



Development of Medical Wellness-Based Health Tourism in Indonesia: Case Study of Traditional Medicine and Melukat Ritual in Bali

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Abstract

Health tourism has emerged as a rapidly growing global economic sector, with countries competing to attract tourists seeking holistic health services. With its rich natural and cultural resources, Indonesia has significant potential to establish itself as a leading destination in this field. This study explores the potential for developing medical wellness-based health tourism in Bali, focusing on traditional medicine and the Melukat ritual. Utilizing a qualitative approach and a literature review methodology, this study highlights Bali's unique advantages, including internationally recognized traditional healing practices and the culturally rich Melukat ritual, which integrates physical, mental, and spiritual health benefits. This study also finds that melukat has gained recognition not only for its therapeutic effects on mental well-being but also as a unique interfaith tourism trend. By promoting this ritual within the framework of medical wellness tourism, Bali can leverage its cultural assets to attract a premium segment of health-conscious tourists while contributing to the preservation of local traditions. This study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders, contributing to Bali's positioning as a premier medical wellness tourism destination. By integrating traditional medicine and Melukat rituals into tourism packages, Bali can attract health-conscious tourists, preserve its cultural heritage, and support local economic growth.

Keywords: Health tourism, medical wellness, melukat ritual, traditional medicine.

1. Introduction

Health tourism has become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors globally (Mousavi, Haghi, & Manshadi, 2016; Taufik & Sulistiadi, 2018). Countries worldwide are competing to leverage their unique potentials to attract tourists seeking holistic health services (Lukose et al., 2024). Indonesia, a nation rich in natural and cultural resources (Sahertian & Jawas, 2021), holds significant opportunities to become a leading destination in this field. One emerging segment within health tourism is medical wellness, which integrates physical, mental, and spiritual health to enhance overall quality of life. However, the development of this sector in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, still requires in-depth studies to ensure sustainable growth.

Bali, known as the "Island of Gods" (Yimin Liu, Luo, & Tao, 2023; Yong Liu, Chin, Nechita, & Candrea, 2020; Tenaya & Salma, 2023), offers exceptional potential in the context of medical wellness. Balinese traditional healing practices, such as herbal therapies and traditional massage, have long been internationally recognized for their efficacy in promoting health and well-being. Additionally, the Melukat ritual, a spiritual cleansing tradition involving sacred water and mantras (Harianja, Antika, & Dewi, 2024), serves as a distinctive attraction for tourists seeking holistic experiences that connect the body, mind, and soul. These traditional elements position Bali as a strong contender for becoming a leading destination in medical wellness-based health tourism (Nurshafira, 2022; Susanti, 2022). However, the utilization of this potential faces several challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, the absence of comprehensive regulations, and suboptimal promotional efforts.

Although extensive research has been conducted on health tourism in Indonesia, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. First, studies focusing on the potential development of medical wellness based on traditional healing practices and the Melukat ritual in Bali remain limited. Second, there is a lack of research on effective and sustainable strategies for developing medical wellness-based health tourism in Bali. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the potential for developing medical wellness-based health tourism in Bali, with a particular focus on traditional healing practices and the Melukat ritual. The research will also examine effective and sustainable development strategies, taking into account cultural, economic, and environmental aspects.

The purpose of this study is to assess the potential for developing medical wellness-based health tourism in Bali, focusing on traditional healing practices and the Melukat ritual, and to identify effective and sustainable development strategies. This study is expected to provide scientific evidence, serve as a policy recommendation for the government and stakeholders, and raise public awareness about the potential of this sector in supporting economic growth and well-being.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the *literature review* method to explore the potential development of health tourism based on medical wellness in Bali. The data used in this research is secondary data obtained from reliable sources such as scientific journals, books and other relevant national and international sources. Data collection is conducted through a literature search using online databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and ProQuest with keywords such as "health tourism," "medical wellness," "traditional medicine," and "Melukat ritual." Literature selection is based on its relevance to the research objectives, the validity of the sources, and the recency of the data.

The data analysis is conducted descriptively and thematically to identify the potential, challenges, and strategies for developing health tourism based on medical wellness in Bali. The analysis process begins with organizing the data into key categories, such as cultural, economic, and environmental aspects relevant to traditional medicine and the Melukat ritual. The data is then interpreted to understand the relationships between these elements in supporting the development of medical wellness. The results of this analysis are used to formulate recommendations for effective and sustainable health tourism development strategies, considering local needs and global market demands.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Development of Health Tourism in Indonesia Towards the Concept of Medical Wellness

Health tourism refers to a form of tourism involving travel to another country to receive healthcare services (Latief & Ulfa, 2024), including medical treatments, surgical procedures, health therapies, and other related services (Letunovska et al., 2020). The primary motivations for health tourism vary, ranging from seeking higher-quality or more affordable healthcare services to combining medical treatments with enjoyable vacation experiences.

As a developing country, Indonesia has significant potential to attract both international and domestic medical tourists (Ratnasari, Gunawan, Pitchay, & Mohd Salleh, 2022; Supriadi, Al Aufa, Nurfikri, & Koire, 2024). One of the key strategies is to reduce the dependency of Indonesians on seeking medical tourism abroad (Jamin, Rahmafitria, & Nurazizah, 2020). This potential is supported by the availability of internationally accredited hospitals, competitive medical technologies, and a diverse range of tourist attractions, such as halal tourism, cultural tourism, green tourism, culinary tourism, and marine tourism. Efforts to integrate healthcare services into the tourism sector have long been a focus of the Indonesian government (Ratnasari et al., 2022).

Moreover, the implementation of the medical wellness concept in Indonesia offers unique competitive advantages compared to other countries, especially due to its rich cultural and traditional health practices. For instance, in Bali, traditional healing methods such as herbal medicine (jamu), massage therapies, and the ritual of melukat can be packaged as part of an authentic wellness experience. These not only promote physical and mental health for tourists but also introduce local culture as an attractive element that strengthens Indonesia's tourism image.

Bali, as Indonesia's largest tourist destination, holds a strategic position in developing health tourism, particularly through the adoption of new tourism concepts based on healthcare. The global pandemic has heightened public awareness

of the importance of health, presenting a significant opportunity for Bali to leverage this momentum to rebuild its tourism sector with a health-oriented focus. This requires close collaboration among tourism stakeholders to create services that support both medical and wellness tourism.

The trend of wellness tourism or medical wellness has grown significantly in recent years, becoming a vital market segment in various countries. Unlike medical tourism, which focuses solely on medical treatments, wellness tourism caters to individuals who are already healthy but wish to enhance their quality of life through physical fitness, spiritual balance, relaxation, and unique cultural experiences. However, this concept is still relatively new in Indonesia and is often misunderstood or used interchangeably with medical tourism (Lucky Kurniawan, 2018).

The wellness tourism market consists of two main categories: primary wellness tourists and secondary wellness tourists (Lee & Kim, 2023). Primary wellness tourists are primarily motivated by physical and spiritual well-being as their main reason for travel. Meanwhile, secondary wellness tourists aim to maintain a healthy lifestyle as part of a broader travel experience. Understanding the motivations of these tourists is essential for developing effective marketing strategies to support wellness tourism in Indonesia.

3.2 Potential for Developing Balinese Traditional Medicine Melukat as Health Tourism Based on Medical Wellness

Traditional medicine has its own unique appeal in the health tourism industry (Widarini, Wijaya, & IN, 2022) because it integrates health benefits with local cultural values. One of the regions that offers traditional medicine rooted in cultural and religious values is Bali. Balinese Traditional Medicine refers to the traditions, experiences, and ancestral skills of the Balinese people, whether undocumented or recorded in lontar *usada* manuscripts, or taught through education and training, and practiced according to the norms prevailing in Balinese society (Arsana et al., 2020).

One of Bali's unique traditional healing practices is *melukat*. *Melukat* is a purification ritual rooted in Balinese Hindu traditions (Ekasani, Ni Made Ayu Natih Widhiarini, & Agung Rizky Fedora Febrawan, 2024; Kamvysselis, 2023; Octaviyani, Antara, & Suryawardani, 2023). This ritual involves bathing or immersing oneself in sacred water, believed to have the ability to cleanse both the spiritual and physical aspects of a person. The water used in the *melukat* ritual is typically sourced from sacred springs, rivers, or the sea. Before performing the *melukat* ritual, a religious ceremony is usually held at a temple as part of the spiritual preparation. Individuals are then guided to the sacred water source to carry out the main ritual. During the ritual, priests or religious leaders recite special chants to enhance the spiritual cleansing effect (Mekarini, 2020).

This process is carried out following specific procedures under the supervision of local religious leaders. After the ritual is completed, a closing ceremony is often held at the temple as the final step in the overall spiritual process. *Melukat* is believed to offer not only physical but also spiritual benefits. Those who undergo this ritual often aim to cleanse themselves from sins, eliminate negative energies, and receive blessings and protection. Furthermore, Harianja, Antika, & Dewi (2024) revealed that the *melukat* ritual has significant therapeutic potential in mental health management. This aligns with Dew & Liyanagunawardena's (2023) statement that traditional medicine plays an important role in therapeutic systems worldwide. Because of its benefits, the *melukat* tradition has now become an interfaith tourism trend in Bali (Sari, Wisuda, & Yulianti, 2022). This development makes *melukat* a promising tradition for health tourism based on medical wellness.

Moreover, in May 2024, the *melukat* ritual was integrated as a supporting event in the 10th World Water Forum (WWF) held in Bali. In this context, *melukat* was introduced as part of the local tradition that highlights harmony between humans and nature. The Provincial Secretary of Bali, Dewa Made Indra, emphasized that the implementation of the *melukat* ritual for WWF delegates was not an attempt to commercialize Bali's religious rituals. Instead, this ritual was offered as an optional addition and was not part of the official WWF agenda (Putri, 2024).

Additionally, the economic potential generated from the development of *melukat* as part of health tourism based on medical wellness is also highly significant (Gorda, Sudharma, & Sutrisni, 2023). By strengthening the promotion and integration of this ritual into health tourism packages, Bali can attract a premium market segment of tourists seeking culturally-based health experiences. Besides providing direct economic impacts, such as increased tourism revenue, this development can also empower local communities by involving them in supporting activities such as providing *tirta* (holy water), traditional health products, and herbal-based spa services. Thus, the *melukat* tradition becomes increasingly solidified as a form of traditional medicine with the potential to be developed into health tourism based on medical wellness.

Table 1. The Potential of the Melukat Ritual for Health Tourism

Aspect	Explanation
Cultural attraction	The Melukat tradition offers unique local Balinese cultural values.
Physical and mental health benefits	This ritual has therapeutic potential for managing mental health and well-being.
Interfaith tourism trend	Melukat has become a tourism trend involving people from various religious backgrounds.
Economic potential	Provides direct economic benefits through the tourism sector and empowers local communities.

International
promotion
opportunities

Introduced in major events such as the 10th World Water
Forum in Bali.

To support the development of *melukat* as part of medical wellness tourism, systematic and professional management is required. Collaboration among stakeholders, including traditional communities, local governments, and tourism industry players, is essential to ensure that the ritual retains its cultural authenticity while meeting international standards relevant to health tourism. Additionally, training for tour guides and local workers on the importance of preserving the authenticity of the ritual while delivering high-quality services will be a key element in promoting Bali as a leading destination for medical wellness.

4. Conclusion

The development of health tourism in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, presents significant potential through the integration of traditional medicine and wellness practices into tourism packages. The *melukat* ritual exemplifies this integration, combining physical, mental, and spiritual health benefits with the rich cultural heritage of Bali. As a purification ritual rooted in Balinese Hindu traditions, *melukat* has gained recognition not only for its therapeutic effects on mental well-being but also as a unique interfaith tourism trend. By promoting this ritual within the framework of medical wellness tourism, Bali can leverage its cultural assets to attract a premium segment of health-conscious tourists while contributing to the preservation of local traditions. Additionally, events like the 10th World Water Forum have showcased the *melukat* ritual on an international platform, enhancing its appeal as a culturally and spiritually enriching experience.

To optimize the development of *melukat*-based medical wellness tourism, collaboration among stakeholders is essential. Traditional leaders, local governments, and tourism operators should work together to ensure that the cultural authenticity of the ritual is preserved while meeting the standards expected by international tourists. Training programs for local communities and tourism workers should focus on balancing cultural preservation with high-quality service delivery. Furthermore, strategic marketing efforts should emphasize the unique cultural and health benefits of *melukat* to appeal to global wellness tourism markets. Investment in infrastructure, such as accessible sacred water sites and supporting facilities, will also enhance the overall tourist experience, solidifying Bali's position as a premier destination for medical wellness tourism.

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