



## **The Potential Retreat of a New Normal Tourism in Bali**

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### **Abstract**

Bali tourism decrease in growth since March 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Irrespective of the decrease in growth, retreat tourism products still survive with a few numbers of tourist. This resilience occurs because it is categorized as a small-scale business. The facts led to explore the potential of retreat tourism as a new normal tourism, because it avoids of crowd and increase body immunity. This article aims are to explore the potentials of retreat tourism as a new normal tourism in Bali. The article uses tourism product planning theory and sustainability concept to describe the potential of retreat tourism as products of new normal tourism. This is based on qualitative research and qualitatively analyzed. The results showed that the retreat has the potential as a new normal tourism product, due to the provision of core health products, harmonized with the local community, local economy and environment. It means that the retreat tourism supports the new normal issue of tourism.

**Keywords:** Retreat, tourism products, new normal, Bali tourism

## **Introduction**

During pandemic covid 19, mass yoga activity was internet viral on June 22, 2020 in Bali. Bali local government banned the organizer because the yoga activity without permission from the local government (news detik.com, 2020). The yoga activity show that yoga become alternative tourists' activities during pandemic, although Bali tourism experienced a decrease in the number of tourist arrivals in 2020, due to the Covid19 pandemic. For example, in March 2020, inbound tourists decreased by 64% (156,876), compared to the 449,569 visitors in March 2019. There was a further decrease in April 2020 by 99.33% (327), compared to the 477,069 visitors in April 2019 (Bali Provincial Statistics Agency, 2020). A decrease in world tourism by -9 in February and -57 in March 2020 (Tourism & Unwto, 2020). The unexpected opening of the island in May and June 2020, led to a continued decrease in growth, and it is expected to last until the end of 2020.

Amid these adverse growth conditions, retreat tourism still exist with 1-5 tourists on villas and small hotels. For example, during the pandemic, there are five retreat tourists on Cepik Villa, located in Sidemen-Bali. In addition, Beeingsatva Villa in Ubud-Bali also survived with five of retreat tourists. These retreat villas consist of yoga studios, meditation rooms and organic gardens with the provision of vegetarian foods; therefore, it is marketed for retreat activities.

The facts show that during pandemic Covid 19, retreat tourism still exists on decreased numbers of tourist. The facts led to explore the potential of retreat tourism in the new normal tourism, because retreats have the opportunity to avoid crowds and increase body immunity. Therefore, retreat tourism is a new normal tourism trend that is expected to start in 2021, despite being a criticism of capitalistic tourism since 1971 (Picard, 2008).

Norman (2014) categorized retreats as spiritual tourism comprising of yoga, meditation, and other spiritual activities. Therefore, retreat tourism is related to wellness, because it uses yoga, meditation, and spiritual activities to ensure the holistic health conditions, of tourists' wellness (Norman & Pokorny, 2017). The phenomenon of the retreat developed in secular societies is similar to those in the new age, which led to the secularization of spiritual resources. Pernecky & Poulston (2015) stated that the new age is a trigger for the emergence of spiritual resource commodification, which is similar to what happened in Sedona, Arizona, United States. Kunwar (2020) also stated a

change in the Katmandu Valley area to a business district with various studios and ashrams for yoga.

Various studies have shown that tourism activities have included spirituality as part of a product. Retreat tourism with spiritual activities led to the commodification of sacred areas, which is home to a yoga studio business ashram. Spiritual resource in commodification is one of the various packages of activities in retreat tourism with the ability to improve the mental and physical quality of health (Aggarwal, Guglani, & Goel, 2008; Kunwar, 2020). Tourists' experiences of retreat tourism are related to reducing stress through tour guides, such as yoga and meditation (Kelly, 2012). The research in Mashhad (Shirmohammadi & Abyaran, 2019) noted that tranquility and health are the brand images of spiritual tourism which related to retreat tourism.

Research carried out in New Zealand by Bone (2013) showed that retreat tourism aims to obtain health, therefore, it is classified in wellness. In a Thailand research, Ashton (2018) stated that novelty, relaxation, transcendentalism, self-esteem, physical appearance, and escape from routine are factors that promote tourism retreats. The attraction comes from direct experience, the natural environment, and a peaceful atmosphere far from home and historic sites. These factors are related to health, relaxation, and physical appearance.

Various studies have been carried out on the commodification, goals, driving factors, and attractiveness of tourism areas. However, there aren't research has been conducted on the retreat tourism products in new normal tourism. Therefore, this study provides new insights into this aspect, with ideas on business opportunities, which are expected to enable the industry to withstand various challenges. In the context of Bali, this article is a critique of capitalistic tourism which depending on mass tourism.

This article aims to explore potentials and sustainability retreat tourism as the new normal tourism. The tourism product planning theory and tourism sustainability concept used for describing retreat tourism potential in the new normal era. Seaton (1993) stated that the tourism product planning theory comprises three levels: core, tangible, and augmented product. Meanwhile, Butler (1999) stated that sustainable tourism is an approach based on the local economy, local society, and the environment.

## **Methods**

This article based on qualitative research conducted from February to June 2020 at Sidemen-Bali and the Ubud-Bali Tourism Area. These two regions represent Bali, however, the Sidemen is not a tourist area, in contrast with the Ubud Region. Data were collected through observation, interviews, as well as surveys, and qualitatively analyzed. The observations were non-participant that observed the activities of retreat tourism, with interviews conducted on four managers and three tourists that take long experiences with retreat tourism.

The survey was also used to acquire local community opinions on the development of retreat tourism by utilizing their spiritual resources. Furthermore, surveys were randomly carried out on local residents using Google forms and were distributed to groups of tourism actors, religious leaders, and the general public outside the group. The survey was answered by 127 local people, with 125 verified by checking the answers with the results of interviews and observations.

The interview data were combined with survey and observation results to obtain a full overview of the tourism retreat products' potential. The group of related answers was categorized on the potentials and sustainability of retreat tourism, with the observations used to verify the results of interviews and surveys. The data was qualitatively analyzed to explore the potentials and sustainability of retreat tourism by categorizing and connecting data to the topics.

## **Retreat Tourism**

A retreat is classified as spiritual tourism, which comprises of healing, experience, quest, collective, and retreat (Norman, 2014). Healing is a tourist activity used to recover from various health ailments, while the experiment is a search for inbound tourists' experiences in ashrams and similar places. Furthermore, quests are defined as searching for answers by tourists to various life-related questions by looking for teachers and astrologers. Collective are spiritual activities, such as yoga workshops, while the retreat is the act of participating in this activity. Norman (2014) stated that retreat activities are mostly similar to a wellness practice. According to Smith & Kelly (2006), wellness is more psychological than physical exercise. Retreat tourism also contains physical activities such as counseling, yoga and complemented by

self-discoveries. Therefore, retreat and wellness intersect with physical, bodily, and spiritual activities.

Norman (2014) and Smith & Kelly (2006) stated that retreat emphasizes on spiritual activities and attractive areas such as mountains. Purdie (2013) reported that the Glasser Mountain in Salendia Baru is attractive. Meanwhile, Kunwar (2020) stated that the merging between a retreat place and a yoga ashram is a tourist attraction area in Nepal. Therefore, retreat tourism are activities that utilize natural and spiritual resources to keep tourists away from the hustle and bustle of routine life.

### **New Normal Tourism**

New normal is a term used to describe a period after the Covid 19 pandemic. Several communities are currently experiencing abnormal conditions, such as restricting outdoor activities, mandatory use of masks, hand sanitizers, and social distancing due to the pandemic. New normal was first used to show the state of business and the economy after the 2007-2008 financial crises, and the term is referred to the state of various post-crisis and pandemic (Wikipedia, 2020).

Benjamin, Dillette, & Alderman (2020) and Ateljevic (2020) stated that new normal tourism is healthful, in harmony with nature and local communities. This definition is in accordance with sustainable tourism (Butler, 1999), an environment with the local economy and communities. According to Sutawa (2012), local community empowerment is the foundation for sustainable tourism development in Bali. Therefore, empowering them to regenerate the area and attract tourists (Ateljevic, 2020). Benjamin et al. (2020), Ateljevic (2020), and Sutawa (2012) stated that new normal tourism prioritizes health activities by promoting sustainability in Bali. Therefore, new normal tourism is tourism based on health care, local community, local economy, and environment.

### **Potentials of Retreat as a New Normal Tourism**

According to the World Health Organization, certain regulations are needed to control the spread of Covid 19 transmission during retreat development for new normal tourism. These regulations are provision of health quarantine facilities, crowd minimization, work distancing, hand sanitizer availability, and risk management (WHO, 2020). Benjamin et al. (2020) stated that this tourism is related to nature and sustainability.

Ateljevic (2020) stated that new normal tourism is closer to the meaning of life, in harmony with nature, and community. Ateljevic (2020) aimed to realize David Korten's economic development theory, which teaches humans how to live naturally. Benjamin et al. (2020) and Ateljevic (2020) stated that tourism is in harmony with nature and local communities, with deep meanings of life that enable humans to live healthily and naturally.

In this tourism, retreat becomes an alternative potential which is defined as an ability that has not been realized in the present and can be developed in the future (Oxford, 2020, Wikipedia, 2020). This means that the retreat's potential has not been presently realized, with the ability to be developed in the future. Retreat tourism emphasizes the search for its self, therefore it needs a quiet place that is distant from the surrounding community to manage the risk of disease transmission.

Cepik Villa located in the middle of rice fields, is an example of a retreat tourism area that appeared to be functional irrespective of the pandemic. These 6-building villas are enough for 15 tourists accommodated five inbound tourists that visited on June 6, 2020 and allowed them to carry out yoga and meditation activities. Inbound tourists are also invited to cultivate fruits and traditional medicinal plants in organic gardens around the villa.

"Yoga practice, meditation, and gardening activities are interesting exercises for tourists during the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic" (Cepik Villa owner, I Ketut Ginastra, interview June 6, 2020).

According to Adeline Torres, inbound tourist from France that traveled to Bali during the Covid-19 pandemic, local residents in the countryside need to be used as retreat places in small villas.

"Penebel located in Sidemen, Bali is good for retreat, and the budget is affordable" (Adeline Torres, interview June 16, 2020).

Ginastra (51 years old) stated that the Covid 19 pandemic is one of the essential reasons for the small number of inbound tourists trapped in Bali. Furthermore, the majority have canceled their various retreat programs due to the absence of flights. A European tourist group scheduled to arrive in July 2020 was rescheduled to the end of the year. Dewa Nyoman Tirta Arta (38

Years), manager of the Beeingsatva Villa in Ubud-Bali, also stated that tourists rescheduled their retreat until the end of 2020.

“We were expecting a group of tourists by June 2020, however, they rescheduled until the end of the year. Flights to Bali are also very limited, which also prevents this activity from being carried out” (Arta, interview June 13, 2020).

The cancellation of retreat groups also took place at the Bali Gandhi Sevagram Pakse Ashram, which usually received inbound tourists from spiritual communities across the world. Ida Rsi Putra Manuba (51 years old) stated that the closure of flights across the globe led to the cancellation of schedules by foreign tourists to Gandhi Ashram. However, a tourist arrived from the United States and a friend at Satva Retreat, Rsikesh-India. According to him, the trip was remarkable with a peaceful atmosphere” (Mark Neiber, inbound tourist from the United States that visited Gandhi Ashram, interview June 7, 2020).

The cancellations of inbound tourist visits do not discourage the villa managers as they still had approximately 1-5 inbound tourists due to the limited employee. Most of the villa owners in Bali also work as employees for husband and wife that owned Cepik worked with their five employees. Ginastra marketed the villa, while Suciani became a yoga instructor and qi-gong (Chinese version of yoga).

Ginastra stated that when flight reopens, several tourists are likely to visit due to stress experienced during the pandemic. Stressed tourists need retreat programs such as yoga, qi-gong, tracking, and meditation. This activity is supported by the natural atmosphere around the villa in Subak Tebola, Sidemen-Bali. Arta is also optimistic on the existence of a retreat tour in accordance with the stressful conditions of foreign tourists. Villa is also going to be an option compared to star hotels because its activities are in accordance with WHO health protocol.

Suciani, yoga and qi-gong instructors stated that qi-gong activities open the blocked energies, therefore, it relaxes the human body. A decrease in the stress level leads to a rise in the body's immunity.



**Figure 1. Retreat in Cepik Villa, Sidemen-Bali (Research, 2020)**



**Figure 2. Retreat Tourism Activities at Villa Beeingsatva, Ubud-Bali (Beeingsatva, 2020)**

Arta stated that many prospective inbound tourists had expressed their desire to retreat in their villas due to stress. Therefore, immediately access is granted to international flights, tourists are likely to choose a retreat to reduce their stress levels and increase the body's immune system. "Currently, boosting the body's immune is the central issue in the new normal period. Therefore, I am optimistic" (Arta, interview June 13, 2020).

Neiber supported this statement by saying that Bali is naturally beautiful with good energy. Therefore, the development of a yoga retreat is likely to have a historical effect on the Balinese community of the Hindus.

Bali has a lot of beautiful, historical, and spiritual places for yoga, which was previously established from ancient times. Therefore,



Bali is a magical place for a yoga retreat (Neiber, interview June 7, 2020).

The Marketing Manager of Retreat Villas in Bali, I Wayan Duarta (47 years), stated that the response of prospective tourists to the retreat tour was outstanding. Retreats participants are also far from the risk of Covid 19, because they are directly picked up at the airport and taken to the location. They also conduct various holistic health activities, such as yoga and meditation, which help increase body immunity.

Duarta, Marketing Manager of Puri Villa, stated that they are arranging suitable tour packages with various combinations with retreats for new normal tourism in Bali.

"We are arranging tour packages following Bali's new normal tourism such as retreat tourism which is in accordance with the government and WHO"(I Wayan Duarta, interview June 26, 2020).

Various statements indicate the retreat is a potential new normal tourism in Bali because it is far from the crowds, and its activities increase body immunity. Retreat tourism is also associated with harmonizing with nature and the surrounding community. Interviews with Ginastra, Suciani, Arta, and Duarta show that retreat tours emphasize on harmonious living with nature through organic farming, vegetarianism, and healthy behavior.

It is also in harmony with the local community through agricultural products for food and spiritual resources. Cepik Villa, for example, uses a local instructor, named Suciani. Meanwhile, Beeingsatva uses them for spiritual content such as *malukat* rituals using holy water at Hindu shrines in Bali. Ashram Gandhi also uses the teachers and students to serve inbound tourists on retreats.

**Table 1. Retreat Potencies for New Normal Tourism in Bali (Research, 2020)**

No	Potencies	Details
1.	The places	Away from the crowd
2.	Activities	Increase body immunity
		Harmony with nature
		Harmony with the local community

The use of local community resources for tourism often creates conflicts, however, in this case, their response was positive. Based on a random survey using Google form on 125 local residents in Bali, using Linkert scale 1 – 5, a total of 3,952 points were obtained, which indicates that the community agrees with spiritual tourism. Questions regarding the use of residents' homes as retreats had 3,685 points, meaning that the local community agreed to its use. Furthermore, Hindu ashram as a retreat tourism had 3,84 points, which means that the population agreed on its utilization. These data indicate that retreat can be a new normal tourism because it is healthy and in harmony with nature and local communities (Benjamin et al., 2020; Ateljevic, 2020). The evident is seen from the survey, which stated the local community's agreement towards the development of retreat tourism in Bali.

### **Sustainability of Retreat**

Retreat tourism is healthy, in harmony with nature and the local community product. According to Seaton (1993), products are core, tangible, and augmented, which are in accordance with retreat tourism throughout the world. The differentiator of retreat tourism is augmented products which are additional facilities provided by the service.

Cepik Villa in Sidemen-Bali offers augmented products with spiritual history. According to Ginastra, Cepik Villa was once a place where the past received *moksha* known as deliverance from suffering. Remnants of *moksha* are a large stone in the Cepik Villa area, which is a sacred place. According to Arta, Beeingsatva Villa in Ubud-Bali offers augmented learning products for Balinese spiritual culture, which provides ceremonial facilities. Beeingsatva also offers a *malukat* (self-cleansing) ritual to the holy springs around Ubud-Bali.

Ida Rsi Putra Manuaba, stated that Ashram Gandhi Pakse Bali provides authentic ashram life as an augmented product. Ashram invites tourists to live

as citizens of the ashram, while working in an organic garden, praying (*puja*), yoga asanas, and meditation. This product augments the original ashram's life with an authentic search for inbound tourists throughout the world (Jamieson, 2019; Sirirat, 2019).

Augmented retreat tourism products act as history, local spiritual, and authenticity of the ashram's life are product parts based on the local community. Therefore, this retreat has the potential to be a criticism of the community's capitalistic tourism developed with a luxury resort pattern, according to Picard (2008). This luxury tourism resort needs foreign investment, which led to the leakage of revenue by 51% for 5 and 4-star hotels (Suryawardani et al., 2014).

The local community has criticized Bali's capitalistic tourism tendency since 1994 through its protest against starved hotel investment in Tanah Lot-Bali (Sutarya, 2019). Therefore, since 1994, the issue of pro-environment tourism and local communities has been experienced in the region. Its pros and cons became pronounced after the inception of the various crises that hit the tourism area in 1997, such as the monetary and 2002 bombing. This crisis led to the termination of skilled workers, and after that, they built small businesses in their respective villages.

Ginastra, Suciani, and Duarta are examples of these skilled workers that built tourism businesses in accordance with the local community and environmental issues. In conclusion, Spiritual and religious tourism is sustainable, for the pro-local peoples' economy, and the environment (Zarb & Zarb, 2020). Sirirat (2019) stated that sustainable tourism occurs in Thailand because its spiritual tourism depends on the local community as a giver of meaning, thereby contributing to their local economy.

The use of various local resources is shown to utilize holy spring as a place for *malukat* and local community villa. Retreat tourism relies on the local Balinese community as givers of spiritual significance. It provides traditional, yoga, and meditation teachers with classes on the natural environment and organic gardens.

Ginastra, Suciani, Manuaba, and Duarta stated that the natural environment is the main support for retreat tourism. Therefore, Beeingsatva Villa-Ubud and Cepik Villa-Sidemen were located in the middle of rice fields, while Gandhi-Pakse Bali Ashram in a rural setting on the banks of the Unda River, Klungkung-Bali. Other retreat tourism villas, such as Villa Desa Canggu, are also in the middle of rice fields.

**Table 2. Retreat Tourism as a Sustainable Tourism Product (Research, 2020)**

No	Pro-Environment	Pro-Local Community	Pro-Local Economy
1.	Organic garden	Teacher of local traditions, yoga, and meditation	Income for yoga teachers and local farmers
2.	Environmentally friendly food	Giving meaning to the retreat	Direct economic relations with local communities
3.	Surrounding natural support		Income from the use of local spiritual resources

Puad & Som (2019) defined a retreat as a sustainable product, that is part of spiritual tourism, which acts on green tourism. These products also act as a criticism of pro-investment in Bali tourism. However, the Balinese people tend to protest against it due to the drainage of land and wasteful use of water (Sutarya, 2017). The results of this criticism also have the potential to become new normal tourism products in Bali because it meets the health needs and is in harmony with the local community, and environment. This also supports the local economy through the use of agricultural products, spiritual and natural resources.

### **Conclusion**

Retreat has the potential as new normal tourism in Bali because it is based on health and harmony with the environment. The core content of retreat tourism is healthy and tangible products such as yoga and meditation programs. These augmented products are manufactured for the uniqueness of Balinese spirituality, such as learning to make ceremonial and *malukat* (bathing with holy water) materials. Furthermore, the retreat tour qualifies as a sustainable tourism product because it supports the local economy, community, and environment due to the use of organic vegetables and other resources.

Furthermore, the local community provides instructors that assist in providing retreat tours, with the pro-environment basis indicated from the support that comes from the natural environment and organic agriculture.

This is a qualitative research due to its inability to calculate the impact of retreat tourism on the local community, economy and environment. It provided an overview of the use of local resources, with positive impacts on the environment and natural resources owned by the local community. However, further research is needed to calculate the impacts to local community, economy, and environment.

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