

Bali: Between Cultural and Marine Tourism¹

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Abstract

This paper discusses the potential of marine tourism in Bali and its contribution toward the development of sustainable tourism. While marine and cultural tourism form two distinct categories, in Bali there are many cultural activities that take place on beaches, or coastal areas that become unique tourist attractions. Therefore, in this paper, I will also introduce an expanded view of marine tourism that would include, for instance, the observation of processions and rituals on beaches. Exploring the interconnections between marine and cultural tourism may help us come up with new strategies for the sustainability of tourism in Bali as a whole. In addition to aiming at sharing the experiences of Bali in managing and promoting its marine tourism potential, this paper also seeks feedback on better ways to manage marine tourism in order to achieve tourism sustainability for the island.

Key words: Bali, marine tourism, cultural tourism, tourist attractions, sustainable tourism

Introduction

The Indonesian island of Bali has a rich art scene and a vibrant cultural life. Both have been used as the foundation for the development of cultural tourism (Vickers [1989] 2012; Picard

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1996). The island attracts more than three million international visitors every year. Last year, for example, the island was visited by 3,2 million of international visitors, almost half of the total number of foreigners visiting Indonesia in 2013, which was 8,8 million. The way Bali uses its cultural assets as tourist attractions not only helps to sustain the flow of visitors to the island, but also plays an important role in nurturing the vibrant life and creativity of the island's culture, thus creating a mutualistic relationship between culture and tourism (Pitana, Diarta, Sarjana 2013). This dynamic relationship continues to strengthen the image of Bali as a cultural tourism destination.

Despite being known for its cultural tourism, as a small island that is surrounded by sea, Bali also has beautiful stretches of beach and coastal environments that are ideal for a variety of marine tourism activities. There are a number of places in Bali that offer a wide range forms of recreation such as surfing, snorkeling, parasailing, dolphin watching, and sea walking. Like performing arts and other forms of cultural attractions, all of these forms of marine-based leisure activities also contribute to the variety of tourist attractions. But it seems that in the attempt to create the image or brand of the island as a tourist destination, such potential has been unequally valued compared to the attention given specifically to arts and culture.

In the mid 1970s, for example, during the flow of visitors known as hippies, there was a growing concern for the negative impact of tourism on local culture. In anticipating the possibility of cultural degradation, profanisation, or over-commercialisation, the provincial government of Bali introduced a regional regulation (*Perda*) as a guideline on tourism development. The regulation, first issued in 1974, outlined that tourism must be developed in order to strengthen local culture, not only to utilise culture as a form of tourist attraction, but

more importantly to use the benefits from tourism to enrich culture (Hitchcock and Putra 2007).

Until recently, the regulation has undergone two revisions, in 1993 and 2012, which stressed the cultural focus of the government in the development of Bali's tourism. The regulation reiterates the importance of maintaining a reciprocal relationship between culture and tourism for the sake of the people's prosperity, cultural sustainability and environmental preservation. There are various forms of tourism, such as ecotourism, and marine tourism, but there has never been specific regulation for these as in the case of cultural tourism. However, the fact is that marine tourism in Bali is as important as cultural tourism in keeping the island tourism industry sustainable.

This paper discusses the potential of marine tourism in Bali and its contribution toward the development of sustainable tourism. While marine and cultural tourism form two distinct categories, in Bali there are many cultural activities that take place on beaches, or coastal areas that become unique tourist attractions. Therefore, in this paper, I will also introduce an expanded view of marine tourism that would include, for instance, the observation of processions and rituals on beaches. Exploring the interconnections between marine and cultural tourism may help us come up with new strategies for the sustainability of tourism in Bali as a whole. In addition to aiming at sharing the experiences of Bali in managing and promoting its marine tourism potential, this paper also seeks feedback on better ways to manage marine tourism in order to achieve tourism sustainability for the island.

Marine Tourism

Marine tourism has been defined widely. Orams (1999:9), for example, points out that marine tourism includes:

those recreational activities that involve travel away from one's place of residence and which have their host or focus the marine environment (where the marine environments is defined as those waters which are saline and tide affected).

Orams' definition, which has been cited by many scholars, includes a wide range of marine environment-based activities. Jeong (2014: 299-300), by referring to Orams' and other marine studies sources, provides a number of activities that could be included in the definition of marine tourism. He states that:

marine tourism participation included swimming in the ocean, cruising, sea fishing, enjoying sea views, visiting an island, staying at a marine resort, visiting a fishing port or, sea village, marine sports and marina use, marine health activities (e.g., a hot sand bath and mudpack), marine ecotourism, and enjoying sunrises or sunsets in marine locales (Jeong 2014: 299-300).

It is clear from the definition above that marine tourism includes a wide range of activities. If looked at from the point of view of participants, it can be seen that marine tourists are not only those actively involved in surfing, diving, sea walking, and so forth, but also those statically watching sunrises, sunsets, or surfing competitions.

In Bali, as in other coasts of the world, there are many kinds of possible activities, not limited to beach-focused forms of leisure, but also activities with cultural and social dimensions. Before describing these further, below is the description of marine tourism and its contribution to the development of Bali tourism.

Marine Tourism in Bali

Bali was first introduced as a tourism destination in the 1920s by the Dutch colonial government. This began by encouraging the Royal Packet Navigation Company or KPM to start bringing

tourists to Bali. Initially, tourists were primarily Westerners who lived in Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), but later on included tourists from outside of Indonesia.

Following the growing popularity of Bali and the increasing ease of access provided, more visitors came and stayed longer; for instance, German-born artist Walter Spies and Dutch painter Rudolf Bonnet. Among other legendary tourists who came to Bali in the early days of the development of tourism was Indian Nobel prize winner for literature, Rabindranath Tagore and his companion, who came to Bali in 1927 (Dutta and Robinson 1995; Lanus 2013).

The trip to Bali on a ship no doubt can be seen as a form of marine tourism. Passengers would also enjoy the scenery of the ocean and beach from their ship when it was approaching the island's harbor. The ship anchored either in North or South Bali harbor from where they toured the island. Since both the ship journey and activities like viewing the scenery or sunset/sunrise from KPM was also a kind of marine tourism, this means that the development of Bali tourism was inseparable from marine tourism since the very beginning.

The establishment of hotels in Kuta beach and in Sanur beach by both expatriates and local inhabitants during the late colonial period (1930s) and after independence (1945) not only shows the central role played by marine environment in tourism development but also the focus on using beaches for recreational purposes. In Bali, before tourism was as well developed as it is today, beaches were not popular places for people to visit. People believe that beaches are sacred and dangerous (*angker*), and they are considered symbolically or physically as a back rather than a front yard. The beach is the place to throw rubbish from ceremonial offerings, or scatter the ashes of the dead, to ensure that their manifested body returns to the outer world or to the holy river of Gangga in India, since

Balinese Hindu hold the belief that sea water would meet the water of Gangga River in the sea. Beaches or coasts were not thought of as recreational places, but more as either *angker* places or places to perform sacred rituals. Visiting the beach in twilight (*senjakala*), the time of sunset, was also considered dangerous, as it is the time when the power of day and night collide. Change, however, took place when tourism activities started to influence local people to see how beautiful the sunset is.

In the 1970s, when tourism began to develop more broadly, surfing sports introduced by the surfers of Australia also started to develop. Bali got to host several international surfing competitions. Balinese youths also appeared to be a formidable surfers, competing at an international level.

Film producer Andrew Kidmann and director Albe Falzon of Australia made a surfing movie called *The Morning of the World* (1971), released in 1972. Lewis (1998) suggested that this film was modelled on Bruce Brown's film *The Endless Summer: The Search for the Perfect Wave* (USA, 1964) and established a prototype of surf movie in Australia. The film follows the journey of a troupe of skilled surfers through high-quality surf in some largely undistinguished territories of Australia, Hawaii, and Bali (Lewis 2009:66). The film's legendary nature not only managed to convince the world that surfing is a lifestyle, but also to promote Bali as a good surf spot for Australian tourists and surfers from other countries.

Since tourists discovered the beautiful beaches around Bali, and since beaches became one of the centres of tourist leisure activities, many international-scale beach activities have been held in Bali, for example the international skydiving championship in 1988, ASEAN Beach Volley Ball, and a number of international surfing contests in south Bali, especially in the Kuta, Legian, and Uluwatu Beaches. While such beach-

focused activities involved more foreigners than local people, recently there are a number of coastal villages that have held festivals which included various form of beach activities and competitions, like the Sanur Village Festival (since 2005, the IXth taking place in 2014), Kuta Carnival, Legian Beach Festival, Lovina Festival (North Bali), Nusa Penida Festival (in the Southeast). Unlike the various national and international championships, these festivals were initiated and run by local people and supported by government and tourism sectors. Since these are held at coastal villages, the festivals include a variety of marine-based activities such as canoe races, fish-based food festivals, and kite festivals. All of these festivals are recent phenomena and since the initiative was taken by local people or villagers, the festivals have contributed to a new spirit of tourism, specifically focusing on marine-based activities and leisure.

Dolphin Watching and Coral Rehabilitation in North Bali

The potential of marine tourism has been developed in a number of areas throughout Bali. The kinds of marine activities on offer vary from place to place. In North Bali, in Lovina beach, there is a dolphin watching attraction which not only attracts tourists to the area, but also provides economic benefits to the local people (Mustika, Birtles, Welters, and Marsh 2012), hence contributing to the sustainability of the destination.

In a study conducted in 2008-2009, Mustika *et al* mention that the dolphin tour brings 37000 overnight visitors to hotels in the Lovina area for the year, and contributes Rp 41 billion to the local economy, including hotels, restaurants, transportation, communication, and souvenir shops. There are 179 boats mostly operated by former fishermen who have direct income from this form of marine tourism. Tickets to watch the dolphins range from Rp 50 thousand to Rp 85 thousand per person (US\$

5 - US\$ 8,5), depending on the distance and quality of service. Since dolphin watching can only be done in the morning, tourists who stay in South Bali have to come and stay overnight in Lovina. As long as this tourist attraction is sustained, the economic impact will continue to benefit accommodation and other tourism-related businesses in Lovina.

In order to maintain the dolphin watching attraction, it is suggested that the number of boats that operate must be controlled and even reduced. The higher number of boats that operate in the area could threaten the appearance of the dolphins and can compromise the satisfaction of tourists who purchase this tour. If the dolphins do not show up, tourists would be unhappy, and slowly this tour would vanish, which could put the tourism business in the area at risk.

Pemuteran Village, North Bali, is another spot of marine tourism worth noting for its best practices, economic impact, and marine-environment preservation. Pemuteran is a coastal area with a dry land which had contributed to the level of poverty of the villagers. Fishermen in the area used to catch fish using cyanide bombs which destroyed corals. This eventually reduced tourist interest in diving or snorkeling in the area.

To avoid further damage to the beautiful marine park in the Pemuteran beach, in 1992, the association of dive operators (Gahawisri) and local accommodation businesses took an initiative to invite villagers to rehabilitate the coral reef as an incentive to invite tourist interest and the economic benefits that follow. They founded the Karang Lestari Foundation (YKL) to work together to save the coral in Pemuteran beach. The interesting part of this effort was that it combined the use of science and technology and the value of local wisdom to ensure to rehabilitation of the coral reef. Technological support was provided by two international experts, Professor Hilbertz Wolf and Dr. Tom Goreau, while villagers enforced



Photo 1. A purification *melasti* ritual on the beach becomes a tourist attraction. (Source Internet).

local-wisdom-based regulations (*awig-awig*) to prevent people from catching fish or destroying the coral as they did before. Traditional police patrol, *pecalang*, has been assigned to patrol the beach area. Should they find villagers or locals catching fish or carrying equipment that would presumably be used to destroy coral, the *pecalang* would give appropriate sanctions. Through this combined effort and serious measures, the damage to coral gardens was back under control.

Tourists slowly returned and business gradually recovered. At the same time, villagers under the foundation profit from working as boat drivers for tourists interested in marine tourism. Thanks to marine tourism, the originally generally poor Pemuteran village began to gradually reach a level of prosperity (Pitana, Diarta, and Sarjana 2013). What is equally important in the context of imagery used in the promotion of tourism in Bali is that this strategy to rehabilitate the reef garden in Pemuteran has gained international recognition. The chairman of Karang Lestari Foundation, I Gusti Agung Prana, received national and international awards, such as the Kalpataru from the government of Indonesia



Photo 2. Dolphin watching in Lovina Beach, North Bali (Source Internet).

(2004) as an environmental savior. The following year (2005), Karang Lestari Foundation received the Gold Award For Best Environmental Project, from the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) submitted in a conference in Macau.

The rehabilitation of coral in Pemuteran with the implementation of a system of biorock has inspired similar efforts in other parts of Indonesia, such as Lombok. Australian businessmen who invest in the island invited experts who were successful in the Pemuteran coral rehabilitation project to implement their biorock system around Gili Terawangan, an island facing severe coral reef damage and waste and sewage problems (Dodds, Graci, Holmes 2010:210). In addition, hoteliers and dive operators in Pemuteran village have incorporated sustainability practices into their management and marketing strategies, thus guaranteeing better economic outlooks for local people, and thus matching the tourism-related economic opportunities of the Lovina in the East and Pemuteran in the West part of North Bali.

Water Recreation and Local Cruises

Benoa harbor and Tanjung Benoa village in South Bali are also a centre of marine tourism. The harbor is the port of yachts and cruise ships, while Tanjung Benoa (across the harbor to the South) offers a range of marine tourism attractions. All the



attractions they offer have not only become a source of income for operators and local people, but more importantly, provide tourists with a myriad of choices of marine leisure activities.

Tanjung Benoa is less than 3 km away and easily accessed from Nusa Dua, home of dozens of luxurious hotels with around 6000 rooms. The beach of the village has low waves, which is ideal for various kinds of marine recreational activities such as parasailing, banana boat riding, water scooter, and kite skiing. There are 24 companies, operated by and employing local people, most of them former fishermen, as in Pemuteran and Lovina. They are grateful for the potential of their area which makes it possible for them to gain access to the economic benefits of tourism (Ayu Rai 2014). Marine tourism operators give priority to measures that will preserve the coastal environment in order to ensure the sustainability of their economic resources.

A relatively new form of marine tourism activities is seawalker, offered in Tanjung Benoa and Sanur, to the north. In this form of recreation, tourists descend to the bottom of the sea, approximately 3-4 meters below surface, to enjoy the beauty of coral reefs and colorful fishes. No swimming skill is required. Advances in technology allow participants to safely get down to below sea level using helmet-oxygen equipment to breathe. Travelers from Asia such as Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and from Australia are fond of this form of recreation. Hotels around Tanjung Benoa and Sanur also include a seawalker attraction in their room rates, making their offerings more attractive to visitors.

Local cruise tours are offered in Tanjung Benoa and Benoa Harbour. There are three cruise ships operating in Benoa and Tanjung Benoa: the Bali Hai Cruise, Bounty Cruise, and Quicksilver. These cruises offer a day trip to Nusa Lembongan Island, about 90 minutes from Benoa. Upon arrival, tourists



Photo 3. Kecak dance performance with the backdrop of cliff, temple, and sunset. (Source Internet).

can enjoy the marine tourism leisure activities, ranging from banana boat riding, diving, snorkeling, glass bottom boat, tours to Lembongan fishermen village, and so on. Hundreds of tourists enjoy this tour every day. Besides the day tour, a dinner cruise is also on offer. All this adds to the unlimited attraction of Bali.

The operation of cruises to Nusa Penida and Nusa Lembongan also stimulates the development of accommodation and restaurants in these two small islands. Job opportunities have opened up for the locals, helping to slow down migration to the main island of Bali.

Rituals on the Beach as a Form of Marine Tourism Attraction

Beaches in Bali not only provide a place for a variety of marine tourism activities as outlined in the previous sections, but also an essential place for Balinese to perform various forms of Hindu rituals. Cremation ceremonies, for example, include throwing the ashes in the beaches, and this could be done more than once. Life cycle ceremonies for babies becoming



Photo 4. Water ski as a form of marine tourism (Source Internet).

six months old also include a purification ceremony held on the beach. Other types of small and medium-scale rituals are frequently performed on beaches around Bali, all of which make the marine environment a spot for tourists to observe a variety of cultural attractions.

There is also an annual procession to the beach from villages and vice versa as part of a purification ritual preceding the celebration of the Hindu New Year, The Day of Silence. During the procession, called *melasti*, temple regalia and offerings are carried out to the beach, accompanied by traditional gamelan music that makes such processions particularly lively. This ritual is performed on beaches throughout Bali. In hinterland regions, where access to beaches is impossible, such rituals are held on lakes or riversides where water for symbolic purification is available. The procession starts from the village temple in late morning, and returns in late afternoon. Access to beaches on the day is difficult, as roads are blocked by long processions that involve thousands of people. The ritual itself lasts around three hours on the beach. The unique ritual



Photo 5. Cruice ship and canoeing on the sea near Nusa Lembongan Island (Source Internet)

called *ngurek* (stabbing kris dagger in the chest) and dances are performed as part of the purification.

The famous Kuta Beach and its north adjacent Legian, Seminyak, Petitenget, and Canggu, and Berawa all become venues of *melasti*. Because it takes place during the day until late afternoon, these beaches, popular for sunbathing, swimming, and other forms of marine leisure, turn into a unique tourist attraction. These activities perhaps can also be defined as a form of marine tourism. But, unlike conventional sorts of marine tourism that focus on marine environment as defined by Orams, this form of marine tourism has a cultural attraction as its main element.

The presence of tourists wearing swimsuits or bikinis amongst the sacred Hindu rituals often provokes critical commentary which negatively expresses how tourist beach culture pollutes sacred rituals. For others, the ability and

solemnity of Balinese Hindus to perform grandiose processions and rituals on beaches usually occupied by tourists is evidence of the fact that the development of tourism causes little influence to the sustainability of Balinese culture. Rather than choose one or the other, it is better to emphasise that such differences of opinion are basically caused by different ways of viewing these phenomena.

Conclusion

Bali has a great potential for marine tourism, ranging from surfing, dolphin watching, cruises, watersports, and seawalking, all of which have directly or indirectly contributed to the local economy, marine environment preservation measures, and most importantly to the myriad of options for marine-based tourist activities.

Marine tourism has played as important a role as cultural tourism in the sustainability of the island's tourism. However, even though, as this paper argued, forms of marine tourism have transformed Balinese practices and attitudes towards coastal areas to such an extent that tourism can be said to have 'invented' Balinese beaches, the potential of marine tourism has never been significantly taken into account in constructing the brand or image of Bali's tourism, which remains focused on culture.

An expanded view of marine tourism would include the observation of processions and rituals on beaches, such as *melasti*, as well as activities such as watching the sunset in the beautiful sea temples of Tanah Lot or Uluwatu in South Bali. These provide interesting examples of how both marine tourist activities and cultural attractions can be combined to become a strong element in promoting forms of tourism that are unique to Bali.

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