

Original Research Article

## The New Age Tourism Brand-Wagon in Ubud, Bali: *Eat Pay Love!*

Dr. Claudia Bell\*

University of Auckland, Auckland CBD, Auckland 1010, New Zealand

**\*Corresponding Author**

Dr. Claudia Bell

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**Abstract:** Bali was well recognized as an appealing holiday destination before Elizabeth Gilbert's 2006 book *Eat Pray Love* became an international best seller. That book, and the subsequent film, confirmed Bali and the inland town of Ubud in particular, as a significant setting for spiritual tourism, particularly for affluent Western women. Spiritual retreats and a wide range of New Age activities are now a substantial market niche in Bali. Private entrepreneurs outside of Bali sell their New Age products over the www. Ubud is a veritable hypermarket of free-enterprise New Age services and merchandise. Bali Tourism's marketing pages on www do not promote *Eat Pray Love* tours or activities. There is no need, or advantage, for any official organization to advertise those attractions. For prospective *Eat Love Pray* visitors, de facto destination marketing via www sites, bloggers and Facebook posts are trustworthy. They supersede any local official destination marketing campaigns for this particular category of tourist. As the consumption of New Age products takes place over the web, the result is considerable economic leakage. Bali itself is intrinsic to the tourist product but has limited profits from the expenditure by these tourists. The services and products offered are not regulated in any way, but nor are they illicit. The discussion draws from interviews and participation observation on four fieldtrips, between 2015 and 2018.

**Keywords:** tourism, destination, branding, spirituality, New Age, Bali, *Eat Pray Love*. leakage

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism geography requires that practitioners recognize phenomena at geographically different scales, ranging from global, national, regional to local [1]. A complex fusion of economic activity and cultural practices are fundamental to the development of tourist locations as geographic spaces designated to particular peripatetic interest groups. My case study, Ubud in Bali, in this paper illustrates this nexus. It exemplifies the need for spiritual tourists seeking the 'self' through travel [2].

Ubud (pronounced 'Oo-bud') is a small inland town in Bali, Indonesia. Its permanent population is around 30,000. While Indonesia is a Muslim country, 84% of the Balinese are Hindu. The warm climate, lush tropical beauty, diverse recreational activities, affordability to tourists and general friendliness makes Bali an appealing destination. Elements of the Hindu culture are everywhere: thousands of little temples, pretty architecture, locals wearing traditional clothing, and colourful offerings of flowers to the gods in front of homes and businesses [3]. Western tourists enjoy the novelty, charm and authenticity of this ambience.

Ubud has many distinctive local features, including topography, vegetation, fauna, climate and its built environment. But its position in the tourist imagination is global. Ubud is an extremely popular site for spiritual tourism. It is strongly associated with the success of Elizabeth Gilbert's 2006 book (also a movie, 2010) *Eat Pray Love*. The book (written as a first-person memoir) sold almost ten million copies, was translated into 30 languages, and spent 57 weeks at the No.1 spot on the *New York Times* paperback nonfiction best-seller list. In that part of the novel set in Ubud, Bali the protagonist embarks on a spiritual quest.

'A destination is both a geographical place and a metaphysical space determined by a network of meanings and values that are attached to it [4].' *Eat, Pray, Love* has spurred a vigorous industry in Ubud for westerners seeking spiritual solace; quasi-spiritual practices in Ubud are wildly fashionable. The spiritual journey is also a physical one, with both Ubud and enlightenment / peace / harmony the destinations. It is maintained that Ubud has experienced an increase in tourism numbers by 400% since the book and film. Tourists themselves play a key role in promoting this town.

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Tourist areas within nations often have their own branding programme and strategies. Destinations draw from positive local characteristics to place themselves in the global tourism market. Academic literature from diverse disciplines on place branding abounds, as this has become a vigorous field of inquiry [5]. This case study demonstrates a significant contrast of relationship between place marketing and place branding carried out from the inside, and place branding as an externally-applied process. The Ubud example controverts attempts to formulate place branding strategies as processes of organizing identity, parallel with corporate branding practices. Place identities can carry a myriad of meanings: a locale and the subjective and emotional attachment to it; people and their social practices including occupations and traditions; and image, materiality (the built environment) institutions (laws, regulations, organisations), and relations (of power, class, gender, production). Kavaratzis and Hatch note definitions of place identity as a substructure of self-identity, consisting of cognitions about the physical world. They report definitions about place with two general constituents: materiality and 'a realm of meaning' (the built environment and 'a more abstract and intangible notion', the interactions between the two unclear (ibid, 72). Contrasts between 'notions of materiality and the realm of meaning as devices for conceptualising places as products to be commoditized and marketed' have also been investigated [6]. Other writers describe place branding as 'very much a practitioner-led field' selling places to external markets [7, 4]. All of these approaches assume that a place is identified from within. Ubud as a case study contradicts this, because the place identifiers of New Age Ubud are external.

## METHODOLOGY

This research interviews for this project took place during a fieldtrip to Bali in November-December 2014. On three later visits, 2015 – 2018, the researcher engaged less formally with female New Age tourists (participant observation). During every stay in Ubud, she visited sites offering New Age services, especially those featuring in the novels and memoirs noted below. Cafes in Ubud, Bali with noticeboards advertising New Age activities were frequented. Brochures were collected, where available. Notices pinned to walls were photographed. Numerous websites advertising New Age opportunities and events in Bali were consulted.

During the interview phase, ten women who had participated in New Age activities were interviewed in depth, for at least one hour each. Confidentiality was assured. Three were American, and two Australian. There was one from each of the following locations: England, Ireland, Sweden, Germany and South Africa. They were 32 to 44 years of age. They were asked about their agenda for visiting Ubud, and about their engagement with practitioners who might help them in their life's journey. All felt they had gained from their experiences. One Australian woman had attended five different New Age events in one week. She explained that she was a repeat visitor. 'It is like a fix. I come here to top up, to feel more positive. It always works.'

The interviews were transcribed, to provide a solid data base. However, in contradiction of my university's requirement that I use a formal methodology – semi-structured interview questionnaires, in a one-to-one setting. In fact, the richest material from these women – and other female tourists to New Age attractions in Bali - turned up in casual social situations, where the women were relaxed and keen to tell their 'unofficial' stories. I would not have been funded to carry out a 'participant observation' project: that consisted, essentially, of hanging out in cafes and at various New Age sites, and having casual conversations.

Women are very comfortable about chatting to new female acquaintances about even quite personal matters. It took no effort at all to assemble a range of commentaries about their experiences in Ubud. As a female researcher travelling alone and frequenting some of the same locations as the New Age visitors, there were many occasions for spontaneous conversations, which were not taped. Apart from the women formally interviewed, 26 others told the researcher about their experiences, sometimes in friendly group situations. The women remain anonymous. Frank encounters between women hitherto unknown to each other, occur every day; this is part of normal feminine life. Their Ubud activities were a recurrent and obvious topic, and often a way to entertain others.

This ease of communication was in contrast to New Age practitioners. Those contacted via their websites (advertising various New Age services) did *not* wish to participate in research of any kind. Those approached during the fieldwork did *not* wish to be interviewed. However, two offered me discount packages of their specialized services.

Encounters with the non-interview women were often serendipitous and insightful. For example over lunch with a group of bike riders an Irish teacher entertained the table with the story of her 'failure' at a fasting / harmony retreat. Those present were amazed that she had paid two thousand Euros for this. She said she justified it to herself as 'just a more expensive holiday than usual'. Another professional woman described her attempt at a silent retreat, hoping to find equanimity, and to dissuade herself of her cellphone compulsion. (This conversation was interspersed by her constantly glancing at her text messages). She bemoaned that despite the cost, it hadn't succeeded. Two other women told the group that the astrologer and animal communicators (to relay messages to their pets back home) they had consulted were 'probably fakes'. One woman complained about the 'horrible food' at her fasting retreat (which apparently offered an optimal lentil dish). In her memoir *Ballicious* Australian journalist Becky Wicks engages in expensive New Age activities, demonstrating the individualistic and corporate values of consumer society employed in the commercial spiritual arena; an appropriation by contemporary capitalist ideologies [8]. Wicks remarks, 'I've learned by being in Ubud, paying a lot to do not very much sometimes is all part of the healing and growth experience' [9]. She never explicitly outs herself, or the reader, as a likely non-believer.

Apart from the interviews, by spending time with women with these interests and inclinations, numerous personal narratives were gathered. Later in my room I wrote detailed notes from these conversations. The experiences of the New Age participants enabled an exploration the ways in which culture is created and recreated by human actors as agents; and how western tourist practitioners could capitalize on the mystique of a small Indonesian town.

### **New Age Spiritual Tourism**

New Age spiritual tourism differs from sacred tourism, which is about visiting local sacred or holy sites, such as Lourdes, Stonehenge or the Yogyakarta Prambana temple. To some extent it lines up with pilgrimage tourism, but differs significantly: religious pilgrimages have long-established destinations and rituals. 'New Age is a broad term encompassing many diverse belief systems that overlap with interests in transformative powers emanating from nature, from individual beings – humans, animals, plants, spirits – and sometimes from beyond the planet' [10]. It is not dependent on any one central authority [11]. Not all spiritual tourism could be referred to as New Ageism. One popular website claims that 'authentic spirituality is about mindful participation in your own life. New-Age spirituality is concerned with carving out a new, more exotic role for the ego to play' [12]. This is widely debated on websites, with numerous variations offered. New Ageism is eclectic, the individual having freedom to construct or invent their own beliefs and practices.

*Eat Pray Love* has been summed up as one of 'these tales of inward journeys ... (that) are typical of New Age travel writing,' a hybrid of travel writing and self-help [13]. It has been positioned in the realm of 'epiphany travel': the 'planned seeking of intuitive leaps of understanding and transformations in psychological well-being' [14]. The novel is critically addressed as a case study of the contemporary female neoliberal spiritual subject, affluent and entitled [15, 16]. Bali as a space colonized as 'other' by *Eat Pray Love* tourists is considered [17]. Against the book's exemplar of the privilege of western women abroad, one author calls for 'the reassertion of a social justice-oriented definition of global citizenship' [16]. Its impacts on tourist numbers have also been explored [18].

The visitors to Ubud are not a passive target group, but active agents, selecting to best fit their own lifestyle and identity construction [19]. 'The market is an integral part of modern life and it is common to look to the market for solutions to problems' [20]. The trip may be to Bali; but at bottom it is about *them*, the consumer, seeing affirmation of their own uniqueness [21]. Spirituality has become a highly commercialized consumable for a wave of consumers well used to making decisions about their own consumption practices. These tourists seek in Bali something that will help them: something in the ambience of the place (and missing in their own) might work the magic.

My focus in this study was on tourists making brief visits – from a few days, or up to three weeks - to attend spiritual workshops. I did not include a cohort of women who had settled long term in Bali to pursue these interests; identified as 'lifestyle migrants' [22].

### **Ubud's New Brandwagon: *Eat Pray Love***

Ubud is traditionally known for its charm and restorative powers. The name Ubud comes from the Balinese word *Ubad*, which means medicine, with reference to the medicinal herbs growing wild around its jungle and rivers. Natural hot springs provide healing water for spas. 'Some may say it's this healing reputation that has drawn people to Ubud; those who feel the need to touch base with their inner selves, or change their lives [9].' In short, it has a long-existing powerful 'brand narrative' [19]. Ubud's attractions for tourists are, in general, arts and culture, yoga, spirituality and nature.

Gilbert's emotional narrative of a serene spiritual environment appeals to a particular kind of tourist. The phenomenal impacts of her work could not have been predicted. For tourists, the journey may be, geographically, to inland Bali. But the metaphorical and spiritual journey is resolutely focused on the self. ('Spirituality' is broadly conceptualized as the expression of one's spirit, that is, how one expresses him or herself as a human being – Willson, McIntosh and Zahra [23]. Gilbert has layered a new brand narrative onto the Ubud already present.

In *Bali is a Brand* 2011 Hobart wrote of the stresses of the market economy – international tourism - on Balinese traditional way of life. He called for a reinvigoration of Balinese arts, religion and culture in order that they survive both for the Balinese and as a brand for Bali [24]. Those cultural artefacts have become intrinsic to the new *Eat Pray Love* tourism wave. This particular tourist group goes to Bali to seek spiritual succour and serenity. The journey is necessary because their own metropolitan high rise environments cannot satisfy these needs. They must be sought in the gentle, exotic contours of the Balinese landscape, and in the daily evidences of a spiritual people with their floral offerings, pretty temples, exotic gardens and general aestheticism.

Bali Tourism's marketing pages on www do not promote *Eat Pray Love* tours or activities. There is no need, or advantage, for any official organization to push the attractions associated with *Eat Pray Love*. Millions of people – readers, film goers – have already been reached, at no expense to the Bali Tourism Board; it does not need to be co-opted for this. Far better that promotion comes from participants themselves. For potential *Eat Love Pray* visitors, this de facto marketing via bloggers is credible; an attainable

fantasy purchase proposition. Here are people – other women like themselves – who have been to Bali, or who now live there, and who are eager to spread their *Eat Pray Love* experiences.

### **Spiritual tourism: New Ageism**

With increased secularization in the western world [23] the origins of New Ageism as a widespread movement are tracked to the developing counter-culture of the 1960s. Traditional religion was proving irrelevant in providing meaning and value; significance was now based on 'the self'. 'New Age ... movements frequently challenge traditional, Western definitions of religion as historical, staid, monotheistic, inflexible, hierarchical, and oriented toward collective, rather than individual, experiences [10]. Originally the domain of hippies and dropouts, and not particularly commercialized, New Age spirituality has moved from the fringes to mainstream culture [25]. There is no formal membership, hierarchy, dogma, doctrine, and no activities in common for all New Agers. There are no special qualifications, skills or intellectual prowess required to participate. New Agers choose their own paths and select the 'tools' which New Ageist. It is about the visitor's search for their own personal enrichment, enchantment, fulfillment and happiness; the 'quest in quest' as one research team sums up [26]. This is the journey of the protagonist in *Eat Pray Love*.

New Ageism is based on discontent with the present, perhaps disappointment that one's individual life course is not fully taking the desired direction. In their review of academic material on spiritual 'seeking' Shaw and Thomson suggest that 'the preference for spirituality results from a combination of uncertainty and wishful thinking'. That uncertainty is a negative, uncomfortable part of the modern condition [20]. The personal crises resulting from accelerated modernism 'may lead to the need for support that spiritual sites give' [26]. Perhaps an alternative geographic space and worldview can elicit personal joy? A deliberate search for transcendence may lead to self-actualization. This contrasts with an incidental transcendence which may occur serendipitously as one travels [23].

Globally there are a few significant sites for New Age tourists. One example is Cusco, Peru, where New Age tourists are accommodated by re-invented traditions for local economic gain [27]. Global New Age tourists appropriating the rituals of Andean and Mexican civilizations are referred to as 'Europeans playing Indian' [28]. Various parts of India host New Agers, including Dharamsala in Northern India [26]. Sedona in Arizona is notable for its 'spiritual magnetism' [29]. The mountain town gained momentum as a New Age venue in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The tourists are 'predominantly middle-aged, upper middle class and female, some of their beliefs and practices (pantheistic and New Age), and some (aligned to) the sacred destinations to which they traveled' [29]. They can purchase customized New Age services in Sedona [30]. Activities include meditation, psychic readings, astrology, tarot, learning about feng shui or extra-terrestrial beings, having their auras read – a wide range of products and services. In other places particular special events and festival attract New Age audiences and participants. The motivations of visitors are summed up in one study as an escape from stress and boredom, a change in everyday routine; and a cultural adventure [11].

### **New Agers without Borders: the tourists**

'Lots of people believe Bali itself is the womb of the universe; the beating heart of all things feminine. And if Bali is the center of womanly power and Ubud is pretty much the centre of Bali, we're living slap-bang in the girliest vortex on earth' [9].

The widespread appeal of New Ageism has enabled it to be commandeered into a global commodity. In contrast to the Sedona example which caters for out-of-state domestic tourists market, the Ubud market is international, with significant numbers of Americans. Globalization and communications technologies create networks that transcend national borders. Spiritual or New Age tourists to destinations such as Ubud or Sedona do not just happen upon spiritual experiences while on a general holiday. They do their research first, and decide ahead what globally-available spiritual products and services will best assist their 'project of self-discovery'. They select a location as the 'right place' to carry out that project [31]. Abundant options are proffered in numerous 'spiritual enterprises' [25]. The goal is to find 'a novel, exotic, life transforming and even sacred experience' [32].

Ubud tourists seek the same spaces as the protagonist in the Elizabeth Gilbert story (written as a first-person memoir). New arrivals quickly immerse themselves in Ubud's New Age environment, attending diverse workshops and picturing themselves as the Julia Roberts character in the movie as they ride a bicycle across the paddy fields. They enjoy coffee and meals at designated cafes: 'Gilbert's haunts have become destinations of their own, stop-offs on an *Eat Pray Love* pilgrimage' (Olien, www). In fact there are more than double-ups: the restaurants Gilbert ate at in Bali, the restaurant her character Liz in the book ate at; and the restaurant Julia Roberts who plays Liz ate at while filming in Bali. This could be described as an emotional / spiritual form of *appellation controllee*, specificity assured. In Ubud, their quest is taken seriously. Existential salvation may occur here. Meanwhile, cultural capital is accrued as they attend the Elizabeth Gilbert/Julia Roberts prescribed yoga workshops / cafés / spiritual guides.

The experience economy encompasses many kinds of branding [25]. Gilbert's Bali quest is for balance through traditional spirituality and healing, but also a search for love. Single women easily identify with the needs of Liz in *Eat Pray Love*. A spiritual journey might lead to feminine transformation and self-discovery. And if Liz in *Eat Pray Love* can find romance in Bali, maybe the lonely single tourist can too?

*Balilicious* [9] is another single-woman memoir set in Bali, this time at the height of the *Eat Pray Love* phenomenon. Three more recent novels: *Constance* [33], *The Paradise Guest House* [34] and *Bali Hai* [35]. The latter on a 'spiritual odyssey like no other' according to the book's back blurb. In each of these, the main character, always a single female in her 30s, is on a mission for a fulfilment that is elusive in her home environment. Despite successful careers, attractive looks, sufficient income, good health and nonchalant global mobility, they are despondent that life has not wholly delivered for them. In the twenty first century single women have become a significant demographic numerically. Many affluent middle class single Western women insist that one can, and is entitled, to 'have it all'; after all, they believe they have earned it.

'It appears that an influx of disappointed thirty- and forty-something women still intent on finding themselves no matter who tries to stop them, are now sitting about in overpriced internationally owned cafes, earnestly dissecting their existential attitudes and waiting for inspiration to strike' [36].

While they wait for that longed-for epiphany, travel to Bali yields a freedom unavailable elsewhere. Liz, the *Eat Pray Love* heroine, marvels 'I feel so free here it is ridiculous' [37]. Like Becky in *Balilicious* she tries to engage with the practices that will take her to a higher level. Attempting meditation yet again, Liz's roommate says 'ten seconds have passed, Liz. Bored again, are we?' [37]. Both women are cheerfully ironic about their own shallowness in this spiritual context. Somehow, just by being in Ubud, surely spiritual magic will happen? But there is no magic to prevent the melancholy or boredom of Western single women; the *Eat Pray Love* spiritual prescription may be worth a try. (Curiously, single men in the same demographic as the women consumers of New Age products in Ubud are not flocking to choose from the thousands of eligible potential partners holidaying there.).

The final outcomes of the Ubud New Age purchases are unclear to a non-participant. It seems that 'the process of uncertainty reduction itself may be pleasurable'. This often means that consumers 'hop from course to course ... through cycles of consumption' [20]. The abundance of products (listed below) indicates a constant re-negotiation of the self in the market; where to place one's faith in order to fulfil one's needs? While uncertainty drives individual consumption, uncertainty is also a characteristic of the reliability of the products marketed. 'New age spirituality appears to combine belief and market, illustrating the rhetoric of 'consumer choice' [20].

### **New Age Products**

Thousands of promises of solutions are available in Ubud. Wicks reported the following found on the Bali Buddha café message board: devotional singing, yoga, naked yoga, laughing yoga, fasting yoga, Ayurvedic Yoga, the 7 Day Ayurvedic Detox *reiki*. (Some may argue against yoga as a new Age practice. This is debated on numerous Christian and New Age websites). Wicks also noted tarot readings, past-life regression, crystal healing, craniosacral therapy, colonic irrigation, liver flushes, primal screaming, trance healing, mediums, Native American healing, how to eat raw and make more friends, and an introduction to your spirit guides. Others mentioned in *Balilicious*: psychic, ecstatic dancing, headstands, aura reading, energy cleansing, purification rituals and sound healing ('sound harmonies working to free us from disharmonious energy patterns. It's using the voice and various instruments as conductors to express thoughts and emotions we might be storing inside..' [9]. Also: mending broken soul and energy fields, full moon ceremonies, Astral travel, and 'how to shake' from the Ratu Bagus Instruction Manual: 'the position is not too important, it's more important to feel electric and hot inside.' She notes that a course on 'seven levels of consciousness' cost US\$300 – sufficient to last a Balinese family a year (ibid, 51).

One practitioner offers soulmate love reading or a past life reading, as well as various reprogramming packages, including intuitive healing services (2 hours for US\$300; book over the internet). The Gift of Harmony Individual Journey costs \$1,100. Another website advertises Intuitive Tarot Master/Psychic Medium and Hypnotic Past Lives Regression Hypnotherapy.

My own hunt in Ubud and in the *Balispirit Newsletter* located an American women charging \$US130 per hour to 'clear blocks of negativity' There is also clairvoyance, animal communication, Shamanic healing, Black Magic, Cosmic, Nirvanic, astral and spiritual levels of consciousness' as well as 'guides through dimensional shifts to your highest vibrational energy, doing special crystal meditations, contacting the Akashic Records, working in conjunction with spiritual healer Oriba (an Indonesian sacred movement system), Dance of the Soul, finding spirit guides from Seven Dimensions, groups healings, sacred mantras, sacred mudras, sacred yantras, aquasoma and more.

Self-help books by New Age teachers and New Age paraphernalia are extensively available in Ubud stores. One well-known shop advertises 'products from the Himalaya, such as Tibetan Singing Bowls, Cymbals, Incense, Meditation shawls and wall hangings. Crystals of all shapes and sizes, Rudraksha beads, handmade spiritual jewelry, necklaces, candles, essential oils, card decks, meditation cushions and much, much more, so come and visit our Aladdin's cave!' [38].

New Ageism or spiritual tourism is an increasingly significant market niche in Ubud's destination branding and marketing. But Bali Tourism's marketing pages on the www do not promote *Eat Pray Love* tours or activities. Promotion comes from participants themselves. Thousands of websites can be consulted about particular New Age services and products available in Ubud. Those diverse options comprise 'a one-stop, spiritual shop, or perhaps a marketplace bazaar, suited for any number of spiritual desires or needs' [29]. There is no need, or advantage, for any official organisation to further push those attractions. Tourists themselves play

the significant role in image projection. 'The new generation of Web 2.0 tools in particular has revolutionized the way destination image is projected and how tourists search for and gather information about tourism destinations' [39]. Tourists receive information from such agents, and transmit information to other potential tourists. New Age services would be difficult to promote on such scale without the new communication technologies. 'Visitor numbers began to spike dramatically after the release of the *EPL* book' [18]. Ubud is a case study of 'today's tourists play(ing) a leading role in image projection' [39].

Alongside this, a key issue is the role of tourists themselves as advocates of place. Through social media tourists have become agents with a powerful role in promotion of place. The tourists who have already had the experience offer their opinions as both solicited and unsolicited agents. Pictures and videos enhance credibility. Travellers of similar taste trust their peers. 'As social media rises in popularity, users gain more power' [40]. It has been suggested that they can outperform all the rest of agent types in these three criteria: credibility, market penetration and costs' [39].

For potential *Eat Love Pray* visitors, this de facto destination marketing via bloggers and Facebook posts is presumed trustworthy. Travellers of similar taste trust their peers. Thousands of websites can be consulted about particular New Age opportunities and products available in Ubud. Those diverse options comprise 'a one-stop, spiritual shop, or perhaps a marketplace bazaar, suited for any number of spiritual desires or needs' [29]. There is no need, or benefit, for any official organisation to further push those attractions.

Another advantageous strand is the marketing of Ubud to New Age practitioners elsewhere. Workshops for professionals are offered where they can upskill, then use those skills in their own commercial practice wherever they are located. These can be added to their CVs and to their own advertising material. The cache of 'Ubud' is huge in this field.

### **Marketing and branding Ubud: Foreign owners**

Ubud's commercial spiritual mystique is controlled and legitimated by market dynamics, like any other tourism product. There are no local government bodies to oversee, control or directly profit from this form of tourism. Ubud is a veritable hypermarket of free- enterprise New Age services and merchandise. All of these involve commercial transactions. Numerous websites and walk-in establishments are easily locatable.

So a small town in Bali is promoted via digital technologies to the world. Most consultants have web pre-paying facilities such as Pay Pal, or ask for cash at the time of consultation. I asked a practitioner about paying tax on income from these sources. Her reply: 'It is totally illegal to work and receive money unless you have a special work permit. Better to avoid the topic.' As purchase of products takes place over the web, the result is substantial economic leakage. That major leakage reduces the beneficial impact of expenditure for the destination. 'In Bali, amenities such as the bigger hotels and travel agents are mostly externally owned by national (Indonesian) or international investors. Those profits go outside Bali, with little trickling down locally [41]. New Age tourism, the great new tourist product for Bali, and Ubud in particular, is in the same category. 'The problem for Balinese in the travel business has not been the numbers of tourists... but finding ways that the benefits flow to the Balinese' [42]. Local Balinese people dealing with the struggles inherent in a low average annual income are effectively re-colonized by the incoming hordes of tourists who are in Bali for their own ends [43].

While they stay in Bali the tourists need accommodation and meals. As McRae explains, most of the new restaurants are foreign owned, and offering 'organic, vegan, raw and even "hi-vibe" foods'. They pay landlords more than local people can afford [44]. Tourists also want to see appealing local attractions, such as temples and rice fields, or nearby specialist artisan villages to buy woodcarvings, silver jewelry and kites. Foreign owners provide the majority of packaged tours and New Age services arranged outside of Bali [18]. There are also individually customized tours employing local guides and transport companies. This contrasts to Fonneland's 2013 study of spiritual tourism enterprises offered in Sami culture. In that Arctic example, the experiences and activities are generated and presented from within the local culture. In the case of Ubud, external entrepreneurs operating from websites, promulgate and profiteer from their own consultative services practiced in Ubud.

The services and products offered are not regulated in any way, but nor are they illicit. These are goods that any tourist can legally purchase. There may be 'unscrupulous traders in the spiritual market place... The freedom which allows such traders to exist also enabled (participants in a 2013 study) to be spiritual consumers and producers' [20]. Fonneland is blunt: 'New Age can be reduced to economics – the greed and profit is essential for those involved.' However, she acknowledges that 'there are ... hustlers and gullible consumers 'in any market, not just the New Age arena' [45]. Ubud's commercial spiritual mystique is controlled and legitimated by market dynamics, like any other tourism product.

There are some parallels here with sex tourism in Bali. This is certainly not officially promoted anywhere. Intending sex tourists learn of places to visit from other tourists, either via social media or by word of mouth [3]. Once in Bali, any man walking about alone, or with another male, is quickly approached and offered sexual services. Women relaxing in cafes or elsewhere easily swap experiences about spiritual opportunities and experiences in Bali.

Ubud is a case study that contradicts claims that 'destination branding should begin by understanding sense of place as experienced by local residents, and the importance of positioning their voices at the heart of the branding strategy' [4]. Rather, it is an example of 'today's tourists play(ing) a leading role in image projection' [39]. As these authors explain, experienced tourists contact other individuals and recommend destinations. Word-of-mouth has become word-of-mouse. With social media, experiences are transmitted globally. Those contacted need not be personally known to the message sender, yet nevertheless they influence other people making travel decisions. Hence tourists 'now take a much more active and prominent role as image-formation agents' (ibid, 205). In significant marker of this new century is Generation Y's commitment to online sites. Generation Y is identified as the net generation, born between 1978 and 1994 - the same demographic enjoying spiritual tourism in Bali.

### **New Age Cultural Tourism Geography**

Bali was a commodity before the New Agers descended upon it. 'More than any other tropical island, Bali has become the most exotic of exotic locations, a fantasy of all the splendours of the Orient and the beauties of the Pacific' [42]. A more recent comment: "Welcome to Bali, the last place on earth that still conjures images of mystiques, beauty, peace and goodwill, with its unique way of living in a modern age. Where you will be thrilled by the hues of colours, sounds and natural beauties. Welcome to the island of the last frontier where the search for the true meaning of life begins' (Editorial, Visitors Guide to Bali, 17<sup>th</sup> edition). Ubud has also long been recognized for its gamelan music, dancing and highly skilled artists and craftspeople. For centuries Bali has been subject to Western imaginings of a desirable tropical paradise. This is ironic in a place where traditional Hindu cultural values stand in opposition to western commercial ideas.

The place and culture provide the picturesque spiritual context – temples, offerings, water gardens. For tourists, effectively, free 'added value' atmosphere is already present. The appealing physical manifestations of the culture remind visitors of the charming 'otherness' of Bali and the Balinese. That very culture becomes the brand: this is perceived by outsiders, and promoted by entrepreneurs. 'It is not Balinese religion or dance *in itself* that is important, but that it is different from what happens elsewhere' [24]. Within that traditional un-capitalist setting, where many local people live in poverty, commercial tourism burgeons.

Film and literary tourism are relatively new for Bali. But the impacts are well recognized in Ubud, which casual references by locals to *Eat Pray Love* tourists. Ubud has become both a place of pilgrimage for *Eat Pray Love* readers, and a location with the potential for personal spiritual fulfilment; or 'performed self-reflection' [31]. This is a total contrast to other parts of Bali, for instance Kuta, Nusa Dua or the Gili Islands, where tourism is aimed at young surfers, divers, beach lovers and partygoers. Ubud, like other parts of Bali, was cast into recession by the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings when tourism dropped dramatically. While actual numbers of tourists influenced to visit by *Eat Pray Love* are uncertain, the phenomenon is acknowledged and valued by the Head of the Bali Tourism Board: 'it has had a great impact on making people realize that Bali is safe' [46].

'Macro-processes such as globalization, capitalist restructuring and time space compression...are fundamental in shaping individuals' [47]. For the advantaged, these can be - are - challenged by agency. Spiritual tourists are the current wave of visitors making an impact. For those tourists, this activity illustrates that specific location signifies the individual's status within hierarchies: affluence, poverty, race, nationality, class, privilege. There is no complete personal dossier of travel; travel consumption, like any consumption, is never finalized, because new journeys are always possible. Self-actualization a key agenda for any tourist; every journey is a chance to accumulate both cultural and mobility capital [48].

The clamour of New Age services advertised or recommended in blogs on the internet is the significant transmission source of Ubud's destination marketing. This will not work just anywhere. Both Bali and Ubud themselves are intrinsic to the tourist product: that very culture has become 'a full blown bourgeois vision of culture as a commodity,' as one critic puts it [24]. Hence Ubud can expect a continuing turnover of new and repeat *Eat Pray Love* tourists. Geographies of belief structures – religions, New Ageism - provide insights into the 'secular and sacred socio-spatial processes that shape everyday life in local places around the world' [49].

Tourists pay for the opportunity and right to visit; to consume other cultures and nations for their own 'self-development' or amusement. Even with New Age enclaves in Ubud, the whole local culture is impacted as the visitors' self-entitlement to service and satisfaction depends on reinforcement of their inequitable relationship with local people. Travelers often have greater rights than the people in the countries they are visiting, as their financial resources ensure access to wherever they want to go, and to whatever services they require. Travel insurance provides emergency and healthcare security. As Liu maintains, developing countries on the periphery are relegated to a subordinate function of the global process [50]. Liu stresses that negative socio-cultural effects as an outcome of tourism are more likely in developing countries than in developed countries. He addresses the potential to obliterate cultures, the commercialization of culture, the loss of authenticity, the manufacture of pseudo culture (ibid; 33). Concomitantly, the attitudes and behavior of Westerners towards deferential locals is surely another instance of tourists as 'purveyors of the negative aspects of Western culture [51].' Effectively, through travel capitalism global geography has been recast for touristic benefits, the whole world re-organized around assorted varieties of 'theme parks' for affluent visitors seeking their own self-actualization as global consumers [52].

### **Conclusion: Eat! Pay! Love!**

The case of Ubud Bali illustrates an ignoring of the 'positioning (of) the sense of place, as it is constituted and experienced by residents, at the centre of the brand strategy' [4]. Key findings in this study show that the significant tourism growth in Ubud as a consequence of *Eat Pray Love* depends both on the sense of Bali in general, and Ubud in particular, by consumers from the outside. It has become a global hub for spiritual experiences, with an international market of single women patrons happily promoting its qualities. Bali itself is the indispensable backdrop, context and destination for this form of tourism. While this is not specifically promoted by the local Tourism Board, there is nevertheless local appreciation that the popularity of *Eat Pray Love* tourism (*Eat! Pay! Love!*) assures the world that Bali is safe.

That Bali is a highly affordable destination for western visitors, enables these processes to take place [43]. New Age tourism is a western 'entitlement'. Cohen observes that while the search for 'one's true self may be fruitless in an 'objective' sense' the search process holds meaning and importance. As this paper shows, it can also make a deep impact on particular destinations.

Social media is a cheap way to encourage tourists to go to Ubud; indeed, promotion costs Bali nothing in fiscal terms. The vast array of New Age products and services are mostly purchased by internet sale. Proceeds of these transactions largely go offshore, to the practitioners. The spiritual journey is also a physical one, part of contemporary travel capitalism. In this case the successful capitalists are those who profit from their sales of New Age products and services. Brand Ubud is working in their favour. Meanwhile Balinese people continue to live and work in Ubud, apparently bemused but accepting of the activities of the visitors swamping their town.

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