

Tourism Industry Dynamics and Local Cultural Values Transformation: A Qualitative Study in Ubud, Bali

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Abstract: *This study examined the tourism industry's dynamics and the transformation of local cultural values in Ubud, Bali. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, employing interviews, observation, and documentation, with data analyzed through thematic categorization, interpretation, and triangulation. Findings indicated that tourist arrivals increased from 47,653 in 2020 to 75,081 in 2025, alongside the expansion of 1,067 accommodation and tourism-support businesses in 2025. Tourism generated livelihood diversification, business opportunities, trade growth, wider social interaction, and greater openness to education. At the same time, intensive host-guest contact was associated with shifts in Balinese language use, clothing practices, intergenerational etiquette, material orientation, and some expressions of religious and customary life. The results revealed an ambivalent cultural transformation: tourism strengthened economic and social opportunities while simultaneously creating pressures on cultural continuity. The study concluded that sustainable cultural tourism in Ubud requires community-centered governance, cultural safeguards, equitable benefit distribution, and clear protection for customary and sacred spaces.*

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Introduction

Tourism in culture-based destinations functions simultaneously as an economic system and an arena of social encounter. Growth in visitor arrivals not only stimulates demand for accommodation, food, transportation, attractions, and creative services, but also brings local communities into contact with consumption patterns, languages, norms, and lifestyles originating outside the community. Therefore, the impacts of tourism development need to be understood multidimensionally: economic success may occur alongside social and cultural changes that are not always easy to manage. Studies of community-based tourism development show that community support becomes stronger when economic benefits are tangible, opportunities for local participation are available, and social costs can be minimized (Nugroho & Numata, 2022; Rachmawati et al., 2021).

Bali is an important example of the close relationship between the tourism economy and cultural identity. The attractiveness of the destination is inseparable from customary practices, arts, rituals, spatial arrangements, language, and local philosophies embedded in everyday community life. Research on culture and tourism in Bali confirms that local values can function as destination capital, but their sustainability depends on the ability of communities and local institutions to retain control over the use of cultural resources (Liestiandre et al., 2024; Rosalina et al., 2023). Within this framework, culture is not merely a 'product' for tourists, but a source of identity and social order with intrinsic value for the community.

Ubud holds a distinctive position in Bali's tourism landscape because of its reputation as a center of art, culture, spirituality, culinary experiences, and wellness. The development of diverse forms of tourism has created a broad market for local businesses and intensified interactions between residents and visitors. Recent studies on wellness tourism in Ubud demonstrate opportunities for community-based development while also warning of unequal benefit distribution, the dominance of external actors, and the potential disconnection of tourism products from the local cultural context (Choe et al., 2025; Hubner et al., 2025). These conditions make Ubud a relevant setting for examining how industry growth is associated with the sustainability of local values.

The 2020-2025 period is also significant because it captures phases of disruption and tourism recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic altered tourist mobility and exposed the vulnerability of areas dependent on travel-related activities, while the recovery phase encouraged businesses to reopen and tourism demand to increase. Studies in Indonesia show that the pandemic caused a substantial contraction in tourism activity and reinforced the need for resilience, diversification, and more adaptive governance (King et al., 2021; Pramana et al., 2022). In the data used in this study, visits to Ubud again showed an upward tendency through 2025; therefore, post-pandemic dynamics need to be understood alongside changes in the economic structure and social life of the community.

From an economic perspective, tourism can expand employment opportunities, stimulate microenterprises and services, and alter community livelihood patterns. However, changes in the economic structure can also create new forms of dependency, competition over land and business opportunities, and increasingly transactional social relations. Young and

Markham (2020) explain that the commodification of place occurs when local spaces, cultures, and experiences become increasingly integrated into the market logic of tourism. In the Indonesian context, Damanik et al. (2024) show that the commodification of livelihoods in tourism destinations can generate different community responses depending on socioeconomic position and asset ownership.

The central issue is not to reject change, but to ensure that change does not undermine the community's capacity to transmit language, etiquette, cultural symbols, communal practices, and the meanings attached to sacred spaces. The cultural sustainability literature emphasizes that cultural continuity requires community participation, stakeholder collaboration, and protection of values that cannot be reduced solely to economic commodities (Li et al., 2021; Ottaviani et al., 2023). Evidence from Bali also shows that cultural change can be related to the sustainability of tourism villages, indicating that destination development should strengthen cultural commitment rather than merely increase visitor volumes (Purnamawati et al., 2022).

At the same time, local communities are not necessarily passive actors. Social capital, community norms, networks, and customary institutions can serve as mechanisms for filtering external influences and directing tourism benefits. Prayitno et al. (2024) show that trust, norms, and social networks contribute to support for sustainable tourism, while Kusumastuti et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of local values in designing destinations that are not only technologically smart but also socially and culturally wise. Cultural transformation should therefore be analyzed as a process of negotiation among economic opportunities, market pressures, social interactions, and the capacity of local institutions.

Previous studies in Bali have examined rural tourism resource management, the Tri Hita Karana philosophy, cultural change, community involvement, and overtourism pressures (Pramono et al., 2026; Rosalina et al., 2025). Nevertheless, further research is needed that simultaneously examines the development of local tourism-industry indicators and traces changes in values expressed in the everyday practices of Ubud residents. Such an approach is important so that the analysis does not stop at economic growth or the romanticization of cultural preservation, but instead captures the ambivalent relationship between the two.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the development of the tourism industry in Ubud and identify forms of cultural-value transformation associated with the intensification of tourism activity. The contribution of the study lies in integrating data on visitor growth and tourism facilities with a qualitative interpretation of changes in livelihoods, social openness, language, etiquette, clothing, economic orientation, and socio-religious practices. The findings are expected to provide a basis for sustainable cultural tourism governance that positions local communities as primary actors rather than merely objects of destination growth.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the development of the tourism industry and the transformation of community cultural values in Ubud, Gianyar

Regency, Bali. A qualitative approach was selected because the research focus concerns not only changes in visitor numbers or facilities, but more importantly the meanings, experiences, norms, and social practices developing within the community. The study was not designed to statistically test causal relationships, but to build a contextual understanding of how tourism growth is manifested in the economic and cultural life of the local community.

Research data were obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore knowledge and experiences related to changes in economic activities, interaction patterns, language, etiquette, clothing, and social and religious practices. Observation was used to understand the behavioral context and changes visible in everyday life, while documentation complemented information on the development of tourist arrivals and tourism facilities. Documentary data used in the manuscript include tourist-arrival figures for 2020-2025 and an inventory of accommodation units and tourism-supporting facilities in 2025.

Data collection used a guided interview protocol while still allowing questions to develop according to informants' responses and field contexts. Data exploration was organized around two main domains: tourism-industry development and changes in cultural values. The first domain covered tourist arrivals, facility growth, business opportunities, trade, and livelihood diversification. The second covered the use of the Balinese language, clothing patterns, intergenerational etiquette, material orientation, social practices, and customary and religious expressions.

The analysis involved organizing field notes and documentary materials, transcribing interview data, coding relevant information, grouping codes into categories, identifying themes and patterns, interpreting relationships among themes, and drawing conclusions. This procedure is consistent with thematic analysis principles that emphasize alignment among research questions, coding processes, theme development, and data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The resulting themes were then compared with documentary data to examine connections between tourism growth and socio-cultural change without reducing them to a single causal relationship.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through data, theoretical, and methodological triangulation. Interview results were compared with observations and documents, while interpretations were examined in relation to literature on sustainable tourism, community empowerment, place commodification, and cultural sustainability. This strategy was used to reduce dependence on a single type of evidence and to ensure that conclusions were built from consistent patterns. Because the study used a descriptive qualitative design, visitor and facility figures were positioned as contextual indicators of industry change rather than as a basis for claiming causal effects on every cultural change identified.

Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that the development of Ubud's tourism industry during the observation period moved toward recovery and expansion. Documentary data show an increase in tourist arrivals from 47,653 visitors in 2020 to 75,081 in 2025. This growth trajectory was not completely linear, as arrivals declined in 2023 after rising sharply in 2022. Nevertheless, the overall period recorded an increase of 27,428 visits, or approximately 57.6%, between the

initial and final years. This pattern indicates a strengthening of tourism activity after the pandemic disruption, consistent with national findings regarding mobility recovery and adaptation within Indonesia's tourism industry (Pramana et al., 2022).

Table 1. Tourist Arrivals in Ubud, 2020-2025

Year	Number of Tourists
2020	47,653
2021	52,379
2022	72,698
2023	68,556
2024	73,575
2025	75,081

Source: *Ubud Tourist Information, as documented in the research data.*

The increase in visitor arrivals was accompanied by the development of supporting infrastructure and businesses. In 2025, 1,067 accommodation and tourism-facility businesses were recorded, including star-rated hotels, non-star hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and eateries, spas or salons, cycling tours, rafting operators, museums, and tourist transportation services. This composition shows that Ubud tourism has developed into an ecosystem connecting accommodation, recreation, wellness, culture, and mobility. Such product diversification creates broader opportunities for economic value creation, while at the same time increasing the intensity of local space and resource use.

The development of tourism businesses is associated with changes in the community's livelihood orientation. Qualitative data indicate that activities previously centered on agriculture, plantations, dry-land farming, and livestock increasingly coexist with trade and service-sector activities. Tourism creates opportunities for residents to become business owners, employees, suppliers, artisans, traders, or service providers. These findings are consistent with Rachmawati et al. (2021), who show that tourism can increase income and economic empowerment when communities have access to benefits, and with Nugroho and Numata (2022), who identify community involvement and perceived economic benefits as important factors in support for tourism development.

Although economic opportunities have expanded, these changes have also generated stronger competition and a tendency toward commercialization. Price competition, accommodation investment, and orientation toward the tourism market can shift some social relations from community-based patterns toward more transactional relationships. This finding does not imply that communal values automatically disappear, but it reveals new pressures

when space, time, skills, and cultural symbols acquire exchange value within the tourism economy. The place-commodification framework proposed by Young and Markham (2020) helps explain how local culture and experience can become increasingly attached to processes of economic value production, while community responses to such processes remain diverse (Damanik et al., 2024).

Another positive aspect identified is greater social openness and attention to education. Interaction with tourists from diverse backgrounds broadens community exposure to new languages, knowledge, technologies, and habits. This change provides opportunities for younger generations to develop competencies relevant to tourism employment, including cross-cultural communication and service skills. In the context of community-based tourism, social capital can help communities convert such openness into collective capacity when networks, trust, and shared norms remain strong (Prayitno et al., 2024). Social openness should therefore be understood both as a source of learning and as a space for negotiating values.

The clearest transformation is visible in everyday cultural practices. One example is the use of *kamen* cloth. The research data indicate that *kamen*, which was previously more commonly worn in everyday activities, is now more concentrated in specific contexts such as customary ceremonies and worship. This change reflects a shift in the function and frequency of a cultural symbol rather than its complete disappearance. Culture may remain present while being repositioned across space and time in response to work demands, mobility, comfort, and interaction with the tourism environment. Purnamawati et al. (2022) also show that cultural change in Bali is closely related to destination sustainability, meaning that adaptation needs to be managed so that the social meaning of local practices is not severed.

Language is another important indicator. The study found that the use of the Balinese language in everyday life tends to decline, while residents use a more diverse range of languages when interacting within tourism spaces. This change can be understood as communicative adaptation, particularly in a destination receiving both domestic and international tourists. However, local language also functions as a medium for transmitting identity, social hierarchy, ethics, and cultural knowledge. When its use weakens in domestic and intergenerational settings, there is a risk that knowledge embedded in vocabulary, speech levels, and linguistic conventions will no longer be fully transmitted.

Changes in language are related to transformations in etiquette. Field information suggests that distinctions in how younger people communicate with older people are less pronounced in some interactions than they were previously. In Balinese society, language and politeness are not independent because both are connected to the structure of social relations and intergenerational respect. This transformation may arise from multiple factors, including education, media, mobility, and family change; therefore, tourism should not be positioned as the sole cause. Nevertheless, intensive contact with a more heterogeneous social environment can accelerate the normalization of more egalitarian and practical communication patterns.

In terms of value orientation, the study records a strengthening of material considerations in some social practices. Growth in the tourism market creates opportunities to earn income while also increasing incentives to convert assets, skills, spaces, and experiences

into commodities. Such conditions may widen gaps between actors with capital and market access and those involved mainly as workers. Recent research on overtourism in Bali emphasizes that destination pressure is not merely a matter of visitor numbers, but also concerns governance, benefit distribution, cultural commodification, and the inclusion of local community voices (Pramono et al., 2026).

Religious and customary life exhibits a more complex pattern. Some community members continue to regard religion and custom as primary guides for everyday life, while tourism activities introduce new behaviors that, under certain circumstances, are perceived as inconsistent with local norms or the sacredness of particular spaces. The findings indicate changing perceptions of activities in several spaces that previously had clearer social and symbolic boundaries. Nevertheless, communities still possess mechanisms of selection through local rules, customary practices, and collective judgment. This is consistent with Rosalina et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of community and customary-institution involvement in maintaining control over tourism resources in Bali.

These findings demonstrate that cultural transformation in Ubud is ambivalent. Tourism can strengthen the economy, knowledge, creativity, and global connectedness, yet at the same time it can alter the rhythms of communal life, the use of cultural symbols, and the economic meaning of traditions. A cultural sustainability perspective helps avoid two extreme conclusions: that tourism always damages culture, or conversely that economic growth automatically preserves it. Li et al. (2021) show that community-based collaboration is important for maintaining cultural sustainability, while Ottaviani et al. (2023) emphasize the need to integrate economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions in heritage-tourism planning.

Table 2. Identified Themes of Socio-Cultural Transformation

Dimension	Indication of Change	Analytical Meaning
Livelihoods	Shift and diversification from agrarian activities toward trade and tourism services.	Economic opportunities increase, accompanied by new dependence on the tourism market.
Social openness	More intensive interaction with tourists and greater exposure to new languages and knowledge.	Expands social learning while also accelerating the entry of external norms.
Language	The use of the Balinese language tends to decline in some everyday settings.	Communicative adaptation may affect the transmission of cultural identity and knowledge.

Clothing and symbols	The use of kamen cloth is increasingly concentrated in customary and worship activities.	The frequency and context of cultural-symbol use are changing.
Etiquette	Intergenerational communication patterns have become more flexible in some interactions.	Reflects negotiation between traditional norms and modern communication patterns.
Economic orientation	Increasing business competition and material/transactional tendencies.	Commercialization increases economic incentives while placing pressure on communal relations.
Custom and religion	Negotiation emerges around tourism activities in spaces and practices with sacred meanings.	Requires local rules and governance that protect cultural boundaries and sacredness.

Source: *Synthesis of research interviews, observations, and documentation.*

Compared with other studies in Bali, the findings reinforce the importance of local control over tourism resources and narratives. Rosalina et al. (2025) show that rural tourism resource management in Bali faces potential use conflicts and requires planning, regulation, and implementation processes that are sensitive to spiritual contexts. Kusumastuti et al. (2024) likewise demonstrate that local values can provide a foundation for sustainable destination innovation. Therefore, Ubud's development strategy cannot rely only on promotion and facility expansion; it also needs to ensure that decisions about what is displayed, commercialized, or restricted continue to involve local communities and institutions.

The Ubud findings can also be interpreted alongside research on Tri Hita Karana. Liestiandre et al. (2024) found that the implementation of this local philosophy is positively associated with destination quality and image as well as revisit intentions. This suggests that preserving local values is not an economic burden, but can be a source of destination quality. If harmony between humans and God, among people, and with the environment is translated into tourism-space management, behavioral standards, waste management, protection of sacred sites, and community participation, cultural identity can function both as a governance principle and a form of market differentiation.

Conversely, the expansion of wellness tourism in Ubud illustrates why growth needs to be assessed from residents' perspectives. Hubner et al. (2025) emphasize the potential of community-based wellness tourism to balance growth and tradition, whereas Choe et al. (2025) show that the benefits of wellness tourism may be uneven when external dominance, economic leakage, and disconnection from local spiritual culture occur. This study's findings concerning

material orientation, business competition, and changing social practices reinforce the need to treat benefit distribution and cultural representation as indicators of success rather than relying solely on visitor numbers.

The first practical implication is the need to strengthen cultural governance at the local level. Government, customary villages, destination managers, and business actors need to agree on clear boundaries among commercial, social, and sacred spaces. Tourist education concerning clothing, etiquette, photography, behavior in temples, and the use of customary spaces should be consistent and easy to understand. Kanha and Phunsiri (2022) show that government policy, tourism understanding, and local orientation can strengthen public participation in sustainable cultural tourism; similar principles are relevant to ensuring that rules are not merely administrative but also have community legitimacy.

The second implication concerns strengthening cultural regeneration. Programs for the Balinese language, customary knowledge, arts, and local ethics need to be embedded in spaces close to young people's lives, including schools, art studios, creative communities, and tourism businesses. Preservation will be stronger when cultural values are not taught merely as ceremonial obligations but are also connected to dignified economic opportunities, such as community-curated cultural experiences, storytelling, heritage interpretation, local cuisine, crafts, and creative activities. Tourism-resource management strategies in Balinese tourism villages show that co-creative experiences and storytelling can support conservation when communities remain involved in management (Rosalina et al., 2023).

The third implication is the need for destination-performance indicators that extend beyond visitor and business numbers. Government and destination managers should monitor the proportion of locally owned businesses, job quality, income distribution, use of local language and cultural spaces, congestion at sensitive sites, community perceptions, and tourist compliance with local rules. Fitriaty et al. (2024) emphasize that community life satisfaction is an important component of sustainable heritage-tourism strategies. By incorporating welfare and cultural indicators, industry growth can be evaluated according to its ability to maintain residents' quality of life rather than merely generating transaction volume.

Overall, this study shows that the relationship between tourism and culture in Ubud is better understood as a process of transformation than as a linear narrative of cultural loss. Communities select, adapt, negotiate, and in some respects maintain norms through local institutions. However, this adaptive capacity has limits when economic pressure, density, commercialization, or the dominance of external actors becomes too strong. The concept of sustainable cultural tourism therefore needs to be implemented as a dynamic balance among economic viability, social sustainability, cultural protection, and environmental capacity. This approach is increasingly relevant amid concerns about overtourism and the need for destination-governance reform in Bali (Pramono et al., 2026).

This study has limitations that should be considered. The descriptive qualitative design does not permit causal conclusions that every change in cultural values is directly caused by tourism, because social transformation is also influenced by education, digital media,

urbanization, mobility, and generational change. In addition, the quantitative data are used as contextual indicators of industry development and do not measure the distribution of economic benefits across community groups. Future research may employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to compare age groups, tourism and non-tourism actors, and levels of tourism involvement so that mechanisms of cultural change can be explained more systematically and measurably.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study found that Ubud's tourism industry expanded substantially between 2020 and 2025, with tourist arrivals increasing from 47,653 to 75,081 and accommodation and tourism-support businesses reaching 1,067 in 2025, driving livelihood diversification, trade growth, wider social interaction, and greater openness to education. Concurrently, intensified host-guest contact was associated with shifts in everyday Balinese language use, the concentration of traditional clothing such as *kamen* in ceremonial settings, more flexible intergenerational etiquette, strengthened material orientation, and renegotiated boundaries around sacred spaces. These findings answer the research objective by revealing an ambivalent cultural transformation: tourism simultaneously creates economic opportunities and exerts pressure on cultural continuity, while the local community exercises adaptive capacity through norms and customary institutions, albeit limited under strong commercialization and external dominance.

On this basis, sustainable cultural tourism in Ubud requires community-centered governance that demarcates commercial, social, and sacred spaces; embeds language and cultural education for younger generations; develops tourism products that create added value for local actors; and establishes monitoring systems that incorporate socio-cultural indicators and equitable benefit distribution. The descriptive qualitative design, however, limits causal inferences and does not capture the distribution of economic benefits across community groups, so future research should adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches comparing varied demographic segments and levels of tourism involvement to systematically explain mechanisms of cultural change and inform evidence-based governance that protects cultural capital while fostering inclusive development.

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