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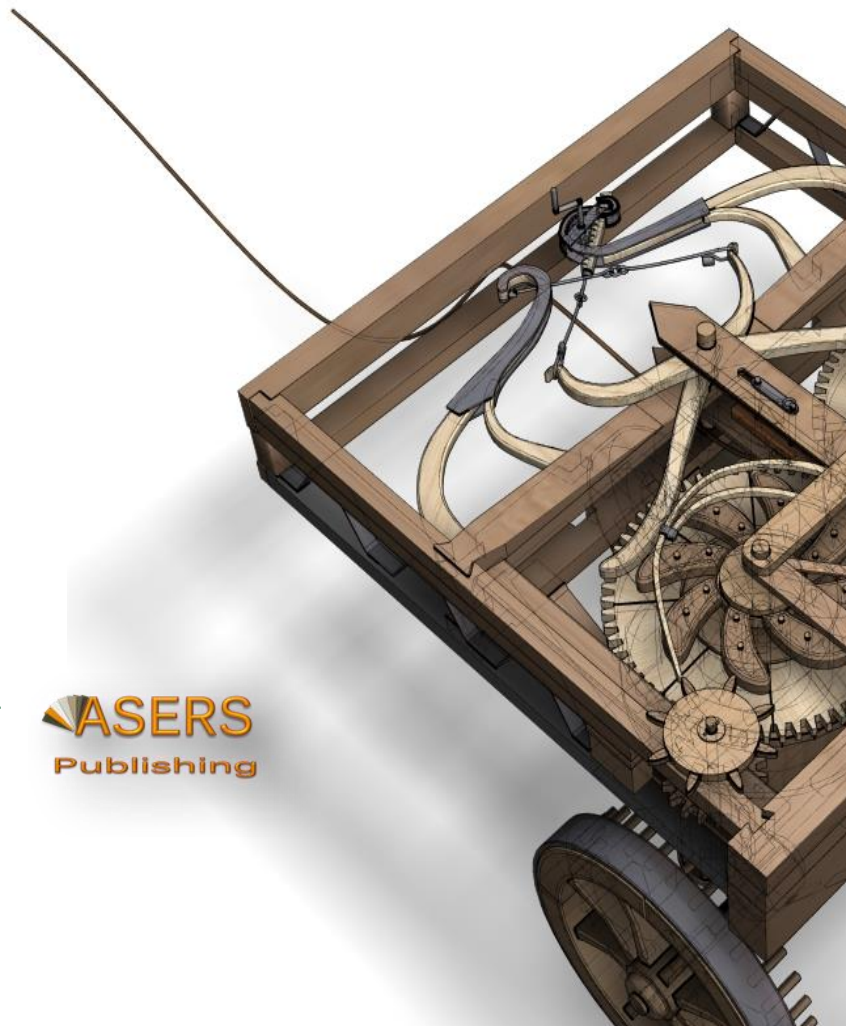
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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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Portrait of International Backpacker Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bali

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Abstract:

The world pandemic due to COVID -19 has destroyed almost all aspects of human life in the world, including the tourism sector. However, the existence of backpacker tourists is unique, because they can still contribute to local communities in Kuta Bali. This study aims to determine the impact of COVID -19 on the level of backpacker tourist visits in Bali and see the benefits generated by backpacker tourists during the pandemic. The entire research and writing process was designed using a qualitative method with a case study approach through in-depth interviews with several random tourists. The results of this study indicate that the pandemic due to COVID -19 has had an impact on the decline in the number of backpacker tourists in Bali. However, they can still contribute to the local community's economy during a pandemic.

Keywords: tourism portrait; international backpacker; COVID -19 pandemic.

JEL Classification: R11; Z32.

Introduction

The world pandemic due to COVID -19 has destroyed almost all aspects of human life in the world. As one of the business sectors that generates many jobs because it is able to accommodate a very large workforce (Nuruddin *et al.* 2020), tourism is considered by some people as the most affected entity. No exception to special interest tourism which is in terms of small quantity and is considered the easiest to condition, but backpacking tours are powerless to create.

The virus that was originally named SARS-Cov-2 which was found in Wuhan China since December 2019 has spread to all countries in the world rapidly (Zhou *et al.* 2020): (Kabir *et al.* 2020). With the rapid spread of COVID -19, almost all countries around the world took firm preventive steps, such as policies for non-pharmaceutical interventions in the form of restrictions on activities and travel (Gössling *et al.* 2020). As a result of

the spread of the virus, it has had an impact on a high public health threat (Chinazzi et al. 2020) and greatly affected the global economy which includes a reduction in workforce, business closings, a drop in production goods (Mofijur et al. 2021) and an impact on the decline. occupancy of several hotels in Bali due to the minimal number of foreign tourist visits (Nuruddin et al. 2020).

Even tourism based on remote tourism villages, old buildings in the form of temples and tours that rely on cave objects which have been considered as destinations of special interest. Experienced several very drastic decreases. According to the International Monetary Fund, the impact of COVID-19 has resulted in a decline in the world economy in 2020 and a decline in economic growth of up to 3% (IMF 2020). Thus, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 has made human life suffer, both in the health, economic, environmental, cultural and social sectors as well as tourism in all parts of the world.

The island of Bali is known for tourism as evidenced by many studies, one of which is historical tourism, cultural tourism, natural tourism, study of Bali tourism theory, and a study of tourist villages were also severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be seen from the number of employees who were terminated from work during April 2020, there were 800 people and there were 46,000 employees who were rested at home. In May 2020, the number of cases of work relationship termination was 2,189 people, while employees who were rested at home were 65,594 people (Merdeka.com 2020).

The existence of Indonesian government policies, such as 'Large-Scale Social Restrictions' and 'the Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities' with the aim of reducing the spread of COVID -19 from both imported cases and local transmissions (Kompastv.com 2020), but on the other hand it is getting to add to the economic pain of the people who have been working in the tourism sector. For Bali tourism, COVID -19 has had a major impact on the number of hotel room occupancy, so that the hotel sector in Bali has experienced cash flow difficulties and significant losses. This condition has an impact on decreasing the ability to pay obligations to banks, taxes, labour contributions, medical fees and operational costs which include employee salaries, suppliers of raw materials, electricity, water, telephone and so on.

The decline in the number of hotel visits in Bali during the COVID -19 pandemic was also caused by the low number of visits from backpacker tourists. Most of the backpacker tourists travel with a lot of time to pursue their hobbies, so it becomes a popular choice (Chang 2009). Backpacker tourists usually look for alternatives to get what they want and do things differently from mass tourism, so they are a sub-group that is separated from mass tourism who are trying to find a more complete experience (Currie et al. 2011). The decline in transportation costs and the growth of communication media via the internet, have also made backpacking tours continue to increase (Maritha 2010).

In Bali, backpacker tourists generally choose to live in the Kuta Beach area which is known as a symbol of the sparkling Bali with its beautiful beaches, nightlife, cultural uniqueness and customs, so that it becomes an attraction for backpackers to settle in Bali (Kompasiana.com 2015). Backpacker tourists also have characters who like the authenticity of culture and nature and have a character that wants freedom (Gonçalves et al. 2018), so they often visit heritage tourism objects that contain cultural, spiritual and natural elements and often mingle with the social life of the surrounding community.

The backpackers who live in the area around Kuta Beach, often choose to stay at residents' houses or boarding houses owned by local people. They usually rent a room for two or five people. This phenomenon is quite unique, because backpacker tourists like this choose to live in people's homes at low cost. On the other hand, the increasing number of backpacker tourists of this type will also have an impact on the losses of the Bali government, especially in terms of hotel and restaurant tax revenues (Radarbali.com 2018). This study is expected to see the impact of COVID-19 on the level of backpacker tourist visits in Bali and the implications of these visits for the economic income of local communities and the Balinese government in general.

1. Literature Review

Studies on backpacker tourists and their impact on the economic and social life of local communities have been carried out by many experts. In addition, studies on tourism and disasters or outbreaks have been studied by several previous researchers. Menuh explains that local people really expect the arrival of backpacker tourists who are able to make the community's economic equality in the tourism industry (Menuh 2015). This is because backpacker tourists prefer cheap accommodation, local restaurants and leasing private transportation such as motorbikes owned by local people. Even so, the negative impacts that are caused also need to be considered, such as the tendency to like to consume alcoholic drinks and visit nightlife and attendance without using a tour guide tends to violate regulations.

According to Yakushiji who conducted research in Thailand, he explained that in less developed countries, backpacker tourists had a positive impact on the economy of the people at the lower levels (Yakushiji 2010). The attitudes and behaviour of backpacker tourists make local people more empowered. However, there are also negative impacts, namely the behaviour of backpacker tourists who like to drink excessively, sexual behaviour and using drugs are a threat to the local community.

Findings from Maritha who conducted a study on the phenomenon of backpacker tourists in Yogyakarta, explained that tourist tourists are dominated by women aged between 20-30 years with status as students and university students from European countries. They travel individually using the guidebook to plan their trip and prefer to stay in cheap accommodation and enjoy local specialties. On average they stay for 5 days with a budget of Rp. 1.7 million by allocating their budget for sightseeing (26.47%), accommodation (25.22%), food & beverages (22.56%), shopping (9.48%), transportation (9.16%), entertainment (3.58%) and others (3.53%) (Maritha 2010).

Tourism is a business that is very vulnerable to potential crises that come from various things, including external shocks that are inherently unpredictable, so that they cannot prepare for the crisis. At least, that is the explanation of Hosie about the relationship between tourism and the crisis. Both of them further explained that HRD is an important aspect of well-structured and well-executed preparations for crisis management, so there needs to be a special emphasis on implementing HRD through the HRM service function in suggesting how it can be integrated with tourism businesses (Hosie 2008).

Gossling provides an explanation of the impact of the corona virus which has become a world opponent, because there is no vaccine and limited medical capacity to treat disease, non-medical efforts are the main way to overcome the pandemic. One of them is with global travel restrictions and the recommendation to stay at home which resulted in the worst economic growth since World War II, thus affecting more than 90% of the world's population not to hold public gatherings and community mobility and tourism activities, which mostly stopped in March 2020 (Gössling *et al.* 2020).

There is a unique finding from Qiu, that during the pandemic there have been unique efforts by local communities by encouraging younger residents to contribute to financing risk reduction, because they are more digitally savvy and connected to the internet more often than older residents. The younger generation is more likely to access the latest information about the pandemic crisis in real time. Thus, during the Covid-19 outbreak, local governments and tourism organizations must involve young people who tend to be more motivated and knowledgeable, in crisis recovery actions after the pandemic (Qiu *et al.* 2020).

According to Jamal, the phenomenon of the COVID -19 outbreak since December 2019 which started in Wuhan China and has not ended until now, should be an important lesson for the world community, because disease outbreaks and other pandemics will become something that is increasingly happening (Jamal, Budke 2020). This is due to an increase in the number of trips and the ease of access to tourist destinations around the world. Thus, the impact of health problems due to outbreaks in the world of tourism must be managed by paying attention to health facilities and accurate information for visitors and local residents about the direct and indirect impacts of the outbreak.

2. Research Methods and Theoretical Studies

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study approach. Qualitative research methods are carried out because in general these methods are closely related to the emphasis on processes and meanings that are not measured in terms of quantity, prioritizing the nature of reality that is socially constructed, the close relationship between the researcher and the subject under study, prioritizing value-laden nature and trying to find answers to questions related to how social experiences arise as well as their meaning (Lincoln 2009). Because this study was only conducted on a few objects, this study also cannot be called a collective case study that examines more general cases (Stake 2009).

The study, which was completed in March 2021, focuses on backpacker tourists who stay at the "Kak Garden Inn Kuta" homestay in Kuta Bali, motorbike rental "Dewa Motor Kuta", WarungMade's Kuta who are simultaneously willing to be the object of research. Interviews were conducted with backpacker tourists who were still in Kuta Bali by means of incidental sampling. This is because the meeting with tourists is accidental, and the position of the informant moves.

Interviews were also conducted in the homestay lobby with an open space with the permission of the business owner. The online interview method was very dominant in this study, because the questionnaire method used did not work as expected. One reason is related to the identity and strategy of a business, so it is awkward in giving answers frankly. Those interviewed were company policy holders and casual employees as well as

backpacker tourists whose names partially requested anonymity. In conducting data search, this study also used literature review and webinars.

Theoretically, the characteristics of backpackers are of course different from tourists who tend to use the services of travel agents, while backpackers take tours and organize them individually. On the other hand, tourists always ensure a large budget in their travels, while backpackers pay attention to travel budgets that are extremely limited. Tourists in travelling always choose expensive and luxurious accommodation, while backpackers prefer cheap and comfortable accommodation. In travelling, backpackers take more time than ordinary tourists to enjoy tourist attractions (Chang 2009).

On the other hand, backpackers have their own ideology, namely: travelling on a low budget, meeting different people, being or feeling free, being independent and travelling for a long time. Thus, the general goal of backpackers travelling is to have hedonic enjoyment, experience and fulfil their desires in simple and affordable circumstances (Scott *et al.* 2008). The pros and cons in people's lives regarding their presence during the pandemic have become a polemic in themselves. However, backpackers choose to keep on travelling as they have scheduled before and continue to have social interactions with each other (Welk 2004).

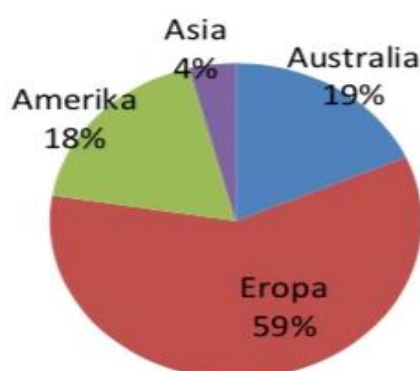
3. Result and Discussion

3.1. International Backpacker Activities in Kuta Bali

Bali is one of the areas most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, because most of its people rely on the tourism sector which is integrated into their daily lives. The drop in hotel occupancy by up to 40% and even touching the 0% mark, has had a significant impact on the continuity of the hotel business, restaurants and other tourism businesses, so that the absorption of labour is very small, both from managerial to manual labour in the field. However, there are good opportunities in the backpacker tourism sector, because during the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities are still ongoing in Bali. In January 2020, backpacker tourist visits reached 530 people, even more than 401 people in the same period in 2019. However, in February 2020 it fell to 240 people. This number is smaller than the same period in 2019, namely 483 people. As of March 2020, the total number of backpacker tourist visits is still around 190 people. The level of tourist visits by backpackers is still said to be in a state that can provide income, but not like before.

The phenomenon of backpacker tourism in Bali, which still exists in the midst of the COVID -19 pandemic, is more due to the Indonesian government policy that provides discounts of up to 50% for routes to and from 10 main tourist destinations that are sluggish due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of these destinations. is the island of Bali (Katadata.co.id 2020). In addition, the continued operation of backpacker tourism in Bali is also due to the large number of foreign nationals living in Bali, even though it is in a pandemic condition. These backpacker tourists adhere to the rules of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, and they are very updated on information related to health protocols made by the government.

Figure 1. Distribution of backpacker tourists in Bali by continent of origin



Source: processed by researchers

There are 59% of the number of backpacker tourists in Bali who come from the continent of Europe with their main goals and interests are curiosity and love for things related to local traditions and culture. As for the number of backpacker tourists in Bali who come from the continent of Australia, the number is 19%. They are generally very good at mingling with local people and really like the beauty of the beach. The American continent contributes 18% of the number of backpacker tourists in Bali. The main goal is to adventure and seek freedom in

enjoying the beauty of Kuta Beach, which is known as a symbol of the sparkle of Bali. The remaining 4% are backpacker tourists who come from the Asian Continent with the largest country of origin being the Philippines. They really like the customs that exist around Kuta Beach which are considered to have similarities with the culture in their home country (Firly, interview 08 November 2020).

One of the backpacker tourists from the European Continent who was still dominant in Bali during the pandemic was Russia, because there were no flights to and from that country, which had already implemented a lockdown. While they are in Bali, the activities they do are doing yoga at the homestay, doing nature tours by visiting waterfalls in the Buleleng area, doing water tours such as swimming and surfing. They also often do mix martial arts (MMA), which is a type of sport that combines techniques from various branches of martial arts to immobilize enemies. Another reason is because of the friendly nature and smiling attitude of the local Balinese people, making them impressed and wanting to stay long in Bali. The following is the recognition of a backpacker tourist from Russia,

"I like Bali, because the people are very friendly and like to smile, that's why I was very impressed here and wanted to stay here longer. Of course, I really like Bali and want to always come back here someday if there is another chance" (Duscha, interview 08 November 2020).

As for the backpacker tourists from Australia, they usually plan their trip a year in advance, so that when the pandemic occurs, they will still go to Bali. For them, Bali is their second home, so Bali has become a familiar place to them. They generally always hope to be able to come and stay in Bali for a long time. They prefer to travel to Bali because the travel costs are very cheap, Bali is known to be safe and comfortable, Bali has a unique culture, the friendliness of its local people and the beach area is their favourite place. Their hope for the Indonesian government is that the visa extension service or residence permit during the pandemic can be easily and quickly accessed. Following are excerpts of interviews with backpacker tourists from Australia.

"We like to travel here, because the costs are so cheap. Bali is very safe and comfortable. Bali has a unique culture and Balinese people are very friendly. My hope is that there will be special treatment related to a residence permit that is quickly and easily accessible" (William, interview 08 November 2020).

3.2. Homestay Conditions in Kuta Bali during the Pandemic

One of the homestays that is extremely popular with backpackers visiting Kuta Bali is Kak Garden Inn. The homestay has a Balinese architectural design with a minimalist concept. Its strategic location, close to Kuta Beach, attracts backpackers to stay at the homestay. Homestay Kak Garden Inn has 25 rooms equipped with wifi. There is a garden around the homestay, so that it makes tourists feel comfortable in the middle of the heat and noise of Kuta Beach.

The homestay provides low prices and very friendly staff service. The location of the homestay is very close to the airport, so it is a special attraction. For backpacker tourists, they can work while travelling in Bali with a backpacker style as a web designer. For them, the homestay provides a very satisfying inspiration than in America (Cienca Sonia, interview 12 November 2020).

During the pandemic, Homestay Kak Garden Inn also felt the impact. At the beginning of the emergence of the virus in Wuhan, the manager only estimated that the impact would only be in China. After hearing information regarding the presence of an Indonesian citizen who was infected with the epidemic, the management still thought it was normal. Because they consider it normal and will soon recover quickly. This is based on the fact that at the time of the Bali Bombing I, tourism experienced a decline in visitors and did not move back for long (Suarka, interview 12 November 2020).

Over time, when the COVID -19 pandemic outbreak took many victims in Bali, management took steps to tighten guest reception and implement health protocols. From the entrance of the homestay to all rooms and rooms, every day is thoroughly disinfected. The management also added a place for washing hands for newly arrived tourists, always using a mask or faceshield for everyone and enforcing a rapid test and thermo-gun for tourists and staff (Suarka, interview 12 November 2020).

As an illustration, during the first four months of the peak of the pandemic in Indonesia, the occupancy of the homestay decreased by 30%. Even so, the management did not lay off employees, so they were still working as usual. But before the pandemic, homestay employees usually received service money. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, management did not provide service money to employees (Suarka, interview 12 November 2020).

For backpacker tourists who live in these homestays, their movements are extremely limited. Backpacker activities every morning is doing yoga and meditation. Even among them, they are deeply steeped in the ritual, so that some backpacker tourists change their diet to become a vegetarian. Apart from meditating through yoga,

they also do sun-bathe and spend the rest on their laptops. Regarding eating and drinking services, they are familiar with online services. However, the homestay has also prepared a pantry (small kitchen) so that tourists can cook by themselves according to their wishes (Suarka, interview 12 November 2020).

Figure 2. Homestay Kak Garden Inn, Kuta Bali



Photo source: Putu Eka Wirawan

Until the end of 2020, Homestay kak Garden Inn Kuta Bali still accepts backpacker tourists, because most of them are trapped and cannot return to their home countries. In order to get a large number of tourists, the management took a policy by lowering the rental price, so that the room rental price at that time touched one million rupiah for one month. This policy turned out to make backpacker tourists feel more at home in the homestay (Suarka, interview 12 November 2020).

Most of the tourists who stay at the homestay are 20 to 30 years old, they are vloggers, web designers, travelers, video creators, online workers and students. Most of the backpackers from Europe and Australia stay at the homestay. For backpacker tourists who come from the continent of Europe, Bali is their favorite place because of the cold weather in their country. They also really like Balinese people who are very friendly and love to smile, so Bali is the place they are looking for and a paradise for them.

3.3. Portrait of Restaurants in Kuta Bali during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Made'sWarung in Kuta Bali is a favorite spot for international backpackers. The restaurant is located close to Kuta Beach, so many local and foreign tourists also visit. There it sells Indonesian and International dishes at very affordable prices and is supported by Balinese architecture and very friendly service. The foods most preferred by backpackers are fried rice, fried noodles and Balinese mixed rice.

Made'sWarung Kuta experienced the impact during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the outbreak in Wuhan, managers thought it would only affect Chinese society. However, after the outbreak had infected Indonesian citizens, the management began to think further. After the government declared several restrictions, such as travel and tourism restrictions, closure of tourist objects, the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic began to be felt by restaurants throughout the Kuta Bali area.

In order to reduce operating costs, restaurant owners took a policy to lay off employees during the pandemic. This was done in order to be able to pay for suppliers, restaurant maintenance and electricity. The direct result of COVID-19 also has an impact on the decline in occupancy rates by up to 0%. Another impact is that they have to lose several employees who are like their own family. The management has also reduced employees by issuing time off and even temporarily laid off, because the restaurant is also temporarily closed to prevent the spread of the virus (Metri, interview 15 November 2020).

When the pandemic peaked, Made'sWarung remained open by serving online orders, even ordering customers could directly order via telephone and pick them up directly to the restaurant. The health protocol applied by Made'sWarung is in accordance with government directives, such as tourists who pick up food are encouraged to wash their hands, check body temperature, have a glass barrier between consumers and waiters and carry out disinfectants in the waiting room. Restaurant income from an online service system can provide income to pay for the salaries of employees who are only given basic salaries and can pay for electricity (Metri, interview 15 November 2020).

Figure 3. Made's Warung in Kuta Bali



Photo Source: Putu Eka Wirawan

The strategy that Made Warung Made during the peak of the pandemic was to collaborate with homestays that still accept tourists, especially backpackers' food needs. Even the shop owners provide shuttle services to make it easier for tourists and limit crowds. Increased promotion through social media and websites is the main goal of these stalls so that after the pandemic, these stalls are increasingly recognized by the wider community. Promotions for tourists, such as lunch and dinner packages, have also been done to attract tourists.

After entering the new normal period, Warung Made serves tourists from 09.00 - 22.00 WITA with a restaurant capacity that can accommodate up to 60 people with Balinese nuances, so as to attract tourists to enjoy Balinese specialties that have become an idol of backpacker tourists. Tourists who come are always greeted friendly and accompanied by Balinese songs. Extremely limited parking is not an obstacle for tourists to stop by the shop. The owner's hope for the government is to provide assistance to the community, both basic necessities and masks, with an easy and fast process (Metri, interview 15 November 2020).

3.4. The Fate of Motorbike Rental in a Pandemic

Motorbike rental is a promising business in backpacker tourism in Bali. In a normal situation, the motorbike rental that backpackers subscribe to in the Kuta area is around 20 motorbikes a day. In fact, most backpacker tourists rent a motorbike for one week to one month. The type of motorbike variant that is rented is an automatic motorbike, because it is easier to drive by all tourists. At the beginning of the emergence of the corona virus in Indonesia, the rental business was still normal, even the owner did not think that his business would fall apart at the end of 2020.

The Indonesian Government's appeal Number 11 of 2020 concerning the Temporary Prohibition of Foreigners from Entering the Territory of the Republic of Indonesia (Laoly 2020), is starting to have an impact on the motorbike rental business in Bali. Due to this regulation, several countries in the world are unable to travel to Indonesia, thus closing the entrance to the visit of foreign tourists to Bali. However, this rule has exceptions to: (1) foreigners holding limited stay permits and permanent residency permits; (2). foreigners holding diplomatic visas and service visas; foreigners holding diplomatic residence permits and official residence permits; (3). medical aid and support personnel, food and humanitarian reasons; (4). conveyance crew; and (5). foreigners who will work on national strategic projects (Laoly 2020).

The decline in interest in renting two-wheeled vehicles was very pronounced from April 2020. Within a day, the motorbike rental business only sells 4 motorbikes a day and discounts are already applied to customer tourists. Under normal conditions, motorbike rental within a week usually has to be paid Rp. 500,000.00, but in pandemic conditions the price is valid for a period of a month. In fact, one of the partners who has only tried to open a motorbike rental business for a year is not operating, so they provide one month's free rental to backpackers who are trapped in Bali during the pandemic (Dewa, interview 15 November 2020).

Due to worsening conditions due to the COVID -19 pandemic, motorbike rental owners were forced to lay off several employees, which originally numbered only eight to two. They are only paid based on the percentage of vehicle rental, so their income is below the district minimum wage average. Several vehicles have also been sold to cover the bank's outstanding debt, so that the number of their motorbikes is only 10 units which originally owned 25 motorbikes. Regarding the government's recommendation, they have also implemented a very strict

Health protocol. They have implemented vehicle disinfectants, used masks, and made hand washing stations (Dewa, interview 15 November 2020).

Figure 4. One of the motorbike rental businesses for backpackers “Dewa Motor Kuta”



Photo Source: Putu Eka Wirawan

The policies carried out by motorbike rental owners during the pandemic also changed, namely reducing business opening hours. Initially it was opened from 08.00 to 20.00 WITA, then changed to only operate until 18.00 WITA. Employees who come to work, are treated in turn every day and bonuses are no longer valid. The most difficult thing for motorbike rental owners is the maintenance of the engine, which must always be checked for its condition.

The strategy taken by motorbike rental owners during the pandemic is to collaborate with homestays that still accept backpacker tourists. They usually give special discounts to tourists who are going to rent. During a pandemic, motorbike rental owners make videos for promotion, create websites and be active on social media to increase tourist attractiveness and make it easier to receive rent from consumers (Dewa, interview 15 November 2020).

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic disaster has made tourism, especially in Bali, totally die. However, the existence of backpacker tourists who have planned their holidays before the pandemic and some have settled in Bali is an incredibly unique phenomenon and cannot be underestimated. A backpacker who survives in Bali with a limited budget, actually benefits businesses that are managed by the community with sufficient capital. One of them is the homestay where they stay. Motorbike rental entrepreneurs and restaurant owners also take advantage of the homestay by working together.

Backpackers in the Kuta area strictly adhere to government regulations in implementing health protocols. During the peak of the pandemic, they mostly stayed in homestays with their main activities being yoga, sun-bathing, swimming, and working on laptops. One of the hopes of backpacker tourists during the pandemic is that the government provides convenience in extending visas with an easy and fast system. Thus, backpacker tourists have greatly contributed to the economy of local communities during the global pandemic.

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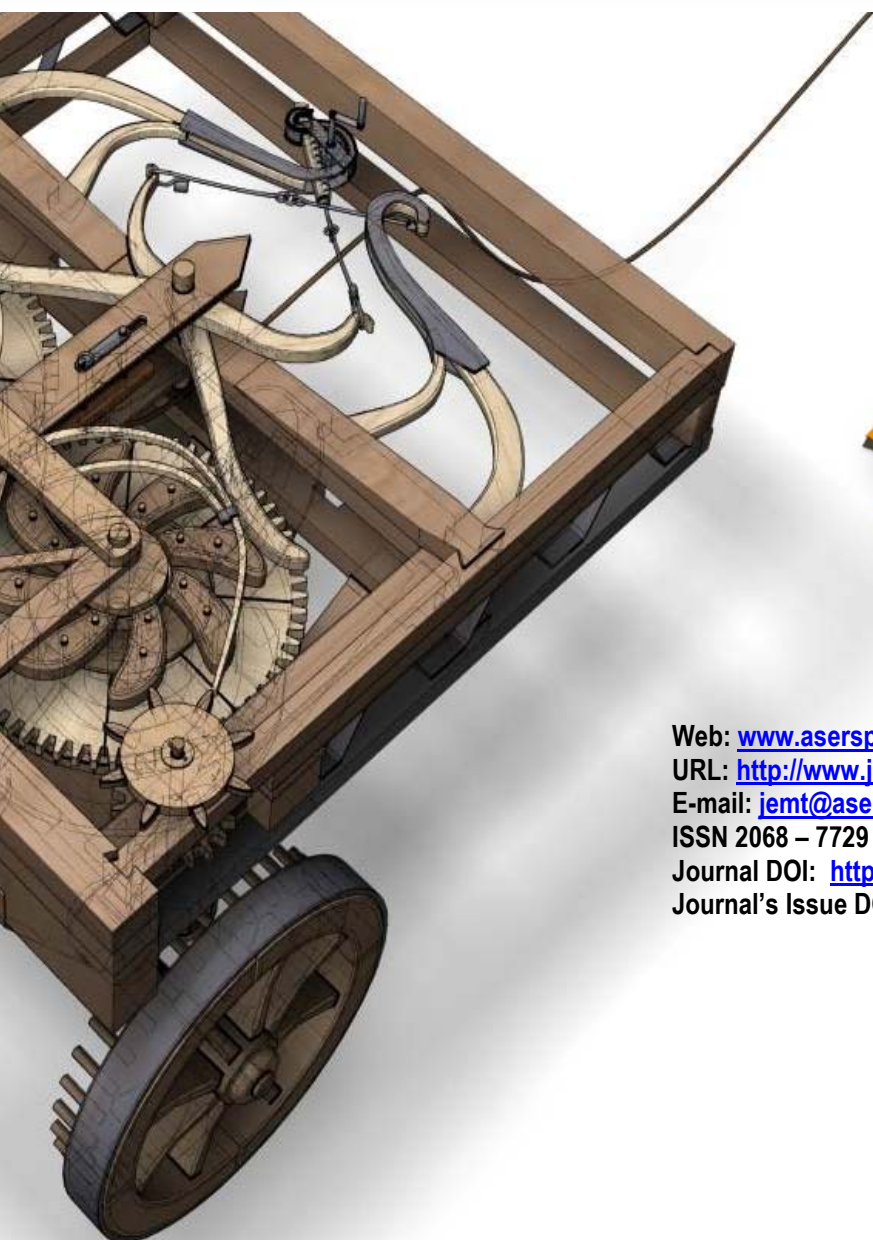
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