PRESERVING THE SANCTITY OF TEMPLE SITES IN BALI: CHALLENGES FROM TOURISM

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PRESERVING THE SANCTITY OF TEMPLE SITES IN BALI: CHALLENGES FROM TOURISM

Abstract

This research set out to explore the consequences for Balinese worshippers of their temples being officially designated as cultural tourism sites. Bali is well documented as having a long and extensive exposure to international tourism; the focus of much previous scholarship, however, has been on the influences of tourism on cultural performance (specifically of dance and music) rather than on sites that continue to be used by local people for worship – in this case, Hindu temples. Two such sites, the public temples of Goa Lawah and Tirtha Empul, were selected as case study sites. These were investigated by means of an empirical approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques: surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and participant observation.

The concepts of cultural misunderstanding and authenticity were investigated in terms of their meanings to both tourists and worshippers at these sites. Further findings revealed a complex pattern of resistance, conflict and accommodation among and between various interested parties, such as international tourists, tour guides, villagers, local worshippers and those from further away, and state officials. Key factors shaping these patterns were the ways in which visitor management was organised in the temples, in particular the practice of permitting tourists to enter the inner, most sacred courtyard of each temple. A further source of conflict was the way in which the revenue from tourism was distributed between local villages and regional government. Some recommendations have been advanced as to how visitor management might serve all temple users more effectively.

Keywords: cultural tourism, preservation of sanctity, authenticity, conflict and resistance, cultural misunderstanding, interpretation, visitor management, Goa Lawah, Tirtha Empul.
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“Om Suasti Astu”

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Table of Contents

Title of thesis ........................................... i
Abstract .................................................. ii
Acknowledgment ......................................... iii
Table of content .......................................... iv
List of abbreviation ....................................... vii
List of table ............................................... ix
List of figure ............................................. x
List of pictures .......................................... xi

Chapter 1: 
INTRODUCTION: WORSHIPPERS AND TOURISTS IN BALINESE TEMPLES
1.1 Research background ............................... 1
1.2 Conflict and cultural tourism ................. 4
1.3 Research questions, rationale and objectives 6
1.4 Thesis overview .................................. 8

Chapter 2:
REVIEWING THE LITERATURE ON CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM
2.1 Introduction ....................................... 10
2.2 The concept of culture ............................ 11
2.3 Defining cultural tourism and cultural tourists 13
2.4 Defining sacred tourism and pilgrim-tourists 15
2.5 Cultural tourism, capitalism and commodification 19
2.6 Meaning of authenticity in tourism .......... 23
2.7 Cross-cultural contact, understanding and misunderstanding in tourism 27
2.8 Tour guides and their role in cultural tourism 32
2.9 Managing temple tourism and visitors .......... 34
2.10 Conclusion ........................................ 37

Chapter 3:
METHODOLOGY: INVESTIGATING TOURISTS IN BALINESE TEMPLES
3.1 Rationale of the research ......................... 39
3.2 Gaining research access ......................... 43
3.3 Research design .................................. 43
3.4 Qualitative method ............................... 45
6.5 Tourists and tourism at Goa Lawah: numbers and income 134
6.6 Goa Lawah Temple as a site of tourism 138
6.7 Conclusion 145

Chapter 7:
TIRTHA EMPUL TEMPLE AS A SITE OF WORSHIP AND TOURISM
7.1 Introduction 147
7.2 The governance of Tirtha Empul temple 147
7.3 The spatial layout of Tirtha Empul temple 153
7.4 Tirtha Empul temple as a site of worship 158
7.5 Tourists and tourism at Tirtha Empul: numbers and income 173
7.6 A cultural tour of Tirtha Empul temple 175
7.7 Conclusion 180

Chapter 8:
CONFLICT AND MISUNDERSTANDING IN TEMPLES
8.1 Introduction 181
8.2 Nature of local involvement with tourism at temples 181
8.3 Government involvement in the policy and management of temple tourism 184
8.4 In pursuit of authenticity: tourist profiles and behaviour in temples 187
8.5 Worshippers in temples and their attitudes to tourists 194
8.6 The role of tour guides 203
8.7 Visitor interpretation at the temple sites 208
8.8 Towards a sustainable visitor management strategy 214
8.9 Conclusion 219

Chapter 9:
CONCLUSION 220

APPENDICES
Appendix 1 Detailed spatial layout of Goa Lawah temple 225
Appendix 2 Detailed spatial layout of Tirtha Empul temple 234
Appendix 3 Survey questionnaires 245
Appendix 4 Interview question lists 248

REFERENCES 267