

The Balance of Life

In an interview with Djuna Ivereigh, Indonesia's Minister of Culture and Tourism, I Gede Ardika, reveals a traditional view of sustainability that greatly predates the buzzword

Q. Sustainable tourism-what does that mean to you?

A. Let me begin with the official definition of sustainable tourism from the World Tourism Organization, which is: Sustainable tourism fulfills the current needs of tourists and of the destination area, while at the same time protecting and supporting future opportunities. Sustainable tourism aims to manage all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, ecological processes, biodiversity and life-support systems.

Q. Can you explain how you view the Balinese concept of *Tri Hita Karana*? How is this ancient belief relevant to modern tourism development throughout Indonesia?

A. *Tri Hita Karana* is Sanskrit, meaning "three causes of welfare and security," through harmonious relationships with God, with fellow human beings and with the environment. In a practical sense, *Tri Hita Karana* represents a "Balance of Life" between the spiritual and physical. This concept is relevant to

modern tourism development not only throughout Indonesia but around the world. I'll give you a simple example: If the tourism industry is hostile to the environment, it is not in balance with its environment. So, to implement *Tri Hita Karana*, one must be balanced between exploiting the environment and preserving the environment.

Q. What do you see as the most serious threats to sustainable tourism in Indonesia? How can we minimize those threats?

A. The most serious threats are poverty, ignorance and greed. To minimize those threats, we first have to find alternative livelihoods for those who earn their living through exploiting the environment. Second, we have to educate and encourage people to increase their awareness and concern for preserving the environment for our next generation. Third, we have to enforce the law. I've received so many reports on illegal bombs and cyanide fishing that destroy reefs. Some people are fishing not just to earn a living--they're just plain greedy. These kinds of people deserve several years' imprisonment.



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Q. I just visited *Pemuteran*, in NW Bali, and snorkeled over a reef rehabilitation project that bears a plaque in your name. In your eyes, how does this project embody sustainable tourism?

A. Back to the Balance of Life concept-when envisioning *Tri Hita Karana*, human beings are seen as the center of the balance. This means human beings are not the object of development but the subject. The strength of tourism should be based on the strength of a community. This is core to our concept of tourism

development in Indonesia-that it must be community-based.

Pemuteran is a very good example of community-based tourism. Many years back, people were fishing with bombs and cyanide. They nearly destroyed the reefs at Pemuteran. Now people realize that rehabilitating the reefs attracts many fish back to their old home at Pemuteran. Tourists love to dive and snorkel, to see the beauty of underwater life at Pemuteran. As I've said at many forums, by preserving reefs the people of Pemuteran are catching tourists instead of fish.

Q. I often marvel at Bali's ability to absorb outside influences and yet maintain its cultural integrity. But this resilience may be poorly appreciated by short-term visitors who see barongs only on billboards and who come to equate temple processions with traffic jams. What can be done to keep the "Bali" in South Bali?

A. Tourists learn to understand and appreciate different cultures and different natural settings. Understanding and appreciating is the basis for conservation. To that end, we

have to educate the visitor either by providing them with comprehensive information on Balinese culture or through explanation by our tourist guides and tourist information centers.

Q. Tourism has the potential to narrow the gap between rich and poor or to underscore it. How can you help tourism benefits be enjoyed by as many Indonesians as possible?

A. This has also become my great concern. That's why in developing Indonesian tourism we are striving hard for a) equity of development, b) enhancement of the multiplier effect, and c) empowerment of the community and the private sector. We are introducing what we call *Pariwisata Inti Rakyat-tourism* from the people, by the people and for the people. To achieve this we propose a partnership program—a bit like a foster parent program. In this system a medium- or large-size hotel becomes the foster parent of a locally owned home stay. The larger hotel can give guidance about management, training and marketing.

Q. Some of Indonesia's greatest tourism assets—reefs and rainforests boasting off-the-charts biodiversity—are facing dire threats. Many may well be lost within your term of office. What can you do to stop that? Can tourism more directly support conservation?

A. We have a strong commitment to adhere to the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development, to Agenda 21 and the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, particularly Article 3: "Tourism, a factor for sustainable development". We aim to develop tourism in a manner that is economically viable, socio-culturally acceptable and environmentally sustainable.

Q. Some of Indonesia's most famous national parks, including Komodo

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and Bunaken, are launching intergovernmental, nongovernmental organization (NGO) and private sector partnerships in efforts to improve management capacity. What do you think about this strategy?

A. I think this is a good strategy. As you know, Indonesia is a big country and rich in tourism assets. To look after these assets demands great effort, expertise and funds, whereas the budget of our government is limited. One way to meet our needs is to build partnerships with other stakeholders.

Let's take Komodo National Park as an example. I, myself, went to Komodo to see what the NGO partner of this park has done. It's tremendous.

Based on consultation with all stakeholders involved, a framework was designed and implemented around a number of modules including planning and evaluation, awareness campaigns, monitoring, enforcement and alternative livelihood programs.

Q. The Maldives claim success with their "One Island, One Resort" policy, in which entire islands are leased to private investors for resort development. Do you see potential in Indonesia for a similar policy?

A. We were interested to learn more about this policy during a recent visit from the Maldives Ministry of Tourism.

It would be difficult to implement in Indonesia, however, as we have a law that prevents islands from being leased to foreigners or other nations. We're currently looking into alternatives.

Q. One hindrance to tourism development in the outer islands has been poor consistency and compatibility in flight scheduling. It's vital for international tour operators to plan around domestic flights at least a year in advance. Rather, it seems that for some "frontier flights" national carriers can't predict scheduling more than a month ahead. Can you—fix that?

A. The trouble with these remote flights boils down to load factor. Our national carriers simply can't afford to operate with too few passengers. One way out is to start using smaller flight carriers. We've seen a number of new companies develop recently and we hope these can begin to fill the gaps.

Q. There's been considerable alarm over proposed policy changes for Indonesian visas. Can you outline those changes and your thinking behind them?

A. As you know, Indonesia suffers severe national debt. We have a dire need to generate revenue and changes in visa policy are one way to do that. Other countries use similar strategies.

Q. What would you like to say to foreign travelers who may be concerned about security issues in Indonesia?

A. We the Indonesia people have a great culture that highly respects foreigners. We don't want to do any harm to foreign travelers. Security issues are really local issues. Don't forget that Indonesia is a big country. It's true that some parts of Indonesia may be unsafe for travelers, but this is the rare exception.