

# Innovativeness in the Development of Special Interest Tourism: The Case of Indonesia Spa Tourism

Yusri Abdillah

Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Administrative Science  
Universitas Brawijaya  
Malang, East Java, Indonesia

yusriabdillah@ub.ac.id

**Abstract - This working paper examines the development of spa tourism industry which the Indonesian government considers it as a part of special interest tourism. More particularly, the paper will take a closer look at the innovation process in such development. At the initial stage of the research, this paper reports involvement among stakeholder in the industry to construct a better regulation for sustainable development of the industry. Data are obtained through a set of focused group discussion encompassing key person from government and private sector. The result shows that there is lack of coordination among parties resulting in the weakness of regulation available to the industry**

**Keywords – Special interest tourism, spa and wellness, innovation, Indonesia**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary tourism development has been moving from mass tourism into a more responsible and quality ones. This notion has been echoed since experts and professionals in tourism view mass tourism as harmful for the sustainability of the development [1]. One of mass tourism characteristics is tourists gather in one destination, particularly in a beach, enjoying natural attraction and atmosphere for recreation and relaxation. The visitation by the huge amount of tourist in only one point of destination is possibly degrade both natural and cultural resources of the destination. This is particularly true when we see at the use of clean water for and the waste from tourism industry. Similarly but from the different perspective, literatures in tourism marketing mention that this sort of development is far from marketing context. Currently, customers are fragmented into a wide range of segments such as geography, economy, demography and even personal interest. This idea indicates that the successful development in tourism is highly driven by the market, and therefore, a market oriented tourist destination should be put first the tourists' interest as the main concern. However, some countries those develop their tourism industry such as Indonesia rely still on the endowment of natural resources to offered for tourists who visit.

The previous development of tourism sector in Indonesia demonstrates a weakness in the tourist market segmentation, which the tourist country source of origin is used as the only

basis for the segmentation. As a result, visitors to the country are less diverse and centralized only on the main tourist destination of Indonesia such as Bali, Jakarta and Batam. This sort of tourism developmental strategy, the country is having a less competitive advantage compared to the geographically smaller neighborhood countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. As a country with rich natural and cultural endowment, the tourism authority of the country just recently tries to work up its tourism competitiveness through the development of special interest tourism. This development project attempts to attract potential tourists those chase unique experiences based on their particular interest as well as distributing "paradises" throughout the country.

On the demand side, there is an increasing number of the concern to the sustainability of not only the economic value of tourism but also the sustainability of its resources. In the age of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of more educated people those aware of the conservation to the natural resources for the next generation prosperity are increasing. As the social welfare in the century is also increasing, the number of educated travelers grow multiply. In turn, this type of travelers require a more responsible sort of tourism. Furthermore, the development of special interest tourism (SIT) addresses to fulfill such requirement. SIT can be appeared at the same type of conventional tourism such as beach tourism and culture tourism, but draws together responsible tourism operator and the tourists with particular interest.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The development of spa industry as part of SIT needs a clear regulation from the tourism authority. The involvement of stakeholder of the industry in the construction of the regulation, therefore, is important to be captured. This involvement process addresses innovativeness since ideas for structuring the regulation is formed by many different interests.

This study aims to portray the innovation process in the development of spa industry in Indonesia, which is considered by the tourism authority as special interest tourism. The study is qualitative in nature. The data is collected through a set of focused group discussion comprising key persons from the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism, the Indonesian Ministry of

Health and the Indonesia Spa Association. The data gathered from these three parties represent triangulation technique for the research.

### III. SPA AS SIT: A THEORETICAL DEBATE

There are still some questions remain about what SIT is and what kind of tourism type can be categorized within the definition of SIT. The debate is important to address since we need a consistency for doing a research in this field. According to Trauer, SIT can be appearing in the form of particular interest or activities, or, identified through geographical area and affinity groups [2]. First, in terms of specific interests or activities there are some types of tourism including sport, adventure, culture, and wine tourism. Secondly, identification types of tourism through geographical area covers interests of visiting places such as Europe, Africa or Antarctica. Lastly, categorization in affinity groups includes groups of senior tourists, women, gays and lesbians, or youths visiting places to get experiences, togetherness and intimacy within their closed interest groups. In this way, we define SIT as the opposite of mass tourism [2]. Novelli differently puts culture-based tourism and special interest tourism as part of niche tourism, which is also considered as the opposite of mass tourism [3]. Although these categorizations put cultural tourism in different classification, both are situated as new types of tourism that different from conventional tourism. Since Indonesian spa is a sort of heritage tradition to the nation, then, the spa industry in the country can be classified as part of cultural tourism with a specific interest to experience heritage wellness.

The debate over the definition of spa comes from two perspectives. The first perspective meets spa with the requirement from medical and wellness demand [4]. From the medical point of view, spa is considered as additional treatment to the illness recuperation. This type of spa service is usually performed at the hospital in order to help patients expediting their healing treatment, particularly for severe disease. Some cancer-specialist hospitals embroil spa meditation in their integrative healing program. The wellness spa, on the other hand, focuses its service on health preservation [5]. This particularly takes place in more developed regions where too sedentary and instant lifestyle become dominant in the work force. The lifestyle is supposed to be the danger for people health leading to diseases such as fatness, cholesterol, diabetes etc. In the big city like Jakarta as for instance, spa business mushrooms in various style in order to serve metropolitan citizen. Governments of some big cities in North America even motivate their citizen behavior toward spa to preserve the health and wellness of their population. The second perspective puts spa as special interest tourism that part of cultural tourism. This is particularly true in easterner world like Indonesia within which spa is viewed as hereditary tradition. In the tourism context, spa and traditional wellness is considered as a system and it needs comprehensive approaches from various disciplines including medical, anthropological and psychological sciences to develop the industry [6].

However, there is a question regarding how special the special interest tourism is. The term 'special interest' should

indicate that the tourist has very specific purpose when he/ she visits a destination to satisfy his/ her interest whether this relates to hobbies, curiosity, or adventure challenges. In fact, there is no tourists with a single interest when visiting a destination. Each tourist comes to a particular destination will expect to enjoy a broad range of experience as complementary for their major interest. A tourist may visit to Yamanashi prefecture in Japan for conference as its main purpose, nevertheless, he/ she may also try to satisfy his/ her other interest such as special food or beverage through wine tourism offered by the destination. It is also important to note that 'an interest is not an obsession' [7]. This implies that perhaps a tourist tries to accomplish its interest of a destination, but it is not an absolute concern of his/ her journey. The tourist may not be possible to satisfy the particular interest in a whole time of travel. Rational tourists usually think about economic benefit by asking what more about the destination is. Lastly, the term of special interest is probably coined by tourism operators in order to create a new profitable niche market. The term Indonesia spa and wellness tourism sound to fit with this practice. Since the country has sufficient resources to develop spa industry, the tourism authorities try to create new market of spa tourism with the brand 'the spa beyond Bali.'

### IV. CULTURAL TOURISM: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The debate over the advantages and disadvantages of developing cultural tourism has continued during the past decade since it is widely viewed as a rapidly growing sector of the tourism business, rather than just a market niche [8]. While there are those who are still skeptical of the positive contribution of tourism to cultural transformation based on the negative perceptions of the hosts [9] [10], there is also a growing awareness of the advantages of tourism for culture and society, for instance the role of tourism in the revival of local tradition [11] [12].

There are many definitions of cultural tourism, seeing it from a variety of different perspectives. Following a proposal by the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), it is suggested that these definitions can be grouped into four categories: "tourism-derived," "motivational," "experiential" and "operational" [12]. Tourism-derived definitions see cultural tourism within the context of the tourist market: as a kind of special interest tourism, as involving relations between people and cultural heritage, or as developing and marketing cultural sites for tourists [12]. This definition emphasizes the tourists' interest in culture and cultural events as the basis of cultural tourism. This definition, nevertheless, is very broad, and includes lower level concepts such as heritage tourism, arts tourism, ethnic tourism, and indigenous tourism [13].

Motivational definitions focus on why people move, for instance to study, perform, or participate in festivals or pilgrimage [12]. This implies the idea that travelers are "pushed" by their own desires or motives for particular types of experience, and/or "pulled" by the attractions which particular sites have to offer [14]. This is the basis of the definition of cultural tourism offered by the company Lord

Cultural Resources, which sees cultural tourism as “visits by persons outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in historical, artistic, scientific, or lifestyle/heritage offering of the community, region, group, or institution” [10]. Whatever their motivation, the fact remains that tourists are involved in some way in the culture of their destination. Push and pull factors should not be seen as mutually exclusive, since they operate at the same time.

The last types of definition discussed by ICOMOS are experiential and operational. Experiential definitions are closely linked to motivation, as they focus on the unique experiences of the tourists as they consume other cultures [12]. Cultural tourists arguably seek to understand other cultures through experiencing the customs, traditions, architecture, and other cultural features of a particular destination. In other words, they search for what makes a destination culturally unique and different from their everyday lives. It is therefore possible to see cultural tourists lying on a continuum between “allocentric” tourists, interested in things that are different, and “psychocentric” tourists, mainly interested in comfort, and therefore enjoying aspects of the destination that they find familiar.

Finally, operational definitions define cultural tourism in terms of the activities which the tourism experience has to offer, including museums, historic buildings, performances, cultural festivals and so on. McKercher and du Cross define cultural tourism operationally as “participation in any one of an almost limitless array of activities or experiences” [12]. They therefore argue that the “participation” is preferable to just “visiting” a certain destination or attraction. This definition emphasizes the cultural resources that a destination can sell to the tourist market. In order to describe which cultural resources are most marketable, this can be classified into arts, architecture, and festivals, and distinguishes between different types of cultural tourism in different areas. Urban areas offer different attractions from rural areas, and mountain areas offer different attractions from coastal areas. It is also possible to differentiate between cultural attractions in developed and less developed areas. Developed areas often offer Western-style performing arts such as orchestral and theatrical performances, while the less developed areas present celebrations of indigenous culture, including religious and other traditional cultural performances.

#### V. CURRENT DEVELOPMENT OF INDONESIA SPA INDUSTRY

Spa and wellness tourism is currently appear to be one of the big global tourism industries. This type of tourism attain popularity in some regions in the world such as in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific. In 2012, the amount of travel for wellness tourism in Europe was reaching 203 million with tourist expenditure about USD 158 billion. North America noted smaller trips around 163 million trips but gaining higher tourist expenditure amounting USD 181 billion. Meanwhile, Asia Pacific obtained 120 million trip with tourist expenditure about USD 69 billion. Other regions with potential spa and wellness development are Latin America, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa accounting respectively 32 million trip

22 billion dollar expenditure, 5 million trip 5 billion dollar expenditure and 2 million trips 2 billion USD tourist expenditure.

In the context of spa tourism in Asia Pacific, although Bali as for instance, has received the best spa destination of the world in 2012, the rest spa and wellness tourism in the country is just recently receiving attention from the central tourism authority as one of the major special interest tourism to be developed in more aggressively. In order to develop the ‘beyond Bali’ spa the ministry of tourism has promoted nine traditional spas labelled as Indonesia spa. They are Martub and Oukup of North Sumatran, Tangas of Betawi, Batangeh of Minang, So-oso of Maduranese, Lulur of Javanese, Batimung of Banjar, Telu Sulapa Epa of Bugis and Bakera of Minahasa. In practice, nevertheless, the Balinese spa still represents the image of Indonesian spa.

However, there are some debate among spa tourism stakeholder on how the industry should be developed appropriately. From one perspective, the government suggested to use Bali as the windows for the branding of Indonesian spa. The implication for this strategy is the budget allocation from the central government will run down mostly to Bali. Meanwhile, business society sees Bali as no more reliable as a hub for Indonesia spa. This is because the competition in spa business in Bali escalate faster, then, the most effective strategy to win the market is the lower price. As a result there are a lot of cheap spa services using non-natural material for spa and wellness treatment.

#### A. THE EXISTING CONDITION

The growth of spa industry in the Asia Pacific is predicted to boost competition not only among spa operators but also hotels those providing spa as their additional service. Independent agencies in tourism Travel and Leisure observes some competitive hotels with spa service are mostly located in Bangkok. Other agencies shows different result, but none of the hotels are in Indonesia. The countries with competitiveness in spa industry in the future will be Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore. According to the Indonesia Spa Association, however, some if not many of the resources used by those countries are imported from Indonesia. They are including the herbals and the spa therapists.

The above description shows that the quality of Indonesian spa is less competitive than some other countries in Southeast Asia. This is contradict with the speed of the industry growth during the year of 2010 to 2012. The growth of this type of tourism industry in Indonesia was about 7% compared to the 4% growth in general tourism. The number was less than the growth of spa industry in India and China that reached 11% and 8% respectively. This picture shows that Indonesia is a potential region to develop wellness and spa Industry. The push-factors for the development are including the awareness of Indonesian society over the importance for preserving health and wellness in their daily life particularly those living in the urban area as well as the attractive of Indonesian spa uniqueness that cannot be found in any other places in the world. Australian special interest tourists as for instance,

contended that Indonesian spa is excellent in terms of its therapists that is natural.

For Indonesia, Bali is the main destination for spa tourism. In the Island of Bali, thousands of spa services scattered in the urban and tourism areas. However, most of them have not registered and therefore, operate without legal certification. As a result, thousands of the therapists are also not certified yet. This condition appear to be the most challenge for both the government body administrate tourism development and the industry associations in spa and wellness.

The main problem for spa industry in Indonesia reposes on the comprehensive knowledge of the business itself. On the supply side, the customer tend to define spa as a massage for relaxation. This make the value of spa as a heritage art of healing is getting degraded. From the supply side, on the other hands, the profession as therapist is narrowly defined as masseur, and thus, a sort of profession without a clear career path and merely as blue collar worker. Instead, as spa therapist, there are many knowledge needed in the field of medical, psychological and also cultural in order to get a certification as a professional therapist. By this obstacle, the development of human resource in spa sector experiences considerable barriers. The vocational schools in spa therapist are almost less enthusiasts, while the need of skilled and educated man power in the industry is quite high. At most, people deem that spa as merely massage and therefore, no specific knowledge needed to work in this industry.

#### B. COMMON PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPA INDUSTRY

In general the development of spa tourism sector face typical problems with other type of tourism. They are problems about policies and regulations, accessibility, marketing and human resource. In terms of government policies and regulations, the existing regulations are not yet supporting the total development of the sector. In the macro level, there is no regulation that provide an enough space for the industry to develop. This is not coherent with the development of the nine spa and wellness capital. Without a strong regulation and commitment, it seems to be difficult to establish a strong industry. At the micro level, the coordination among local tourism authority with the industry remains weak. This is because the organization of spa is ambiguous between the local authorities in tourism with the local authorities of health. This ambiguity eventually will end at the rate of tax the member of the industry has to pay.

With regards to the accessibility, the problem lies on the easiness to get the service at the tourism spot. Spa in Bali as for instance, is well-known in the context of tourism, and therefore, the customers in the industry are using the service of intermediaries since the clients cannot easily find the service everywhere at the tourism spot. This make the cost of accessing spa even higher and provide less margin for the provider. As a result, there is a very little innovation from the operator.

Marketing is also a classical problem for the industry. The promotional aspect of spa such as in Bali, is integrated to the other tourism promotional program. Since spa and wellness

tourism are not promoted independently, the sector is viewed only as complementary to the main course of tourism activity. In this regard it is not worth to classify spa as a type of special interest tourism. Another problem is, some promotional programs abroad is not focused on the particular target since it is not conducted in the right events or exhibitions.

#### CONCLUSION

Spa and wellness industry are the potential sub sector of tourism that has opportunity to be developed in the Asia Pacific region particularly a place like Indonesia. The country possess a huge resources to develop the industry. However, the lack of coordination among parties make the development program for the industry is facing obstacles. The obstacles at the end lead to the country's less competitiveness comparing to other region is Southeast Asia such as Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. In order to compete effectively with these competitors, innovativeness in the spa and wellness industry need to be advocated through a flexible coordination among parties involved within industry. Apart of the need for qualified human resource, a focus on the market preference is highly needed in order to catch customers those more fragmented in the recent days of tourism.

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