

HARNESSING NATURE'S POTENTIAL: BRANDING PENGLIPURAN BAMBOO FOREST AS AN ECOTOURISM DESTINATION IN BALI

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ABSTRACT

The Penglipuran Traditional Village in Bali has a bamboo forest of approximately 45 hectares that is managed through the customary system (awig-awig), serving as a source of economic, ecological, and spiritual value for the community. This study aims to analyze the utilization of the natural power of the bamboo forest as an agent of change while shaping a new branding of ecological tourism in Bali. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with primary data collected through observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews, as well as secondary data from literature, articles, and relevant journals. The results show that the management of the bamboo forest through local wisdom creates a unique tourism identity, integrating ecological, socio-cultural, and economic aspects, while strengthening the community's role as the main actor in environmental preservation. The bamboo forest becomes an educational tourism attraction through activities such as trekking, bamboo handicraft workshops, and participation in traditional ceremonies, while also maintaining ecosystem balance, disaster mitigation, and groundwater conservation. This new branding emphasizes authenticity and sustainability, making Penglipuran a model of ecological tourism capable of attracting both domestic and international tourists. In conclusion, the new branding of Penglipuran Bamboo Forest emphasizes the integration of nature conservation, cultural preservation, environmental education, and local economic empowerment through the utilization of bamboo in traditions, crafts, creative industries, and a bamboo laboratory, thereby positioning Penglipuran as a sustainable ecotourism destination that is authentic, educational, and globally valuable.

Keywords: *Bamboo Forest, Tourism Branding, Ecotourism, Local Wisdom, Sustainability*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia possesses extraordinary cultural diversity and biodiversity that serve as strategic assets for tourism development. These resources enable tourism to function not only as an economic driver but also as a medium for preserving local identity and community-based development. Bali, as one of Indonesia's leading international tourism destinations, exemplifies the integration of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and local wisdom rooted in Hindu philosophy. This harmonious relationship between nature and culture has positioned Bali as a world-class destination while shaping its global tourism branding.

Despite its economic contributions, the rapid growth of tourism in Bali has generated significant environmental and socio-cultural challenges. The expansion of tourism infrastructure has intensified pressure on natural resources, degraded ecosystems, and marginalized local communities (Dipayana & Sunarta, 2015). Empirical evidence shows a substantial increase in freshwater demand driven by tourism, leading to competition between tourism facilities and community needs (Yamamoto et al., 2021). These dynamics illustrate how mass tourism often prioritizes economic gains while neglecting ecological sustainability.

In addition to environmental impacts, mass tourism has contributed to the erosion of cultural values and customary institutions. Cultural commodification has transformed traditions and rituals into market-oriented performances, weakening their sacred meanings and social functions (Chong, 2019). Furthermore, external pressures from investors and tourism interests have reduced community control over space, decision-making, and cultural practices, posing serious threats to customary law communities and local wisdom in Bali (Poetra & Nurjaya, 2024). These conditions underscore the urgency of tourism models that prioritize cultural sensitivity and community empowerment.

In response to these challenges, sustainable tourism has emerged as an alternative paradigm that aligns tourism development with social systems, cultural values, and local wisdom. This approach emphasizes community participation and environmental conservation as core elements of tourism branding (Ichsan, 2014). One prominent example is Penglipuran Traditional Village in Bangli Regency, which represents a model of ecological and cultural preservation through customary governance and strong socio-cultural resilience (Nugroho, 2013).

Penglipuran Village is characterized by its traditional spatial organization and the management of a bamboo forest covering approximately 45 hectares, regulated through *awig-awig*, a customary legal system rooted in collective consensus and the principle of harmony among humans, nature, and God (Kusuma, 2012; Luqiana, 2024). Bamboo is positioned as an ecological, economic, and spiritual asset, with its utilization strictly regulated to prevent overexploitation (Muliawan, 2023). This management system reflects the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* and demonstrates how local wisdom can sustain both environmental balance and community livelihoods.

The branding of Penglipuran's bamboo forest illustrates how ecological conservation and socio-cultural values can be integrated into a sustainable tourism model. Consistent with previous studies, this approach highlights the importance of local knowledge, collective awareness, and community participation in shaping environmentally friendly tourism branding (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2019; Firdaus et al., 2019; Tajeddini et al., 2017). Supported by global insights on bamboo-based sustainability and ecotourism (Cairo et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Bredenoord, 2024; Lee, 2021; Riswan et al., 2022), Penglipuran Village demonstrates how bamboo forest management can function as an agent of change, offering a distinctive and sustainable tourism identity that responds to the growing demand for balance between culture, nature, and development.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted in Penglipuran Tourism Village, Bangli Regency, Bali Province. The selection of this location was based on the characteristics of its preserved bamboo forest, its role in the socio-economic life of the community, and its potential as an icon for ecological tourism branding. The study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, in which the researcher analyzed documents, realities, and field facts. To collect data, the researcher utilized primary data obtained from observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews. Secondary data were gathered from books, articles, scientific journals, and other literature, which served as references and supporting materials for the interpretation and analysis of research findings. The main instrument used was interviews, enabling the collection of in-depth information from purposively selected research subjects to ensure the relevance of data with the research topic. The study was conducted from June to August 2025. The informants

included I Ketut Nuryada (Secretary of Penglipuran Traditional Village), Agus (Head of Penglipuran Traditional Village Community), I Wayan Sumiarsa (Penglipuran Village Manager), and Wayan (Traditional Leader of Penglipuran Traditional Village). Data analysis was carried out using the Miles & Huberman model, which involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was conducted by filtering information relevant to the research focus. Data display was presented in the form of narratives, tables, and diagrams to facilitate the understanding of emerging patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn inductively by linking field findings with theories of branding and ecological tourism.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Penglipuran Traditional Village is located in Kubu Sub-district, Bangli District, Bangli Regency, with a total area of approximately 112 hectares. Situated at an altitude of 700 meters above sea level, it lies along the Kintamani tourism route. Penglipuran Village was officially designated as a Tourism Village through Regent Decree No. 115 on April 29, 1993. The village has several main attractions, including its spatial layout based on the Tri Mandala concept, the existence of a bamboo forest, religious rituals, traditional cuisine, cultural festivals, and a hero monument. Of these six attractions, five fall under the category of cultural tourism, while the bamboo forest serves as a key natural tourism attraction.

“Currently, Penglipuran Traditional Village has gained international recognition, but it still faces challenges in terms of human resources to accommodate tourists from diverse backgrounds. The community has agreed that our village can enhance its economic value, but the development has not yet been maximized. This led to the idea of diversifying economic opportunities through various tourism activities, such as village trekking, cycling tours through the bamboo forest, and others. These initiatives are expected to foster community creativity, thereby contributing to the welfare of tourism actors and the surrounding residents of Penglipuran Village.” (I Wayan Sumiarsa, Penglipuran Village Manager, interview, September 21, 2025)

In managing Penglipuran Traditional Village, one of the existing challenges relates to the human resource capacity in tourism. There remains a limited and incomplete understanding of how to deal with the dynamics of heterogeneous visitors. Efforts to develop the village's economic potential are continuously being pursued to ensure that local residents benefit optimally. In its development, Penglipuran Traditional Village offers a wide range of tourism activities, including village trekking, cycling to the bamboo forest and other attractions, photography tourism with traditional Balinese attire, religious tourism, historical tourism, shopping tourism, traditional culinary experiences, dance and music performances in the village *wantilan*, agro-tourism, camping activities, and participation in cultural festivals (Semara et al., 2021).

One of the natural strengths of Penglipuran Traditional Village is its bamboo forest, which is considered capable of creating an agent of change for the overall social structure of the village (Mahagangga et al., 2016). In daily practice, the local community of Penglipuran implements bamboo forest conservation through six effective strategies: (1) promoting the preservation of the bamboo forest ecosystem through commitments embedded in customary law, (2) empowering traditional institutions (*lembaga adat*) as the legitimate authority to regulate spatial management based on bamboo forests, (3) engaging the surrounding community through environmental conservation education, (4) designating the bamboo forest as a protected forest,

(5) establishing bamboo-based yards and architectural designs as a form of support for local values, and (6) imposing sanctions on community members who violate the provisions of customary law (Atmaja, 2015).

“We see tourism and tourists both as opportunities and challenges, and therefore they must be managed properly. Many tourists come to the bamboo forest, take photos, but do not purchase anything. This means that the income of local people does not increase. There are also issues concerning the carrying capacity of the bamboo forest in accommodating thousands of visitors. We realize that eco-friendly tourism is important, but natural resources must be developed and supported by effective tourism management in order to enhance the economic value of the community. Clearly, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects must be integrated within Penglipuran Traditional Village as a future tourism destination.” (I Wayan Sumiarsa, Manager of Penglipuran Traditional Village, interview, September 21, 2025).

The main attraction of Penglipuran Traditional Village is the bamboo forest, which can be viewed from ecological, socio-cultural, and economic perspectives. Through its cultural authenticity and ecological architecture, Penglipuran Traditional Village has positioned the bamboo forest as an ecological system that has evolved into a distinctive identity and a new branding for ecological tourism in Bali. The bamboo forest spans 45 hectares and consists of 15 species of bamboo (Sudiarta & Nurjaya, 2015), with the most dominant being local species such as *bambu petung* (*Dendrocalamus asper*), *bambu tali* (*Gigantochloa apus*), and *bambu tabah*. These species form a natural landscape that supports the development of modern tourism destinations while remaining strongly connected to nature (Putra, 2025).

“The bamboo forest has existed since the establishment of the village, and we regard it from an ecological perspective as a crucial water catchment area. Our ancestors had already agreed that the bamboo forest must serve as a conservation site, and bamboo cutting is strictly regulated by customary law. At present, we are promoting the bamboo forest as a site for educational, socio-cultural, and ecological tourism, which also generates economic impact. There must be cultural inheritance concerning the bamboo forest so that future generations in Bali and beyond will continue to recognize its importance. We consistently promote and disseminate the ecological potential and fundamental architectural concepts of the bamboo forest in Penglipuran Traditional Village. This is tourism, but its authenticity must always be preserved.” (I Wayan Sumiarsa, Manager of Penglipuran Traditional Village, interview, September 21, 2025).

Ecologically, bamboo represents a natural solution to climate change and the global environmental crisis. Bamboo forests managed under conservation principles can serve as natural fortresses that protect communities from natural disasters. The Penglipuran Bamboo Forest in Bali, as a symbol of cultural sustainability, highlights the ecological strength of bamboo in supporting the local community's socio-cultural system. Beyond its ecological dimension, the bamboo forest also carries philosophical values related to social and cultural life.

“The people of Penglipuran Village actually understand and always support the concept of Tri Hita Karana. In customary practices, this manifests through the sustainable use of bamboo: maintaining, replenishing, and utilizing what exists in the bamboo forest as needed. For example, bamboo is commonly used for religious and ceremonial purposes.” (I

Ketut Nuryada, Secretary of Penglipuran Traditional Village, interview, September 21, 2025).

From the social and cultural perspective, bamboo has long been an integral part of Balinese life within the framework of *Tri Hita Karana*. At present, bamboo is utilized for various purposes, particularly in religious and traditional ceremonies, symbolizing the harmonious relationship between humans, God, and nature (Putra et al., 2025). Local communities use bamboo in numerous rituals, including the *Panca Yadnya* (Dewa Yadnya, Pitra Yadnya, Rsi Yadnya, Manusa Yadnya, and Bhuta Yadnya), which sometimes require specific types of bamboo (Ekayanti, 2016).

“In fact, we are concerned that many tourists come without understanding the profound cultural values of our village. For instance, some show little regard for our cultural environment. Therefore, we must constantly remind and firmly emphasize the importance of Tri Hita Karana to all parties. This is the ideology we uphold to maintain balance among humans, God, and nature. In practice, this philosophy is also reflected in bamboo kitchen architecture, which is warm, environmentally friendly, and aligned with the concept of balance.” (Agus, Head of Community of Penglipuran Traditional Village, interview, September 20, 2025).

The community of Penglipuran Traditional Village has also developed bamboo as a medium for socio-culturally based tourism since 1995 and was awarded the *Kalpataru* environmental prize. Although this tourism activity carries economic value, the community remains concerned about the potential loss of their social and cultural environment. Therefore, the managers of Penglipuran Traditional Village consistently emphasize the importance of preserving local wisdom, particularly the philosophical understanding of bamboo as part of ancestral teachings embedded in the *Tri Hita Karana* concept. This philosophy supports the pursuit of balance in achieving harmony and well-being by integrating divine values (*parahyangan*), human values (*pawongan*), and environmental values (*palemahan*) (Sutawan, 2005).

“In tourism activities that involve the contribution of the traditional village, economic value is indeed important. However, we must not pursue economic gains at the expense of local wisdom in Penglipuran. Our village must remain a site of cultural preservation. Therefore, there must be a regeneration of cultural knowledge, particularly regarding the philosophical concept of bamboo, passed on to the younger generation and shared with tourists visiting our village. We regard the bamboo forest, bamboo houses, and the sacredness of bamboo as a social system that is both educational and protective against foreign cultures that often have a destructive tendency.” (Wayan, Kelian Adat of Penglipuran Traditional Village, interview, September 21, 2025).

The development of ecotourism based on local culture is thus an appropriate strategy to create a balance between economic benefits and socio-cultural sustainability. In the context of Penglipuran's bamboo forest, the economic aspect is inseparable from the religious and social values of the local community. Safeguarding local wisdom is essential to protect Balinese cultural identity amid the increasing economic demands of society. At the same time, tourism development also contributes to cultural preservation, since it has an educational function. Through direct engagement in tourism activities, visitors are able to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for Balinese traditions and local wisdom (Windia & Dewi, 2007; Martha et al., 2024).

The natural strength of the bamboo forest as an agent of ecological, socio-cultural, and economic transformation can serve as the branding of Penglipuran Traditional Village as a leading ecotourism destination in Bali. In general, branding is a process of introducing an identity, which may take the form of a name, logo, slogan, or specific imagery representing a company or a region, including a tourism destination. In the tourism sector, branding functions as both a symbol and a key strategy to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing. Through branding, a destination is introduced to a wider public, fostering tourist interest and encouraging visits. Typically, tourism branding is realized through compelling phrases combined with specific logos or visual designs, which are then disseminated via official websites and digital platforms such as social media. The presence of branding in digital spaces enables both domestic and international tourists to recognize the potential of a destination while simultaneously promoting a positive image of the region. Branding thus serves as an effective promotional tool, linking destinations with prospective visitors (Leonita et al., 2022).

Isdarmanto (2020) describes branding as an image management strategy that involves deliberate changes in economic, social, cultural, and governance aspects. Branding is not merely about outward appearances but should also reflect the core values and fundamental character of a region. Effective branding must present the holistic identity of an area to ensure that it is easily recognizable and well-received by the public. This view aligns with Julia Winfield-Pfefferkorn's (2005) argument that the right branding technique will make a region more admired and loved by tourists. In this context, the application of digital tourism has become a primary necessity, as it allows tourism information to be delivered quickly and extensively.

The creation of a new branding identity for Penglipuran's Bamboo Forest as a model of ecotourism represents a sustainable tourism development strategy that integrates natural, cultural, and local economic strengths. This branding concept functions as a medium to communicate Penglipuran's uniqueness as a destination that combines nature conservation with educational and sustainable tourism experiences. The bamboo forest in Penglipuran Traditional Village, Bangli, Bali, has the potential to become a visual asset packaged within an ecotourism concept through educational tours, bamboo handicraft workshops, and participatory conservation activities.

The new branding of Penglipuran Bamboo Forest essentially integrates local cultural values and customary systems, where the use of bamboo in traditional ceremonies and handicrafts becomes part of the tourism narrative that enriches the visitor experience and preserves local wisdom. From an economic perspective, the development of bamboo-based derivative products and local enterprises strengthens the role of the community as the primary actor in tourism. By prioritizing environmental education, ecosystem sustainability, and the authenticity of cultural values, the bamboo forest branding projects the image of Penglipuran as an ecotourism destination that harmonizes nature conservation with economic empowerment without causing environmental degradation. Economically, bamboo also provides high added value, as its leaves can be used as compost fertilizer to support community-based agriculture and plantations (Ardiyanto & Nadiroh, 2019).

At present, the management of Penglipuran Traditional Village is also developing creative industries through initiatives such as a bamboo café and a forest market located within the bamboo forest. The bamboo café serves as an educational medium for eco-friendly uses of bamboo, where the café's structure is built entirely from bamboo and dining utensils, including straws, are also bamboo-based. Meanwhile, the forest market acts as an educational space that

fosters both economic and cultural interactions within the bamboo forest. Its uniqueness lies in the atmosphere created, where visitors walk along pathways within the bamboo groves while engaging in cultural and economic exchanges. These two forms of creative tourism strengthen the new branding of Penglipuran Traditional Village as a creative economy hub that integrates environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects into a holistic and sustainable rural tourism development model (Junaid et al., 2022).

This study also recommends positioning the bamboo forest in Penglipuran Traditional Village as a bamboo laboratory. Given bamboo's immense potential in ecological tourism, the bamboo laboratory would shape visitors' knowledge about the role of bamboo in environmental protection. Branding narratives such as natural carbon absorption, climate resilience, and disaster mitigation would heighten tourist curiosity toward a future model of independent and sustainable tourism. The bamboo laboratory is envisioned as a platform for innovation and the cultivation of a strong identity centered on research, education, and community empowerment—particularly the utilization of bamboo as an ecological asset in environmental conservation.

This new branding emphasizes that tourism development does not necessarily entail environmental destruction; rather, it can harness the strength of nature as an agent of transformation. The concept is also highly relevant in the global context, where ecotourism is increasingly favored by environmentally conscious tourists seeking authentic and responsible experiences. By combining nature conservation, cultural preservation, environmental education, and local economic empowerment, this approach demonstrates how natural resources can serve as powerful agents of change—creating a tourism destination that is sustainable, educational, and beneficial for both local communities and visitors.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The bamboo forest in Penglipuran Traditional Village, Bangli Regency, Bali, is a tangible example of how the power of nature can be utilized as an agent of change in sustainable tourism development. The existence of the bamboo forest not only functions as a support for the local ecosystem but also serves as the basis for creating a new branding strategy that highlights ecological, cultural, and economic values. Through management based on *awig-awig* or customary regulations, the Penglipuran community has been able to preserve the bamboo forest while simultaneously utilizing its resources for construction, handicrafts, and traditional ceremonies.

The new branding of Penglipuran Bamboo Forest emphasizes the importance of integrating nature conservation, cultural preservation, environmental education, and local economic empowerment in sustainable tourism development. The use of bamboo in religious ceremonies, handicrafts, and creative industries such as the bamboo café and the forest market enriches the tourist experience while safeguarding local wisdom. From an economic perspective, bamboo not only has high added value as a derivative product and a driver of community-based creative enterprises but also contributes to supporting the agricultural and plantation sectors.

In addition, the concept of transforming the bamboo forest into a bamboo laboratory presents opportunities for research, education, and innovation that can strengthen Penglipuran's identity as a model of future ecological tourism. With bamboo's role as a natural carbon sink, a symbol of climate resilience, and a means of disaster mitigation, this branding offers both ecological value and global appeal for environmentally conscious tourists.

Thus, the branding of Penglipuran Bamboo Forest demonstrates that the development of tourism destinations does not have to destroy nature but can instead harness the strength of nature as an agent of change. This holistic approach creates an image of Penglipuran as an ecotourism destination that is educational, authentic, sustainable, and widely beneficial for both the community and visitors.

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