanaprastha</i> (2)	An elevated space or tableland within the forest	Mahabharata (Sanskritdictionary, 2022)
<i>Vanaprastha</i> (3)	An Appointment with the forest	Veda base search (vedabase, 2022)
<i>Vanaprastha-asrama</i>	retiring into a forest, living the austere life	Monier-Williams search (Sanskritdictionary, 2022)

Source: Processed (2022)

Therefore, in this study, Vanaprastha is defined as an appointment and is a journey into the forest austerely and applying identified exercise on its tablelands for a determined purpose.

### **Ecotourism**

Forests play a vital role in life; it is irreplaceable. The planet earth is dependent on the forest's existence. Forests protect the land from erosion and instability; forests purify the water, the water usage for gardening and farming so that humans survive and do not run out of food. The most valuable thing is that the forest cleans the air and provides oxygen for any living thing to breathe. Oxygen is a vital element that living things cannot survive without within seconds. Despite the irreplaceable role of forests in the health of the world's environment and economy, deforestation continues to accelerate. According to the environmental organization, the world has lost twelve million hectares of tree cover (Watch Indonesia, 2019). Not only trees that are lost, but various biotas are in extinction if the forest coverage continues to decrease. Even the world's climate change occurs due to the decline in the number of forests. Indonesia forest identification through satellite imaging across the country in 2020 by the Indonesia Ministry of Environment and Forestry recorded that Indonesia's forested land reached 95.6 million hectares, or 50.9% of the total land. From the year 2019 to 2020, Indonesia lost 115,5 thousand hectares of forest. Although it is considerably large in number, it is much better than the deforestation rate from 2018 to 2019, which reached 462.4 thousand hectares, (Menlhk.go.id, 2022). The success in reducing deforestation rates is strongly influenced by the reforestation program that reaches over 3 thousand hectares. Indonesia's vast forests, with an increasingly positive result on reforestation, brought significant advantages for ecotourism development. It requires nature and environment conservation that will reduce the deforestation rate while increasing the local community economy. The government policy to reinstate customary forests across Indonesia will undoubtedly provide a storynomics value, the

narrative-based attractions, creative content and local community living culture to strengthen ecotourism attractiveness, (Soeroso, 2020).

Ecotourism is defined as a nature-based tourism activity where the primary motivation of visitors is to observe, appreciate and experience biodiversity responsibly, and participate in maintaining the ecosystem to elevate the welfare of the local community. Ecotourism is also an indicator of public awareness toward the conservation of biodiversity, the natural environment and the local community's culture, which requires special management processes aimed at minimizing negative impacts on the ecosystem, (UNWTO, 2019).

Forest exploitation is certainly not an option, as we wish to preserve them. So, forest conservation through tourism can be the solution. Synthesizing the concept of eco-therapy through forest bathing and eco-tourism will transform those concepts into a bio-eco-based wellness tourism destination, so-called Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism.

## **Wellness**

The shared understanding of "health" and "wellness" are interchangeably used; however, The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Although the common understanding of wellness can be defined similarly, some scholars and the National Wellness Institute suggest that wellness can be defined as an active process through which people become aware of and choose a more successful existence. Usually, health is referred to as physical health and wellbeing are referred to as mental health, (Davis, 2022). Wellness is a modern word that has ancient roots. The tenets of wellness as a preventive and holistic approach to health remain trackable to the ancient civilization of the east and the west. The Global Wellness Institute indicates the evolution of wellness starting in the Ayurvedic period 3000 to 1,500 BC, a holistic approach to creating harmony of body, mind and soul



through unique personal nutritional system, exercise, social interaction and hygiene needs). Traditional Chinese medicine from 3000 to 2000 B.C. is considered one of the oldest medicine systems such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, Qi Gong and Tai Chi. Ancient Greek medicine from 500 B.C. to ancient Roman 50 B.C. emphasized preventing sickness and public sanitation.



Figure 1. The evolution of wellness

Source: GWI (2018)

The published English words of wellness were initially used in 1654 in the dairy entry of Sire Archibald Johnston to express the opposite meaning of illness. Within the 18th to early 19th century, physicians promoted the usage of the natural substance to boost self-healing responses, followed by the "Kneipp Cure" that combined herbalism with hydrotherapy, exercise, and nutrition. The Carnegie foundation's Flexner report

in 1910 marked the dropped of naturopathy from mainstream medical education, setting the stage for disease-oriented medicine. For over half a century, wellness was out of sight until an informal network of Dr John Travis, Don Ardnell, and Dr Bill Hettler embraced the high-level wellness published earlier in 1961 by physician Halbert L. Dunn. These fathers of the wellness movement created their comprehensive wellness models, developed new wellness assessment tools, and wrote and spoke actively on the concept. Since then, wellness has gained momentum within the medical academic, marked by the establishment of the European Wellness Union (EWU) in 1990.

Entering the 21st century till today, words of wellness have become ubiquitous in trade media and among consumers. Wellness has emerged as an expression of lifestyle value, marked by the establishment of the U.S. National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) in 1991. Meanwhile wellness has an ancient deep root in the Balinese tradition of nature healing, and therefore, Bali has no shortage of wellness retreats (Fitzgerald, 2020).

### **Forest Bathing**

Dr Qing Li is one of the researchers from the "Department of Hygiene and Public Health Japan" who is most passionate about researching the effect of forest bathing on health; he conducted further research on the effect of forest bathing on a person's immunity through the method of comparing and measuring the activity of Natural Killer (NK) lymphocytes in the blood. The NK lymphocyte activity was measured by the levels of granulysin, perforin, and granzymes. (Li, 2010). Granulysin is an antimicrobial peptide (protein) released as cytotoxic granules by killer lymphocytes. Perforin is another protein released by killer cells of the immune system that creates pores in the membrane of targeted cells to destroy them. Granzymes' role within the natural killer is to promote cytotoxicity of foreign, neoplastic, or infected cells. The study shows that the level of NK lymphocytes of the participants after being

for 2 nights three days in the forest was significantly increased compared to before entering the forest and compared to the participants who remained in the city. The NK lymphocyte activity increased for more than 30 days after leaving the forest. This clinical evidence confirms the role of forest bathing in increasing immunity levels. Figure 2. Presents the comparison of the positive rate in peripheral blood lymphocytes (PBL) of GRN=granulysin, Perforin, GrA=granzymes A, GrB=granzymes B, before forest bathing, a day after, after the second days, seven days and 30 days.

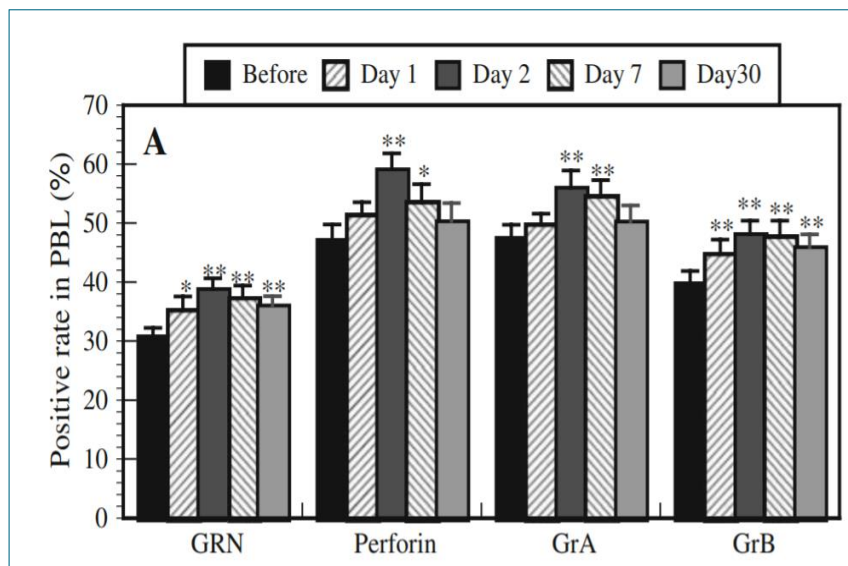


Figure 2. The positive rate in peripheral blood lymphocytes GRN=granulysin, Perforin, GrA=granzymes A, GrB=granzymes B.

Source: Li, Q. (2010)

This figure suggests that we may maintain an optimum level of a positive rate of lymphocytes in the PBL by exercising the forest bathing once in 30 days. Further clinical trials showed that increased NK activity in lymphocytes could kill tumor or virus-infected cells by releasing perforins, granzymes, and granulysin in the exocytosis pathway. Exocytosis releases and fuses vacuole contents from inside the nuclear cell membrane with the cell membrane. Figure 3 below is the simplified diagram to understand how forest bathing increases the GrA, GrB, Perforin and

granulysin level in the Natural Killer lymphocyte to kill the tumor or virus-infected cell.

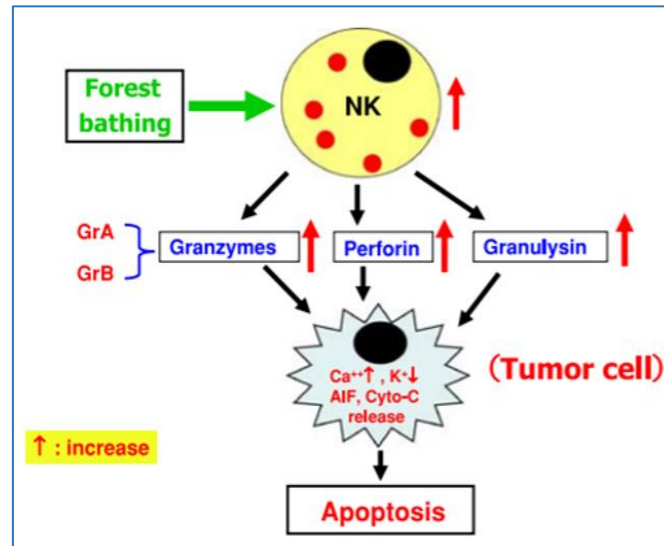


Figure 3. The simplified diagram of NK in Forest Bathing

(Source: Environ Health Prev. Med on Effect of forest bathing trips on human immune function, published online 2009)

This series of molecular processes in a cell is one of the methods used by our body to get rid of unneeded or abnormal cells. This process is so-called apoptosis. In the case of cancer, the apoptosis might be blocked, this blockage can be penetrated by increasing the blood peripheral lymphocyte level as a natural killer through forest bathing activities.

There was also a study aimed to compare Forest Bathing Alone (FBA) with Forest Bathing with exercise (FBE) towards trigger points in the posterior neck region (TRPs), where the range of motions of the cervical spine was evaluated on the first day and the last day of the program and compared between the two. The study's conclusions indicate a significant reduction of TRPs in the FBE group compared to the FBA group. The reduced TRPs are an indication of a more relaxed and flexible muscle around the posterior neck region. (Kang, 2015). Other research on forest bathing using the profile of mood states (POMS) method showed a significant increase in vigor, accompanied by a drastic decrease in anxiety, depression, and anger. Regular forest

bathing activities can overcome psychosocial risks related to diseases caused by stress and depression.

Chia-pin Yu, in 2017 conducted a study to investigate changes in autonomic nervous system activity and emotion after forest bathing – a two hours program for the elderly. (Yu, 2017), study indicates a positive physiological benefit from the activities, where the tension-anxiety, Anger-hostility, fatigue-inertia, depression-dejection, and confusion-bewilderment were significantly lower, while on the other side, the vigor-activity of mood subscale was higher. It concludes a determination that short forest bathing programs are a promising and effective therapeutic method for psychological relaxation strategy.

In the most recent study, (Silmi, 2021) of Mataram University using a pre-experimental method with a one-group pre-test and post-test design with a sample of 24 people using consecutive sampling. The subject group will first be given a pre-test before the intervention, measuring blood pressure. Then the test results were compared at the beginning and end of each subject. The results were that forest bathing exercise had a significant effect on decreasing the blood pressure of patients with coronary heart disease.

## **Method**

This research is adopting a qualitative exploratory approach addressing existing phenomena from a new synthesized perspective (Mason, 2010), that combining the in-depth interview technique to mine the primary data (Antony, 2022) and literature study to mine the secondary data (Guillen, 2019). Primary data mining is conducted qualitatively through semi-structured interviews involving selected informants who have solid academic backgrounds, tourism industry experience, and cultural expertise. Taking the advantage of technology, the interview was conducted one by one for each key informant and video recorded via zoom. The recorded videos were saved in MP4 video format; QR-coded per informant, uploaded to YouTube, and URL

link were created for easier computer online access. The key informants who are interviewed in this research are:

1. Ida Pandita Mpu Brahmananda, a Balinese Hindu priest who was walaka as Prof. Dr. Ir. I Gede Pitana, M.Sc., a tourism professor of Udayana University, has served as Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the author of several tourism books.
2. Prof. Dr. I Nyoman Darma Putra, M. Litt. is a professor in the field of literature at Udayana University, a master and doctoral lecturer in Cultural Studies and a productive senior journalist.
3. Ida Rsi Acharya Waisnawa Agni Buddha Wisesanatha, a Balinese Hindu priest, before becoming a priest (walaka), was Ir. Made Suryawan, MM. CHA., CHSP. a hospitality industry professional, the founders of the Zeeti International Hospitality Management and the Mirah Delima Institute, a Balinese Spiritual Education, Development and Healing.

The secondary data were gathered through various empirical materials such as journal-article, case studies, books, and texts that describe the previous study (Ihalauw, 2022). Citation of each data source organized with Mendeley and applying APA style. Adopting qualitative data analysis methods and manual data analysis procedures (Bungin, 2022), Both primary and secondary data collections are compiled and color-coded using the open coding and axial coding principle.

Table 1. Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism Data Codification

No.	Code	Data Source	Data type
1	KI-1	Key Informant 1 In-depth Interview	Primary Data
2	KI-2	Key Informant 2 In-depth Interview	Primary Data

3	KI-3	Key Informant 3 In-depth Interview	Primary Data
4	P1	Forest Bathing Literature Review	Secondary Data
5	P2	Vanaprastha Literature Review	Secondary Data
6	P3	Ecotourism Literature Review	Secondary Data
7	P4	Wellness Literature Review	Secondary Data

Source: Process 2022

Data validity is checked using the construct-related validity and adopting an interrater reliability to assess the data reliability. The collected data is then analyzed with a typical qualitative approach adopting the five-phased cycle (Robert K. Yin & ., 2016), includes disassembling where the collected information are subtracted into elements and tabulated with intersection analysis.

Table 2. Element’s Disassembling Tabulation

No	Category	P1	P2	P3	P4	KI-1	KI-2	KI-3	SUM
1	<b>FOREST, GARDEN</b> tree, wood, things that grow on earth, natural substance	****	**** **	****	*	**** ***	****	****	31
2	<b>NATURE</b> Conservation, Natural, landscape, tableland, biodiversity, ecosystem	**	**	****	***	**** ***	**	**	22
3	<b>HEALING</b> ecotherapy, Aromatherapy, detox, oxygenized, Physical, mental, exercise, self-healing, fresh, relax,	****	***	**	**** *	****	**	****	24

	medicine, harmony w/nature								
4	<b>VISIT</b> Journey, appointment, wondering, entering, visitor	*	***	*		****	****	**** **	19
5	<b>CULTURE</b> environment, local community, tradition, ecosystem, living culture, boma, Catur- asrama	*	****	****	** *	**** **	**** **	**	26
6	<b>EXERCISE</b> Walk, yoga, meditation, relaxation, breathing, contemplation, Participate, exercise.	***	***	**	**	**** ****	**	****	24
7	<b>ECONOMY</b> Tourism, Management, attraction, welfare	*		**		*	**	*	7
		16	21	19	14	37	22	25	

Source: Process 2022

Asterisk (\*) symbols were used to replace number (one) in the table, although in some cases, real numbers are needed to calculate occurrence of elements. The third step is data reassembling and arraying, where analytical process and data are displayed in table and figures; this is critical for better understanding the abstract idea of categorization of the theme. Reciprocal analysis then takes place to measure the weight of the relationship between phenomenon's themes. The weight of phenomenon's reciprocal relationship is then to be interpreted (step 4), to reflect the synthesized meaning in a focused context (Seiver, 1998) and devising the synthesized concept, in respond to first research question and objective. Compounding themes of the synthesized data is the final step of concluding, from which the definition of the



synthesized concept is constructed. Having the elements, the theme, the themed compounded, the proposed definition of the concept can be constructed. The overall process aimed to construct theory abstraction of Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism.

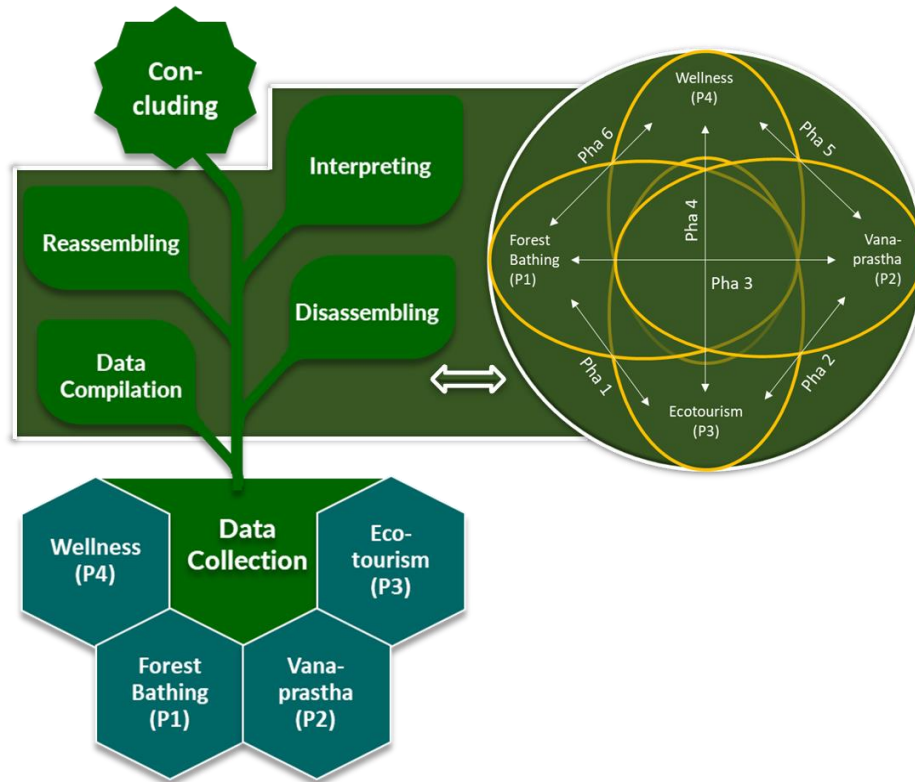


Figure 4. Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism Research Logic Framework

Sources: Process (2022), adopted from (Robert K. Yin, 2018)

## Result and Discussion

This research manages to disassemble the concepts of the phenomena, subtract them down into distinctive elements, then reassemble the intersected elements into themes, to be then made into compounds to be interpreted and arranged as a new concept. This study develops a new concept of sustainable nature and forest-based tourism aimed at improving the health of tourists through cultural healing while accelerating the capacity building of the host community on economic sustainability – practices that are geared towards long-term economic growth, which minimize adverse impacts to social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the community

(UMW, 2023). The proposed title of this new tourism concept is Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism, a tourism concept with seven interrelated themes, as illustrated below:

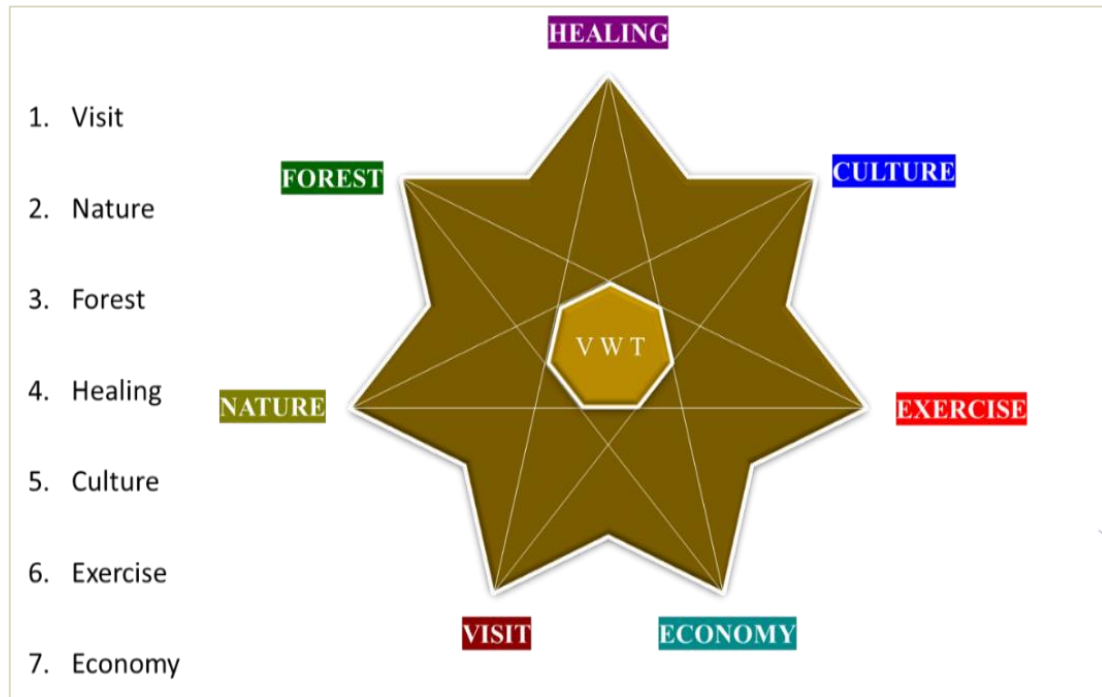


Figure 5. The Seven-Pointed Star of Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism

Sources: Processed (2023)

The ultimate idea is that to be a qualified Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism Destination, a site and its management should comply with all those seven themes.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Taking the output of each analytical step into account, the conclusions of this study are:

1. The synthesized output on forest bathing, ecotourism, wellness, and vanaprastha is a tourism concept with seven interrelated themes which are: Nature, Forest, Healing, Culture, Exercise, Visit, and Economy. Therefore, to be a qualified Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism Destination, a site, and its management should comply with these seven themes.

2. The proposed title of the concept is Vanaprastha Wellness Tourism, with a proposed definition: Sustainable cultural landscape-based tourism aimed at improving the health of visitors through a cultural healing experience while accelerating the capacity building of the host community on economic sustainability, nature protection and environment sustainability.

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Finally, please accept my apologies for any imperfections in this study write-up; for this reason, the author expects directions and suggestions from readers so that the writing of this study can be even better. Hope this study can be useful for readers and can be developed further by future researchers.

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