

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE TIRTA EMPUL AREA, TAMPAKSIRING

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### Abstract

This study is based on the growing trend of spiritual and cultural tourism in Bali, which, at sacred sites such as Tirta Empul Temple (Tampaksiring), not only opens up local economic opportunities but also raises management dilemmas that deserve careful attention particularly regarding the tendency to commodify rituals and environmental pressures that have implications for water quality and the cleanliness of the area. This research aims to map the development of cultural tourism in Tirta Empul while critically synthesizing the main attractions, various impacts, and management strategies most frequently reported in the literature. Theoretically, the discussion links Tri Hita Karana, Community-Based Tourism, and heritage management perspectives authenticity to understand how sacred and tourist functions are negotiated in practice. The method used is a Narrative Literature Review of publications from 2015–2025 searched through Google Scholar, SINTA, and university repositories; studies were selected through title-abstract relevance screening and then analyzed thematically. Interestingly, the findings indicate that *melukat* (temple) and heritage values are the primary drivers of visitation, but issues of desacralization, overcrowding, and recurring waste/garbage remain unresolved challenges. Therefore, the synthesis recommends strengthening sacred space zoning, implementing a code of ethics supported by cultural interpretation, managing visitor flow, and strengthening the role of traditional villages, while emphasizing the importance of regularly measuring visitor carrying capacity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Tirta Empul.

### A. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has fundamentally shifted from the logic of “travel for the sake of experience” toward an experience-based industry supported by facilities, services, and multi-actor governance. As a result, the quality of destination management has become the primary determinant of the sustainability of its benefits (Kodhyat, 1996; Republic of Indonesia, 2009). In Bali, the expansion of cultural tourism has simultaneously generated latent tensions between economic–visitor imperatives and the obligation to preserve the symbolic meaning of rituals within sacred spaces that remain actively used for worship (Pitana & Gayatri, 2005). This tension becomes particularly pronounced in ritual-based spiritual tourism destinations, as visitors often arrive with a “consumption-oriented experience mindset” that does not always align with local ethics and customary norms. Pura Tirta Empul in Tampaksiring, Gianyar, represents a relevant case, as the growing appeal of *melukat* rituals and its ancient architectural landscape continues to intensify visitor flows, while issues of cultural commodification and cleanliness/waste management increasingly manifest within the ritual space. Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the Tirta Empul Area and examines the development of cultural–spiritual tourism through a thematic synthesis of the

literature in order to capture dominant problem patterns and academically grounded management trajectories.

A number of previous studies provide an important foundation, yet they tend to address different analytical intersections. Sumaeni and Mahagangga emphasize that the management system of Pura Tirta Empul as a heritage tourism attraction requires regulatory arrangements capable of safeguarding heritage values while maintaining orderly visitor flows, positioning management as the key mechanism for balancing sacred functions and tourism use (Sumaeni & Mahagangga, 2018). From a destination marketing perspective, Maharani et al. demonstrate that the development of ritual bathing tourism at Tirta Empul can be mapped through SWOT analysis and internal external matrices, yielding strategies that are predominantly growth-oriented when strengths and opportunities are perceived as dominant (Maharani et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Sutejo et al. broaden the management lens by linking the Tirta Empul spring to conservation concerns and the sustainability of spiritual–profane utilization, including the role of *awig-awig* customary regulations in protecting both the site’s sacredness and its surrounding ecology (Sutejo et al., 2025).

The study you conduct shares a core similarity with these works in its substantive focus: Tirta Empul is treated as a cultural–spiritual tourism destination that demands a balance between visitor experience and norms of sacredness (Maharani et al., 2023; Sumaeni & Mahagangga, 2018). However, a clear point of divergence lies in analytical emphasis. Prior studies generally operate within a single analytical framework such as marketing strategy (SWOT) or spring conservation producing strong findings in specific domains, yet not necessarily integrating cross-thematic dynamics into a unified developmental map (Maharani et al., 2023; Sutejo et al., 2025). In contrast, your article employs a Narrative Literature Review to synthesize findings from the past decade thematically, enabling the integration of attractions (ritual bathing and architecture), impacts (commodification and waste), and strategic directions (Tri Hita Karana and the role of Desa Adat) into a coherent argumentative flow. In this sense, the study does not replace earlier research but rather connects fragmented empirical insights so that the “bigger picture” becomes more visible.

It is at this juncture that the originality of your research emerges not in identifying a new object of study, but in the manner of consolidating cross-thematic evidence into a more comprehensive developmental framework for active sacred destinations such as Tirta Empul. Thematic synthesis allows the study to demonstrate how shifts in visitor motivation, adat-based governance, and challenges of physical site preservation interact with one another, rather than being interpreted as isolated issues (Sumaeni & Mahagangga, 2018; Sutejo et al., 2025). Moreover, this approach provides space to evaluate the “fit” between management strategies and the distinctive characteristics of spiritual tourism, which international literature consistently frames as an experience highly sensitive to values, ethics, and visitor experience design (Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2010). Accordingly, the contribution of the study is integrative: it offers a more structured knowledge map that can serve as a foundation for both management decision-making and future research.

The constellation of findings above underscores the importance of this review, as visitor pressure on sacred sites generates not only issues of order and tourist experience but also impacts ecological sustainability particularly of water resources and the social legitimacy of management in the eyes of customary communities. In the context of spiritual tourism, the literature further suggests that spiritual fulfillment motives and destination atmosphere are central drivers of visit intention, rendering “experience quality” and “governance” not merely technical concerns but the very core of destination success (Garg et al., 2021; Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2010). When management fails to maintain this balance, destinations risk

experiencing both a degradation of meaning (sacredness) and a degradation of service quality (congestion, waste, normative conflict), ultimately undermining competitiveness and social acceptance. Consequently, mapping development trajectories alongside challenges and strategies consistent with local values is necessary as an academic reference base that can be tested and reused.

The objective of this study is to review the development of cultural tourism in the Tirta Empul Area, Tampaksiring, through a Narrative Literature Review that organizes existing findings into themes of core attractions, management challenges, and the most frequently recommended development strategies. Operationally, the study seeks to: (1) identify forms of transformation through which Tirta Empul has evolved from a ritual space into a spiritual tourism destination; (2) synthesize key issues such as cultural commodification and cleanliness/visitor management; and (3) integrate strategies emphasizing balance among sacred values, conservation imperatives, and modern visitor management (Maharani et al., 2023; Sutejo et al., 2025). The expected outcome is a concise yet analytically sharp framework for interpreting the current position of Tirta Empul, while simultaneously providing a conceptual foundation for strengthening the role of Desa Adat and sustainability principles in destination governance.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Tri Hita Karana (THK) for Cultural Tourism**

Tri Hita Karana is a Balinese philosophy of local wisdom that emphasizes the balance of three harmonious relationships as the source of well-being: the relationship between humans and God, humans and other humans, and humans and nature. In practice, THK is operationalized through three interrelated dimensions: Parhyangan (spirituality and ritual), Pawongan (social relations and community life), and Palemahan (ecology and environmental space).

Within the context of cultural tourism, THK functions as a normative framework that helps destinations sustain not only economic viability but also socio-cultural integrity and ecological balance. Here, “sustainability” emerges from adherence to local values rather than from purely technical standards. Recent literature indicates that THK is frequently employed as a foundation for sustainable tourism practices in Bali; at the same time, it can become a site of contestation when the logic of mass tourism projects begins to shift the meaning of harmony into a mere marketing label. Accordingly, THK is highly relevant for interpreting the dynamics of Tirta Empul: how to preserve the sacredness of *melukat* rituals, organize relationships among actors (customary villages, site managers, and tourists), and simultaneously control environmental impacts (Subrata et al., 2025; Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019). Indicators:

- Parhyangan: compliance with ritual procedures; protection of sacred areas; visitor ethics grounded in customary values.
- Pawongan: collaboration between customary villages and site managers; fairness in benefit distribution; social control mechanisms over the behavior of tourists and vendors.
- Palemahan: waste and plastic management; cleanliness of water and space; conservation of landscape and environmental carrying capacity.

### **Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Community Empowerment**

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) positions local communities as the primary actors rather than mere complements in the planning, management, and distribution of tourism benefits. In principle, CBT requires genuine community ownership/authority, capacity

building, and tangible participation mechanisms so that communities are not merely “included” in a symbolic sense. The CBT perspective further underscores that destination sustainability cannot be enduring if economic benefits flow predominantly to external actors or specific elites, as such conditions erode social legitimacy and weaken commitments to conservation. In the literature, CBT is understood as an approach that integrates empowerment, resource conservation, community socio-economic development, and enhancement of visitor experience into a mutually reinforcing package. This framework is highly relevant for Tirta Empul, as the strategy of “active involvement of the Desa Adat” can be empirically examined: whether participation truly delivers control, capacity, and equitable benefits, while also addressing issues of commodification and waste (Junaid et al., 2021; Scheyvens, 1999).

Indicators:

- Community participation in decision-making (visitation rules, zoning, trade/commerce arrangements).
- Degree of local control/ownership (role of the Desa Adat in governance).
- Capacity strengthening (training, SOPs for ritual–heritage services, environmental literacy).
- Benefit-sharing mechanisms (fees/retributions, local business opportunities, adat/conservation funds).
- Resource conservation (site protection, tourist behavior, cleanliness).
- Quality of the tourist experience (information, visitor flow, ethics, comfort).

### **Heritage Management and Authenticity to Control Commodification**

Heritage management emphasizes that cultural heritage attractions are irreplaceable resources; therefore, their management must prioritize conservation, impact control, and governance that safeguards intrinsic heritage values. In heritage destinations, “authenticity” is pivotal because tourists’ experiences and loyalty are often shaped by perceptions of genuineness both in material aspects (architecture, spatial organization) and immaterial dimensions (rituals, meanings, atmosphere). As commercial pressures intensify, commodification may emerge as a shift from meaningful cultural practices to spectacle-oriented products or services, which at a certain point risks diminishing sacredness and provoking social resistance. Consequently, robust heritage management typically integrates conservation, interpretation (educating visitors about meanings), and visitor management to balance public access with the protection of site values. In the case of Tirta Empul, this theoretical lens is well suited to examining the boundaries of “what is permissible” in the commercialization of *melukat*, the ethical design of cultural interpretation, and strategies for regulating visitor flows to preserve sacredness and the quality of the visitor experience (Millar, 1989; Park et al., 2019; Nowacki, 2021).

Indicators:

- Physical conservation of the site (architecture, sacred–public zoning).
- Protection of intangible heritage (ritual procedures, norms of propriety, sacred symbols).
- Cultural interpretation (ethical guidance for *melukat*, historical narratives, guides/signage).
- Visitor management (entry–exit flows, capacity limits, rules on photography/activities).
- Control of commodification (service standardization, commercial arrangements, limits on commercial activities in sacred areas).

- Compliance and enforcement (SOPs, customary sanctions/managerial rules, impact monitoring).

### C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Narrative Literature Review (NLR) because this approach is well suited to summarizing and organizing a coherent “evidence storyline” from a diverse body of literature without statistically pooling results. Consequently, the researcher can emphasize context, meaning, and conceptual explanations concerning the development of cultural tourism at Tirta Empul. Within the NLR writing tradition, the quality of a review is largely determined by clarity of focus, consistency of argumentation, and transparency of the search process, so that the resulting synthesis goes beyond a merely descriptive summary (Ferrari, 2015). Moreover, methodological scholarship affirms that a literature review may be positioned as a legitimate research methodology when researchers clearly explain how searching, selection, and synthesis are conducted systematically in line with the study objectives (Snyder, 2019). Accordingly, NLR is selected to read Tirta Empul not only as a “tourist attraction,” but as a sacred cultural space that embodies interconnected dynamics of attractiveness, socio-cultural impacts, and management strategies (Popay et al., 2006).

The initial stage begins with identifying keywords that represent the locus and focus of the review, namely “Cultural Tourism,” “Tirta Empul,” “Tampaksiring,” “Spiritual Tourism,” and “Gianyar Tourism Development,” including equivalent or related terms to broaden the scope of the search (e.g., cultural tourism, spiritual tourism, heritage temple, or *melukat*). The literature search is conducted using secondary sources that are both realistically accessible and relevant to the Indonesian context Google Scholar, SINTA, and university repositories by systematically documenting titles, authors, publication years, sources, and manuscript links to ensure an auditable literature trail (Snyder, 2019). To maintain contextual relevance and currency, inclusion criteria are limited to publications from the past ten years (2015–2025), while sources outside this range are used only when they provide truly fundamental conceptual foundations. At this stage, all initial findings are also organized into a working list (e.g., a spreadsheet or tracking sheet) to facilitate the removal of duplicates and the documentation of inclusion–exclusion decisions (Ferrari, 2015).

Subsequently, selection and evaluation are carried out through screening based on the relevance of titles and abstracts to the topic of tourism development at Tirta Empul/Tampaksiring and the associated socio-cultural issues, followed by full-text reading of the most pertinent studies. To ensure that synthesis goes beyond mere “collection,” qualitative analysis is conducted using a thematic approach by coding key findings, grouping recurring patterns, and formulating stable and meaningful themes aligned with the focus of the review (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Operationally, the themes follow the analytical framework of the study: (1) tourism attractiveness, (2) socio-cultural impacts, and (3) management strategies. Each study is assigned to the appropriate theme and then compared to identify convergences, divergences, and knowledge gaps. To enhance rigor, the synthesis process is made transparent by justifying study selection decisions, explicating relationships among findings, and drawing conclusions as evidence-based interpretations rather than opinions (Popay et al., 2006).

### D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Synthesis Matrix of Prior Literature (2015–2025)

<i>Author and Year</i>	<i>Focus of Study</i>	<i>Key FindingsUtama</i>
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	Spiritual Tourism	The melukat tradition at Tirta Empul has shifted from a purely religious ritual to a spiritual tourism attraction (wellness tourism) that is in demand by the global market.
Widiastuti (2019)		
	Development Strategy	Synergy between the Traditional Village and the Regional Government is needed in managing parking and zoning for vendors to improve tourist comfort.
Windia & Dewi (2016)		
	Sustainable Tourism	The threat of cultural commodification is quite high. Strict regulations regarding tourist dress codes and behavior in the Utama Mandala area are needed.
Ardika (2018)		
	Creative Economy	The presence of Tirta Empul has stimulated the growth of local MSMEs (bone, silver, and textile crafts) around Tampaksiring, but price competition among vendors is increasingly fierce.
Darmastuti & Yudanti (2021)		

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Source: Data processed from various journals (2026)

Based on the literature review, it is found that tourism development at Tirta Empul revolves around three main themes: shifts in visitor motivation, community-based management, and challenges related to the physical preservation of the cultural heritage site.

- Tourist Attraction: From Ritual to Spiritual Tourism

Tirta Empul is no longer solely a place of worship for Balinese Hindus; it has transformed into a global destination for spiritual tourism. The literature notes that the *melukat* ritual (ritual purification) has become a primary attraction for international visitors. This aligns with theories suggesting that modern tourists increasingly seek authentic experiences. The sacred spring at Tirta Empul is believed to possess healing properties and to provide inner peace. Historical infrastructure, such as the ancient bathing pools and *candi bentar* architecture, adds educational value for visitors. However, several studies emphasize the need for accurate interpretive narratives so that tourists understand the philosophical meanings behind the rituals, rather than perceiving them merely as visual attractions.

- Socio-Cultural and Economic Impacts

Tourism development in this area generates dual impacts:

- Economic Impacts: Increased income for local communities through ticket sales, souvenir kiosks (the art market in the parking area), sarong rentals, and local guiding services. These revenues contribute significantly to the financial resources of the *Desa Adat* Manukaya Let, which manages the site.
- Socio-Cultural Impacts: Intensive cultural interactions occur. On the one hand, the community develops a stronger sense of pride in its heritage. On the other hand, the sacrality of space is challenged when areas intended to remain tranquil become

crowded with tourists taking photographs (the phenomenon of overtourism). The literature recommends strict zoning between the *Utama Mandala* (the most sacred zone) and general tourism areas.

- Sustainable Management Strategies

Based on the literature, the most effective management model for Tirta Empul is Community-Based Tourism (CBT), grounded in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*—the balance between humans and God, humans and nature, and humans with one another. Key strategic findings from previous studies include:

- Visitor Management: The implementation of separate entrance and exit flow systems to prevent human congestion around the sacred bathing pools.
- Code of Ethics: Stricter enforcement of dress codes and behavioral regulations for visitors to preserve the sanctity of the temple.
- Environmental Conservation: Protecting the spring water sources from domestic and tourism-related waste pollution in the surrounding Tampaksiring area is crucial to maintaining water quantity and quality, while preserving sacredness and mitigating environmental impacts

The transformation of Tirta Empul into a magnet for spiritual–cultural tourism encompassing *melukat* (ritual purification), self-cleansing, and the search for inner calm can be understood as part of a broader trend in Bali, in which local ritual practices are increasingly framed as self-healing and “self-transformation” experiences for tourists, particularly through tour packages and digital media narratives (Suarja et al., 2023). Conceptually, this pattern aligns with studies of spiritual tourism experiences that position healing/renewal, meaning-making, and spiritual engagement as core dimensions shaping visitors’ perceptions and satisfaction (Sahin & Güzel, 2024). Accordingly, the appeal of Tirta Empul should not be understood merely as a cultural “object,” but rather as an experiential space that integrates symbols, rituals, and sensations of meaningfulness; within value-based tourism contexts, such attributes have been shown to contribute to experience quality, satisfaction, and revisit intention (Park et al., 2019)

Discussions of tourists’ growing interest in authenticity and the need for guides or narrative explanations gain further traction when linked to findings that authenticity in heritage tourism is multidimensional (e.g., objective and existential) and exerts a direct influence on destination evaluation and experience quality (Park et al., 2019). Moreover, the literature emphasizes that heritage interpretation through guiding, signage, and narratives of history and sacredness is not merely a supplementary feature, but a crucial instrument for sustainability, as it helps visitors understand values, cultivate respect, and curb behaviors that may disrupt sacredness (Nowacki, 2021). In the context of non-Abrahamic religious sites, experience management strategies that balance sacred–secular elements through behavioral rules, spatial regulation, and the communication of meaning have proven relevant for minimizing friction between local worship practices and tourism consumption, thereby ensuring that sites do not lose their integrity as spiritual spaces (Pande & Shi, 2023).

Findings on local economic contributions from entrance fees and cloth rentals to souvenir sales and employment opportunities are consistent with the argument that community-based tourism can indeed broaden economic benefits; however, the quality and sustainability of these benefits are strongly determined by the degree of meaningful participation and power relations within destination governance (Gutierrez, 2023). At the same time, concerns regarding desacralization, crowding, and tourist behavior (e.g., excessive photography or violations of sacred-space etiquette) can be interpreted through the

overtourism literature, which explains that visitation intensity exceeding “socio-cultural carrying capacity” tends to trigger experience degradation, value conflicts, and pressure on local identity (Capocchi et al., 2019; Koens et al., 2018). Contemporary discourse further suggests that unchecked growth-oriented visitation often generates social backlash and demands for policy shifts toward controlling tourism intensity (Milano et al., 2019). When this framework is applied to Tirta Empul, the issue becomes more pointed: the problem is not merely that the site is “crowded,” but that there is an imbalance between the market logic of tourism and the logic of sacred space.

Recommendations to separate sacred zones (e.g., the *Utama Mandala*) from general visitor areas through zoning can be reinforced by visitor management studies in heritage destinations, which stress the importance of regulating visitor flows, access rules, and spatial management to safeguard both experience quality and conservation (Álvarez-Sousa & Paniza Prados, 2020). In religious contexts, effective management also requires “soft” instruments such as codes of conduct, visitor education, and interpretive design that foster respect not merely through physical restrictions, but through value-based understanding that encourages voluntary compliance (Nowacki, 2021; Pande & Shi, 2023). Furthermore, as cleanliness issues and threats to sacred water sources are of concern, the argument can be strengthened by evidence showing that the sustainability of spiritual sites in Bali is inseparable from tourism-related waste and pollution problems, which are often linked to weak policy enforcement, infrastructural limitations, and low compliance among business actors (Shantika et al., 2025). By integrating these references, the management strategy for Tirta Empul can be positioned as a more comprehensive policy package: visitor management combined with the protection of sacredness and the mitigation of environmental impacts.

## E. CONCLUSION

Based on a Narrative Literature Review of publications from 2015–2025, this study confirms that the dynamics of cultural tourism in the Tirta Empul area, Tampaksiring, are primarily underpinned by the strong appeal of spiritual–cultural tourism most notably the *melukat* ritual as well as architectural and heritage values. Notably, these strengths coexist with two recurring challenges highlighted in the literature: a tendency toward cultural commodification that risks shifting the boundaries of sacredness, and persistent waste and environmental management issues that may undermine both site quality and visitor experience. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that destination “success” should not be interpreted solely through visitor numbers or local economic benefits. Rather, it is more appropriately understood as the capacity of governance arrangements to maintain a fragile balance between sacred functions and tourism uses through clear spatial regulation, the enforcement of visitation ethics, and the protection of resources particularly water quality and overall site cleanliness.

It is worth noting that the study’s objective to map the development of cultural tourism at Tirta Empul through thematic synthesis can be considered achieved, as the review consolidates the literature into three key themes: attractions, socio-cultural and economic impacts, and management strategies. This thematic consolidation renders patterns of issues and plausible policy directions more legible. The distinctive contribution of this study lies in the construction of an integrative knowledge map: rather than merely summarizing studies in isolation, it weaves cross-dimensional evidence so that management strategies are understood as interlocking packages. For example, Tri Hita Karana and Community-Based Tourism are positioned as foundational values and governance principles, which are then translated into

operational instruments such as sacred-area zoning, codes of conduct, visitor flow management, and environmental conservation agendas.

Accordingly, at the practical level, the study recommends strengthening the implementation of zoning particularly the delineation of *Utama Mandala* and public tourism are tightening codes of conduct supported by interpretive efforts (education on ritual meanings and the ethics of sacred spaces), and improving waste management systems and water-source protection as priority actions. From an academic perspective, future research should focus on measuring the carrying capacity of sacred pools and visitation areas, more rigorously evaluating tourist compliance with ethical regulations, and examining in greater detail the mechanisms of collaborative governance among *Desa Adat* institutions, government bodies, and surrounding business actors.

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