

# SUSTAINABLE RELIGIOUS TOURISM: IS THE BUDDHIST APPROACH ABLE TO MAKE IT HAPPEN?

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## ABSTRACT

*Temples and places related to religion have become one of the tourist attractions to visit a country. On the other hand, it also threatens the sustainability of this tourist destination. Buddhist tourist destinations such as Borobudur Temple have unique characteristics, where everyone can visit as an ordinary tourist destination. This study uses a mixed method research approach. This significant Buddhist heritage is seen as one of the objects of respect (Pujaniya Vatthu-Uddesikacetiya) for Buddhists. Re-positioning Borobudur Temple as a religious tourist destination is very helpful to maintain its sustainability. The results of this study highlight the construction of a new tourism concept with the Buddhist approach. This concept harmonizes the needs of tourists for serenity, spirituality, and sustainability.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Holy places such as temples, stupas, churches and other places related to religion are now tourist destinations that attract tourists. Tourist destinations related to religion are usually historical relics that are thousands of years old. Of course, this tourist destination is very vulnerable if not treated properly. Mostly, the holy sites of religion are tourist destinations that are open to tourists. Buddhist

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sites such as Bodhgaya, Lumbini, Boudhanath, and others, are now tourist destinations that are open to all tourists. However, there are also sacred sites that can only be visited by tourists from certain religions such as the Kaaba in Mecca.

Indonesia has an extraordinary religious site, Borobudur Temple. The temple, which is recorded as the largest Buddhist temple in the World, is currently managed like a historical heritage destination. The number of visitors is certainly one of the target tourist destinations. Therefore, the manager only focuses activities on ways to increase visitors to Borobudur Temple. The number of tourists, especially foreign tourists, is assumed directly proportional to the country's foreign exchange earnings. On the side of the number of tourists who exceed the boundary will be able to threaten the sustainability of this tourist destination. The concept of mass tourism management like that is unfortunately still maintained today.

There has been a lot of research on sustainable tourism that addresses various aspects of tourism (Gupta, 1999, Shunnaq et al., 2008, Lim and Cooper, 2009, Font et al., 2016). The study of sustainable tourism for religious tourism destinations is still very limited. This study aims to provide an alternative management of Buddhist religious sites by considering the sustainability of the site.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable tourism is one of the alternatives offered, so the tourism sector runs by taking into account the sustainability of tourist destinations. Sustainable tourism is tourism that takes into account the impact of various aspects such as the economy, social and environment now and in the future, which also pay attention to the interests of stakeholders such as visitors, industry, and host communities (UNEP and WTO, 2005). United Nation Environment Programme and World Tourist Organization set up a measurable framework by referring to the concept. Tourism is expected to be an activity that must be able to: (1) optimizing environmental resources by taking into account the preservation of nature and biodiversity; (2) maintaining and respecting the socio-cultural aspects of the host community including contributing to preserving cultural heritage, traditional values,

and contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance; and (3) ensure that economic activities can take place in the long term and provide benefits to stakeholders fairly (UNEP and WTO, 2005).

Each type of tourist destination has a different and unique way and approach to preserve it. Religious sites that are religious tourist destinations are grouped into cultural tourism categories (Swarbrooke, 1999). However, Swarbrooke (1999) explained that cultural tourism itself has many forms. This shows that the efforts to preserve it will also be very diverse.

### 3. METHOD

This research was conducted using a mixed approach between quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative approach is used to find out how respondents perceive items from spirituality of tourist destinations. The items of the statement for the Spirituality of tourist destinations that will be tested, taken from our previous research (Hermawan et al., 2016). The qualitative approach is done by interviewing several tourists as key informants with in-depth interviewing techniques. The results of in-depth interviews will be used as a basis in analyzing the findings in this study.

Respondents in this study were domestic tourists who had visited Borobudur Temple between July 2017 and June 2018. Questionnaires were distributed to 30 respondents selected by purposive sampling with a response rate of 80.33%. Processing data in this study using Winstep version 3.73.

### 4. RESULT

The first step taken in this study was to explore respondents' perceptions of Borobudur Temple. This perception will be expressed by the level of respondents' agreement on the item being asked. Tourist perception about the spirituality of Borobudur Temple was measured using a questionnaire. Eight items measure spirituality of tourist destinations, namely: peacefulness, spiritual comfort, holy atmosphere, inner happiness, escape from the "civilized" world, close to God/religious figure, respect to God/religious figure, and religious fulfillment.

### Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire is proven first. The average logit of each item in the questionnaire about spirituality of tourist destinations is 0.00 with a standard deviation of 0.77. All items are between -1.54 logit to 1.54 logit with a standard error of 0.33 and raw variance explain by measure of 43.6%. These results indicate that all goods can be used to measure the spirituality of tourist destinations with a good level of precision.

The average logit person is 1.6 with a standard deviation of 1.15 logit. The distribution of people is between - 0.7 logit to 3.9 logit with a standard error of 0.58. These results indicate that no respondent gave an extreme assessment (outlier).

Cronbach Alpha (KR-20) of 0.7 with person reliability of 0.68 and reliability items of 0.80. These results indicate the measurement items for spirituality of tourist destinations are measuring instruments that have high reliability. The results also showed that respondents were quite consistent in giving responses.

### Tourist Perception of the Spirituality of Borobudur Temple Tourism Destinations

The item-person map reflects responses to items for spirituality of tourist destinations. Respondents' responses were spread among those who easily agreed, with those who had difficulty agreeing. From the Person-Item Map distribution, it can be seen that the response distribution of respondents is balanced.

Based on item-person maps, spirituality of tourist destinations for Borobudur Temple can be sorted as follows: holy atmosphere, peacefulness, respect to God/religious figure, inner happiness, escape from the "civilized" world, religious fulfillment, spiritual comfort, and close to God/religious figure. The results of the mapping show that the most easily felt by visitors to Borobudur Temple is a holy atmosphere and peacefulness. Respondents agreed that Borobudur Temple has spiritual value.

The sacredness of the Borobudur Temple is indeed undeniable. The temple, which is the largest royal mandala, was once used to carry out Buddhist worship. That is the sacred source that tourists feel when they are there. The sacredness of the temple is sometimes



## Preservation of Borobudur Temple

In-depth interviews produced three main themes that could be done as an effort to preserve Borobudur Temple. Three themes of conservation efforts are spirituality, education, and governance. In terms of spiritual themes, Borobudur Temple is one of the pilgrimage sites for Buddhists. As a place of pilgrimage, Borobudur Temple needs to be preserved and kept sacred.

Efforts to maintain the sanctity of Borobudur Temple had been offered by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia through the Coordinating Minister for the Marine Affair Rizal Ramli (Junida, 2015, Riyandi, 2015). Until now, the offer did not seem to have received a good response from Buddhists in Indonesia due to various obstacles. Rizal Ramli at that time offered to use the Borobudur Temple not only as a tourist destination but also as a place of worship for Buddhists. Even Rizal Ramli wants the Borobudur Temple to become its Mecca for Buddhists (Junida, 2015, Riyandi, 2015). Central Java Governor Ganjar Pranowo even admitted that he was very serious in encouraging the use of Borobudur Temple as the center of Buddhist religious activities (Ais, 2014, Jawa Tengah, 2014, Wibisono, 2015, Fitriana, 2015).

Borobudur Temple has been used for National Vesak puja since 1953. The activity should be used as a benchmark that the Borobudur Temple is a place of worship and center of Buddhist activities. Conservation and management efforts have so far remained as cultural heritage objects, and have not experienced significant changes. Permission to use Buddhist activities is easier and increases in number, very encouraging.

Rizal Ramli and Ganjar Pranowo's proposal also gives wider freedom for Buddhists to worship at Borobudur Temple, while preserving Buddhist temple that are more than 1,000 years old. Its use as a place of worship will instantly change the image of a tourist destination. The positioning of the Borobudur Temple will change as a tourist place and place of Buddhism. Thus, tourists who visit will be more adaptable like in a place of worship.

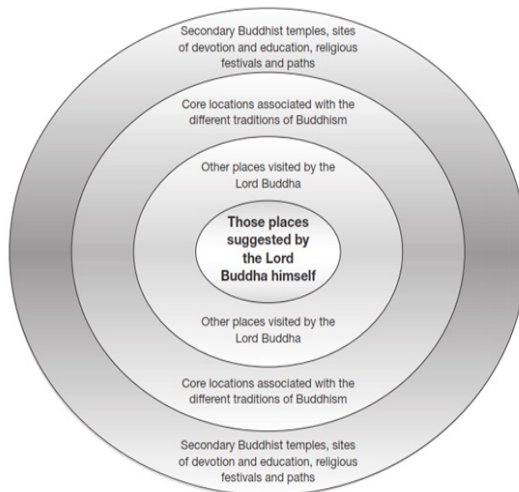


Figure 2. *Spiritual Tourist Destination Hierarchy in Buddhism.*  
Source: Hall (2006)

Regarding the rules when in places of worship, Buddhists have their own characteristics and rules. Buddha has a basis for respecting objects that deserve respect. This is stated in the Maṅgala Sutta (Sn. 261) *pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*. The object of respect in Buddhism can be grouped into two, namely respect for people and objects. Temple and stupa is an honorable thing because it can be a symbol of Buddha itself. Respect for objects that are worthy of respect is carried out by means of *añjali*, *namakkāra*, *padakkhiṇa* and several other rituals such as meditation, reading *parittas*, *sutras*, *sadhana*, and recite *mantra*.

The debate about the sanctity of a place that can be considered as a Buddhist spiritual destination continues to this day. Most have argued that the only Buddhist spiritual destinations listed in *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*. There are four (4) where it can be visited at least once in life, that is the place where the Tathagata was born, where Tathagata attained enlightenment, in which the first Tathagata turning the wheel of *dharma*, and the Tathagata realizes *Mahāparinirbbana*. However, *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* not designate where it is specifically and in detail. In the process, other destinations that have *sarira* of Buddha-*dhatu* can be regarded as a Buddhist spiritual destination.



Hall (2006) creates a hierarchy of spiritual tourism destinations associated with Buddhism. Hierarchy provides an overview of some of the Buddhist tourist destination today, related to the potential tourist visits and/or pilgrims. Different elements in the hierarchy have significance and will be relatively different in different Buddhist traditions (Hall, 2006). Referring to the hierarchy, Borobudur Temple can be included as one of the Buddhist spiritual destinations.

Borobudur Temple has been declared as one of the spiritual tourist destinations for Buddhists. This declaration was published by online media from outside Indonesia (Wisman, 2017, Bernama, 2017, Zhang, 2017). The Victoria and Albert Museum (2016) even included the Borobudur Temple into the criteria of a Buddhist pilgrimage place. This great opportunity should be used to preserve Borobudur.

However, concerns about the sustainability and existence of Borobudur Temple is still going on. This concern arises because the knowledge of some tourists is still very limited regarding Borobudur Temple. Information that can educate tourists directly and easily accessible is needed. This information can be provided by installing a Quick Response (QR) Code in several places that are easily accessible to tourists. The information presented in the QR Code can be started from the historical development of Borobudur, meaning expressed and implied by sculptures, reliefs, or symbols, to guide behavior in the temple area.

As a spiritual tourist destination, Borobudur Temple can also be an educational tourist destination that provides knowledge for its visitors. A study conducted by Choe, Blazey and Mitas (2013) showed that people who visit Buddhist places will get the opportunity to learn about various cultures and lifestyles of Buddhism. Tourists can immediately see various things about Buddhism to the procedures of worship, while at Borobudur Temple. Especially for worship, now only be seen when there is a celebration of Buddha there. Some Buddhist celebrations are currently on the annual agenda at Borobudur Temple such as Vesak Nasional, Asadha Puja and Kagyud Monlan Indonesia.

The paradigm shift from the old to the new tourism must be able to reposition the temple's governance. Borobudur temple is



supposed to be managed as a Buddhist spiritual destination, not just a tourist park. The old tourism paradigm only emphasizes the number of tourist visits (mass tourism). Mass tourism exploring tourism resources and sometimes ignoring the sustainability of tourist destinations. The paradigm of the new tourism, offer quality tourism based serenity, spirituality, and sustainability in line with the Buddhist concept. The old tourism paradigm gives tourists the beauty of the temple, the beauty of the reliefs, the sunrise panorama, and other things related to physical conditions. The new tourism paradigm will give travelers more personal and special sensations such as the experience of inner happiness. Tourists will be more in tune with nature and help maintain the sustainability of tourist destinations. It is not limited to Buddhist practitioners, but for tourists in general.

Spiritual and religious tourism destinations have characteristics that are different from other tourist destinations. Spiritual tourism has a broader meaning of pilgrimage tourism, religious tourism or other religious activities. It is related to enhance exchange and socio-economic development. The activities of spiritual tourism have contributed to heritage tourism sustainability such as to protect religion and promote beautiful places (Azahari, 2015).

The consequences of repositioning the image of tourist destinations are indeed not easy, especially those related to governance. Managing temples that are a heritage of the past requires special expertise. However, as a religious site, the temple should be treated as a religious object as well. The Indonesian government must involve Buddhist organizations including monks to participate in the management of Borobudur. Participation is not only limited to religious activities or seminars conducted in the temple area, but more than that.

To involve the Buddhist community in managing cultural heritage such as the Borobudur Temple, it may take a long process. However, the Buddhist community can begin for example by arranging the code of conduct while in the Borobudur Temple. The Buddhist community can also be involved as a source of information related to the express and implied meaning of the Borobudur Temple.

## 5. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study only focuses on Borobudur temple in Indonesia. The majority of people in Indonesia who are not Buddhists are unique characteristics of this research. Results of this research may be in line with other Buddhist sites with similar characteristics. Further studies should be conducted at other locations that have different characteristics with different methods.

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