

BALI TOURISM FACES A STEADY DECLINE AS GROWING PROBLEMS LIMIT THE ISLAND'S APPEAL



Bali tourism is big business with approximately 2.5 million visitors a year flocking to the hotels of the southern tourist resorts, however while this should be good news for the island the tourism industry is in fact causing some devastating problems. If Bali does not act fast and find effective solutions then the reputation and appeal of this destination could be permanently damaged.

Infrastructure and garbage issues plight the island on a grand scale.

Bali is now burning with the waste that is being generated from this overcrowded region and the debris is littering the beauty spots and attractions that are meant to draw in the tourists in the first place. The national park is aptly described as a "forest of garbage" by Wayan Gendo Suardana, an environmental activist wishing to preserve the natural beauty and essence of the true Bali. With such a large garbage problem and the increased congestion and pollution on the roads surrounding the southern resort, it is clear that Bali simply cannot cope. They have become trapped in a vicious circle where the more they try to develop the island and improve the industry and revenue the worse the island gets and the less appealing it becomes.

What is the solution for this fading island paradise?

The argument over the best course of action to take to improve Bali tourism is split between two drastically different options - containment and expansion. Environmentalists may prefer the idea of containment because it potentially preserves the rest of the island and keeps the problem centralised however if containment is to truly work without making the problems worse - as is the problem at the moment - officials will need to devise some realistic proposals and currently they are in short supply.

Those that favour expansion appreciate the need to take the pressure off the south and decrease the intensity of the problems there. There are plans being developed for better transport links across the island and the development of new resorts, for example Firmansyah Rahim from the Ministry of Tourism has suggested the idea of creating "strategic tourist areas" in the North and East with the added benefits of new airports and train links. While this could be a potential solution for the South and an appealing prospect for many tourists, there is also the chance that this could lead to the problem spreading and the rest of Bali losing its identity and beauty, a worry for Wayan Gendo Suardana and many like him.

Is there a simple, beneficial solution to the problem? Is there a possible compromise to appease both parties?

Unfortunately the issues that have been highlighted by both the Bali tourism experts and the environmentalists involved in this problem have led to more questions than answers. Both sides make seemingly strong cases for their arguments and it is difficult to see where the best answer lies. The most positive thing to take from this discussion at the moment is that at least Bali is aware of

the situation it has created and it making some attempt to rectify it. Whether those measures will be successful or make the problem worse remains to be seen.

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