

## Visitors' Perceptions of Cultural Improprieties in Bali, Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT :** This study measures the awareness of Balinese cultural improprieties by tourists visiting Ubud, south-central Bali, Indonesia in July 2002. Bali is Indonesia's most famous holiday destination, the "Island of the Gods" or "The Last Paradise." The images and literature used to market Bali internationally, however, do not convey the importance of observing proper cultural behavior. A Tourist Behavior Survey was administered to visitors in Wanara Wana Monkey Forest by team members of a Summer Field School in Ethnoprimateology. Results of the study are discussed here. Our findings indicate that intervention strategies might be useful to advise tourists how to behave properly in Bali. If such intervention is successful, Balinese people may feel enhanced reinforcement that their culture is of considerable value on the world stage.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Tourism, Cultural Improprieties, Tour Operators, Sustainability

### Introduction

Sustainability has many different faces on the island of Bali in Indonesia. Sustainability can be recognized in the complex maintenance of the rice terraces, the heart and soul of human subsistence in Bali (cf. Lansing 1991, 1995; and others). Sustainability is found in the context of vivid cultural expression, e. g., in arts and crafts, music and dance, and the like; in Bali, it is said, there is no word for "art" - the nearest equivalent word simply means "life" (cf. Covarrubias 1946; McPhee 1947; H. Geertz 1994, and others). Sustainability also means meeting the needs of three constituent groups in Wanara Wana Monkey Forest in Ubud: the habituated macaque monkeys, *Macaca fascicularis*, who reside in Monkey Forest; the villagers of Padangtegal who come to Monkey Forest because of the temples there; and the tourists who visit Monkey Forest especially for its well-known

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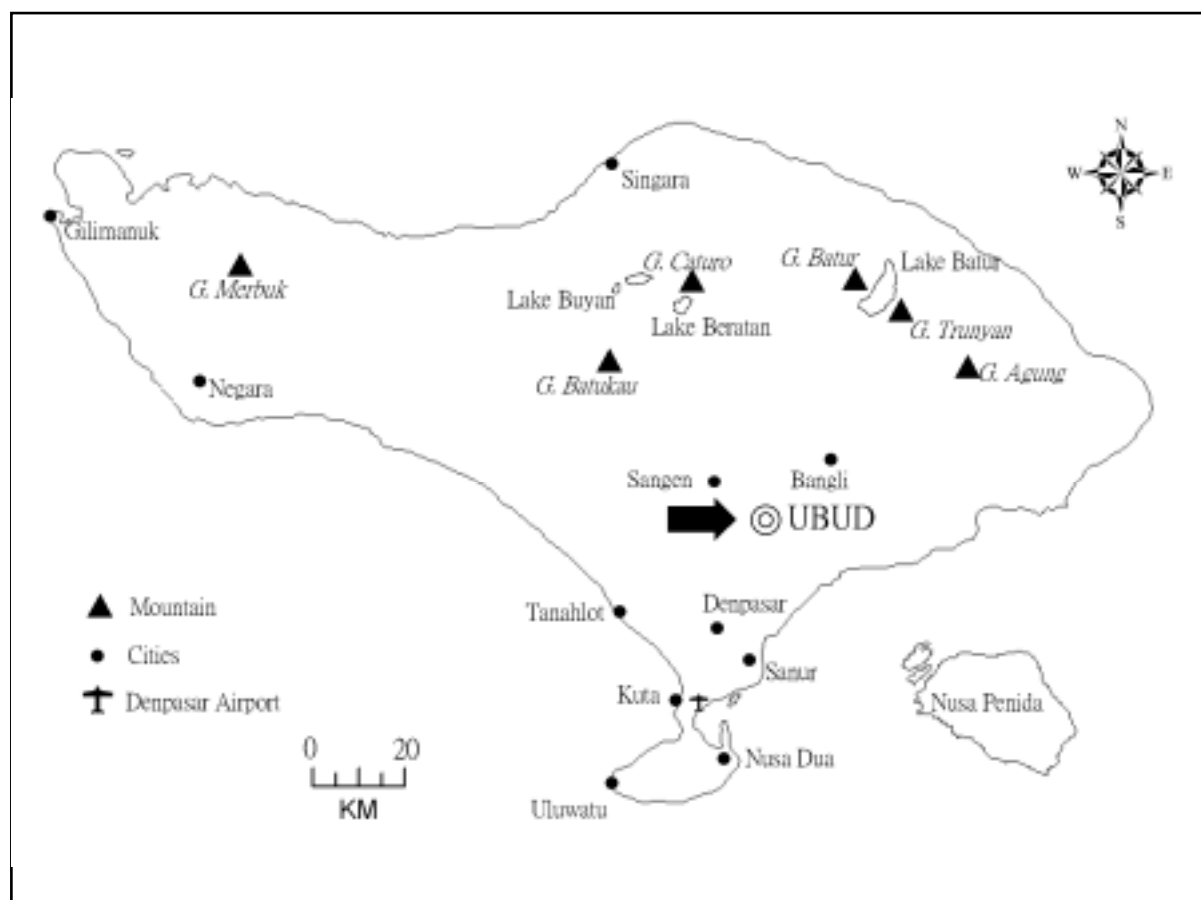


Fig. 1 Map of Bali

monkey inhabitants.

To what extent do visitors, in this case, the tourists who come to Monkey Forest, have positive experiences during their stay in Bali? To what extent are they informed or knowledgeable guests? Researchers undertook a study to explore the level of awareness of tourists of cultural improprieties on the island of Bali. The setting for the administration of the surveys was the town of Ubud (Fig. 1). Team members participating in a Field School in Ethnoprimateology interviewed tourists visiting the Study Area, Wanara Wana Monkey Forest in Padangtegal village within Ubud. Researchers utilized a questionnaire in the course of interviewing an availability sample of tourists in Monkey Forest. This paper reports on the data set collected in July 2002.

### Review of the Literature

For decades concern has been expressed about the major cultural changes that are taking place in Bali. Picard (1996: 92, after Dalton 1990: 35-36) has written: "How

much more tourism can the island take? How much more traffic? How many more craft shops? How many more Kutas? How many more jets? The answer is that it never stops, the roads are widened, the hotels multiply, the direct flights increase. Commercialism has crept into every aspect of Balinese life..... It is now clear that the unbelievably complex social and religious fabric of the Balinese is at last breaking down under the tourist onslaught.”

And yet, such cries of alarm appear greatly exaggerated. Bali is routinely cited as a premier example of a society that has energetically embraced tourism over a significant period of time. Likewise, it is said that Bali has very successfully sustained its unique culture.

Picard offers a reassuring conclusion (1996: 93, after Elegant 1987: 9): “Has the tidal wave of tourism sweeping over the East Indies washed away the idyllic culture [of Bali] that enchanted earlier visitors? With its hamburger joints, discotheques and Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets, has Bali succumbed to the gritty homogenization of the modern world? The short – and definitive – answer is: By no means! Beset by invaders for millenniums [sic], the Balinese are responding to the latest incursion, as they have to past incursions, by becoming even more like themselves. The fabric of Balinese society is too strong and too flexible to be rent by easy money.”

We suggest that it is not easy in contemporary Bali to be Balinese. The titles of certain books and articles in print, for example, provide clues: (cf. McKean 1989, “Towards a Theoretical Analysis of Tourism: Economic Dualism and Cultural Involution in Bali”; Vickers 1989, *Bali: A Paradise Created*; Wikan 1990, *Managing Turbulant Hearts: A Balinese Formula for Living*; Barth 1993, *Balinese Worlds*; Martopo and Mitchell 1995, *Bali: Balancing Environment, Economy and Culture*; Hobart 1999, “As They Like It: Overinterpretation and Hyporeality in Bali”; MacRae 1999, “Acting Global, Thinking Local in a Balinese Tourist Town”; Pitana 1999, “Status Struggles and the Priesthood in Contemporary Bali”; Rubinstein and Connor, eds., 1999, *Staying Local in the Global Village: Bali in the Twentieth Century*. In spite of this, we have encountered Balinese people in the course of our Balinese Macaque Project (1999-2002) who appear to be incredibly “other oriented”, social as well as sociable, people described by Wheatley as *vibrant*. Wheatley (1999: 121) states:

They [the Balinese] appear to be constantly energetic and busy..... Much of this vibrance is expressed in their religion and in their arts. Such vibrancy seems to generate a powerful magnetic force that attracts more people and more energy to it. Laborers look for work, and tourists flock in. But why be so busy? What causes the Balinese to be so energetic?

What, we ask, is the “fabric of Balinese society” (after Elegant 1987: 9, in Picard 1996: 93)? Wheatley suggests that the Balinese find special meaning in their philosophical

concept known as “*Tri Hita Karana*”, the three causes of goodness. “*Tri Hita Karana*” is about achieving harmony and balance — between human beings and gods, between human beings and nature, and between human beings and other humans. Can such harmony and balance in fact be achieved in Bali? Can the same also be maintained? With the response to both of these questions appearing to be very positive, we propose that sustainability is happening in Bali.

Of like importance in Bali is the concept of “*Rwa Bineda*”. This is a dualistic concept which divides life and the world into two continuously opposing categories, e.g., positive vs. negative, sacred vs. profane, up-stream vs. down-stream, and the like. The two opposing categories continually negotiate with each other. Harmony and balance can be achieved in Bali because both concepts are constantly monitored by unknowns, especially disharmony and lack of balance, according to Balinese thinking.

Thus, Bali attracts visitors for two major types of tourism: the activities based on sun, sea and sand, and “cultural” tourism of which dances, performances, shadow-puppet shows, visits to temples and religious ceremonies are presented (Long and Wall 1995: 240). Our study explores the level of awareness of visitors to Bali concerning aspects of cultural tourism. At present, we do not know of other studies of this type conducted in Bali, or in other international tourism locations.

## Research Objectives

The goal of this research endeavor is to explore a particular aspect of tourism in Bali, and how the same has impacted local life and local culture. The research objectives of this study include measuring the awareness of tourists of Balinese cultural improprieties, and collecting data to enable an analysis of tourists' responses according to country of origin, current place of residence, gender, age, number of times having visited Bali, and the like.

Balinese cultural improprieties explored in the course of interviewing tourists in July 2002 can be divided into three categories:

### 1. Religious Improprieties, e.g.,

“It is necessary to wear a sarong/waist sash to enter a temple”

“Menstruating women and persons with a bleeding cut are not allowed to enter a temple”

“At a temple festival, it is rude to have one's head higher than the priest or village headman.”

### 2. Body Positioning Improprieties, e.g.,

“Using the left hand to give or receive things, or pointing with the left hand is considered rude”

“Standing or talking with hands on hips is considered rude”

“Touching someone’s head is inappropriate.”

### **3. Culturally Incorrect Behaviors, e.g.,**

“It is not polite to call someone by his or her family name without the Pak (Bapak) or Bu (Ibu) title.”

## **Research Methods**

After the Tourist Behavior Survey had been designed in draft form in 1999, faculty at Udayana University in Denpasar, Bali, were consulted by our research team concerning the appropriateness of the survey instrument. Pre-testing of the survey instrument with foreign [non-Balinese] students at Udayana University was then undertaken. This resulted in some revision and expansion of the Balinese cultural improprieties being explored in the study.

The Tourist Behavior Survey in final form was administered to an availability sample of tourists visiting Wanara Wana Monkey Forest in Padangtegal, Ubud, Bali, in July of each year from 1999 through 2002. University faculty and students participating in a Summer Field School in Ethnoprimateology in the Monkey Forest served as interviewers, while also undertaking other research tasks relevant to the work of the Field School (see also Iverson *et al.*, 2000)<sup>1</sup>

## **Research Findings**

Ninety-two interviews were completed in July 2002 with tourists visiting the Monkey Forest, who represented nineteen countries of origin outside of Indonesia. Seventy-five of the interviewees were first-time visitors to Bali. Seventeen of the guests had visited Bali two to five times. Thirty-six of those interviewed were men; fifty-six of the ninety-two visitors were women.

Data gathered and evaluated with reference to our research endeavor in July 2002 indicate that many of the tourists interviewed in the Wanara Wana Monkey Forest in Ubud could not describe the major Balinese cultural improprieties. Our researchers asked visitors first in the open-ended part of the survey, “Are you aware of any tourist behaviors that are

considered offensive or rude by local Balinese?" Less than 20% of the interviewees were knowledgeable of Balinese cultural improprieties at the outset.

Some of the tourists we spoke to did not admire the behavior of other tourists in Bali: "They talk too loud," "They wear very revealing clothing," "They tease the monkeys in Monkey Forest", "They do not buy after bargaining," "They step on the offering", "They are arrogant toward the locals." Some of our interviewees did not recognize their own behaviors to be inappropriate. "Tourists in Bali should not wear skimpy clothing," said a woman dressed in a spaghetti-strap sleeveless blouse and a very short skirt. "Visitors in Monkey Forest should not tease the monkeys," stated a tourist who had just withheld bananas from a monkey.

When asked, "Are you offended by Balinese people in any way?" most of the tourists said, "Not at all!" Some tourists, however, felt that locals could be rather aggressive in touting, especially vendors or taxi drivers.

Tourists were then presented with a list of eleven Balinese cultural improprieties on the reverse side of the survey instrument. Some of the interviewees recognized the Balinese cultural improprieties when prompted in this manner. Others acknowledged some of the improprieties, but not all of them.

### **1) Religious Improprieties**

The majority of visitors (first-time and repeat visitors) were well aware of the necessity in Bali to wear a sarong/waist sash to enter a temple. Among those who were not aware, more than 83% were men.

A total of 41.3% of the visitors were not aware that menstruating women and anyone (including men) with a bleeding cut should not go into a temple. Of the visitors who were not aware, 94.7% were first-time visitors. Among those visitors who reported they had visited Bali twice or more than twice, only two visitors (both of whom were women) were not aware. The lack of awareness concerning this propriety was reduced to only 11.8% (from 94.7%) among the repeat visitors.

More than 60% (63.04%) of the visitors were not aware that it is rude to have one's head higher than that of the priest or village headman at a Balinese temple festival. First-time visitors accounted for 87.9% of those who lacked the awareness of this cultural constraint.

### **2) Body Positioning Improprieties**

With regard to the statement, "Using the left hand to give or receive things, or pointing with the left hand is considered rude," only one-third of the visitors were not aware of this cultural constraint in Bali. Among those visitors, first-time visitors to Bali accounted for

80%.

With regard to the statement, “Standing or talking with hands on hips is considered rude,” more than 50% (56.5%) of the visitors were not aware of this cultural impropriety. Among those, 78.8% were first-time visitors to Bali.

Approximately one-third (34%) of the visitors were not aware that touching someone’s head is inappropriate in Bali. Among them, two-thirds were first-time visitors.

### **3) Culturally Incorrect Behaviors**

More than 80% (81.5%) of the visitors interviewed were not aware that it is improper to call someone in Bali by his or her family name without utilizing the Pak [Bapak] or Bu [Ibu] honorific designation. Among those repeat visitors, nearly two-thirds (64%) were not aware of this cultural practice.

## **Discussion**

In July 2002, one of the authors of this paper, Chiang, interviewed thirty-five Mandarin-speaking visitors in Monkey Forest who originated from Taiwan, Republic of China. She interviewed 14 males and 19 females (with missing data from an additional two informants). Twelve of her informants were in the age group 18-29, eighteen of her informants were in the age group 30-44, and five were in the age group 45 and older. The responses from Chiang’s sample of Mandarin language speakers were very similar to the responses generated from the English language speaking visitors who were interviewed by Project team members in July 2002 (see Diagrams 1 and 2 below).

Clearly, return visitors to Bali are significantly more aware of Balinese cultural improprieties. First-time tourists to Bali knew little about the improprieties when interviewed in Monkey Forest in July 2002. Most visitors we interviewed, however, were interested to learn about Balinese improprieties. Some of the improprieties are integral to the local Hindu religion<sup>2</sup> - thus, visitors **MUST** behave properly; the matter is not optional. In the Wanara Wana Monkey Forest, for example, tourists who wish to enter the public courtyard of the Pura Dalem (main temple) must wear a sarong and waist sash, men and women visitors alike, just as local residents do. Tourists who decline to wear appropriate dress will be (politely) denied entrance to the Pura Dalem by Balinese people.

How can tourists who come to Bali be instructed to behave in culturally appropriate ways? Television programs and Balinese newspapers could prepare ad campaigns. Leaflets for local distribution might be of value. Upon entry into Bali at Ngurah Rai International Airport in Denpasar, while standing in line for customs clearance and luggage

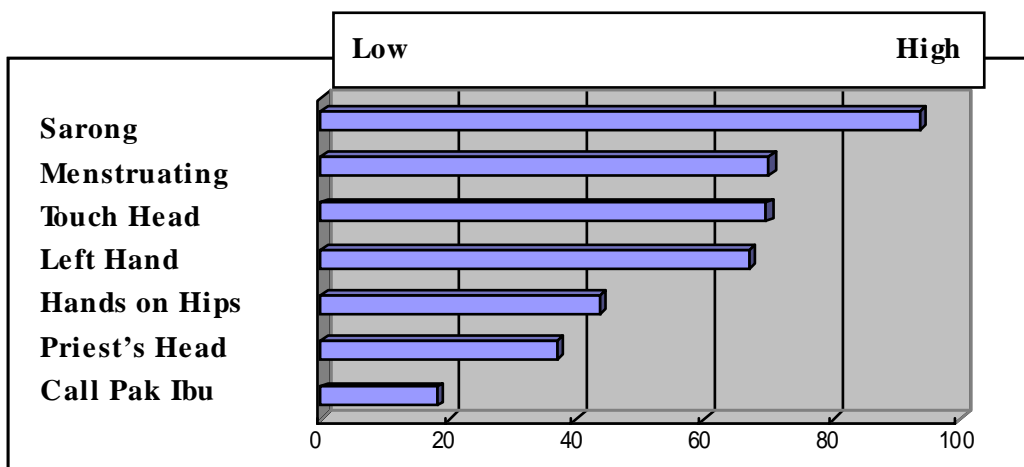
pick-up, a video presentation on appropriate 'Do's and Don'ts' in Bali could be screened continuously. It is essential for local tour guides to be well informed, as well as culturally knowledgeable and sensitive.

Our project results suggest that return or repeat visitors to a place such as Bali are more aware of the local cultural improprieties, seem to find the cultural improprieties meaningful in the context of local cultural practices, and seek to behave appropriately as visitors. Repeat visitors to Bali want to know how to behave properly in Bali. They want to meet and get to know Balinese people within local cultural contexts. Returning tourists indicated to us that they greatly value this type of cross-cultural learning and sharing.

We suggest that the quest for sustainability, in this case, indicates that returning guests are of greatest value to a receiving country in the context of tourism. Such visitors have made a choice to return to the country in question. Their initial visit was a very positive experience. They have returned - and may return again...

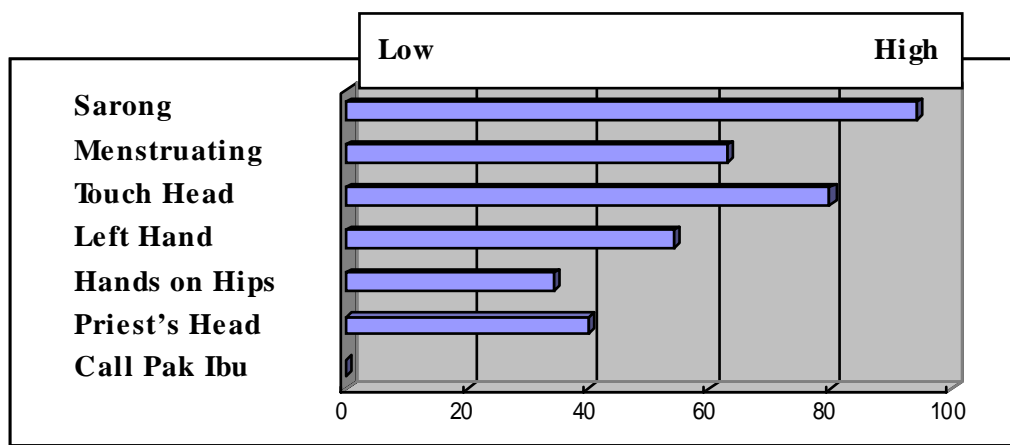
Our research also suggests that Bali is widely recognized around the globe as a society that has managed to **sustain** its "traditional" or "classic" culture through various waves of political, economic and socio-cultural change, the most recent of which has been rapid tourism growth and development. Indeed, it seems that tourism has served, in fact, to **sustain** and enhance Bali's remarkable cultural integrity. Active and dynamic tourism has given the Balinese a unique type of stage on which to rethink, refresh, and showcase their culture in ways that are (mostly) consistent with local cultural proprieties<sup>3</sup>.

**Diagram 1. Level of Visitor Awareness (Interviews conducted in English primarily with Tourists from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America, n = 92)**





**Diagram 2. Level of Visitor Awareness (Interviews conducted in Mandarin with Tourists from Taiwan, Republic of China, n = 32)**



### Notes

1. We utilized an “availability sample” of respondents because our team members were multi-tasking, i.e. teams have several tasks at one time, and had to interview a tourist whose language he/she could understand. It is therefore hard to predict how many can be interviewed per day. A questionnaire in English and its equivalent in Chinese was used.
2. Indonesia is mainly Muslim, but the province of Bali is Hindu which makes it culturally unique.
3. This paper was prepared before the devastating bomb attack, on October 12, 2002, that gained worldwide press coverage and resulted in the deaths of over 180 visitors and locals. Amidst cancellations by many tour operators and advisories from many consulates that (particularly Western) visitors should leave Bali, there are dire predictions for the industry at this point. We continue to feel that Bali is for the most part a sustainable island culture and hope that the speed of the recovery from this disaster will evidence this claim.

### Acknowledgements

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Rice Terraces, Bali, Indonesia



Traditional Temple Offerings Carried by Balinese Women



Religious Ceremonial Procession in Ubud, Bali



Conducting Tourist Awareness Survey in Monkey Forest, Ubud, Bali



Tourists Encounter a Macaque in Monkey Forest, Ubud, Bali



Monkey Forest Staff Feeding a Macaque

## 巴里島遊客的不適當文化行為認知之研究

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### 摘 要

本論文針對於巴里島中南部烏布的遊客，對於巴里島遊客不適當文化行為認知進行了解。巴里島是印尼最著名的旅遊聖地，號稱為「上帝之島」或「最後的樂土」。儘管有許多的意象與文獻對巴里島市場的國際化做了著墨，但是卻沒有關注到外地人適當文化行為的重要性。這次我們在西元2002年7月份，組成了一個暑期靈長人類學田野工作研習營，在聖泉廟所在的猴子森林(Wanara Wana Monkey Forest)進行了一項遊客行為調查。研究結果發現介入的策略可能可以讓遊客知道，在巴里島要如何才算是合宜的舉止。假若這類的介入是成功的，巴里島居民可能會深刻的感覺到他們的文化在世界上是被珍視的。

**關鍵詞：**文化旅遊，不適當文化行為，旅遊業者，永續旅遊

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