



Nitisastra as Reference for Tourist Guidance in Bali

Ida Bagus Nyoman Mertayasa*

ABSTRACT

One example of responsible tourism behavior is respecting local culture and traditions. This includes avoiding the dismissal of local customs, valuing and supporting the preservation of traditional arts, actively participating in the preservation and development of local traditions, and demonstrating a positive attitude and coexistence with others. At a minimum, tourists visiting various regions in Indonesia are expected to exhibit good tourism behavior. Gradually, this can set an example for other tourists, both domestic and international, who are also vacationing in Indonesia. The diversity of cultures (multiculturalism) is an inevitability that must be embraced by Indonesian society. Being a pluralistic and multicultural nation, Indonesia is susceptible to conflicts involving religion, culture, race, and customs. Such tensions often arise due to the intersection of diverse cultures, interactions between individuals and groups with differing perspectives, and varying levels of knowledge and understanding. The teachings of Nitisastra provide valuable insights into addressing these issues by emphasizing the importance of self-management, respect for knowledge, and ethical behavior. According to Nitisastra, the pursuit of knowledge and adherence to moral principles are central to responsible leadership and personal growth. For tourists, this translates into respecting local norms, practicing humility, and contributing to the welfare of the community. The Nitisastra perspective teaches that true wealth lies in knowledge and ethical conduct, which should guide interactions with local communities and the environment. These principles, when applied to tourism, can help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism and promote a more harmonious relationship between visitors and the local population.

Keywords: Nitisastra, guidance, tourist's behavior, Bali.

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*UD. Yadnya Grosir
lbmertayasa21@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Society refers to a group of individuals living together within a specific area, engaging in mutual interactions, and adhering to shared norms and customs. According to Soerjono Soekanto (2006: 22),¹ society comprises people who live collectively, produce culture, and possess identity, traditions, attitudes, habits, and a sense of unity. The Balinese society, as a group of people who have inhabited the island of Bali for a substantial period, has evolved to establish its own rules and culture. The uniqueness of Balinese culture is renowned worldwide. Since the promotion of tourism began—dating back to the colonial era, the Royal Pita Maha period, and continuing into post-independence Indonesia—a myriad of tourists have visited the island. However, the influx of tourists has not always occurred without issues. Occasionally, social tensions arise due to cultural

differences between tourists and the local community.

As tourists, it is essential to respect all the rules and customs that govern the destinations they visit. Each region and its communities uphold distinct norms and traditions, many of which remain well-preserved today. The presence of diverse societal groups with unique identities, beliefs, religions, and customary practices often leads to conflicts, which can manifest openly (manifest conflict) or remain latent (hidden conflict). To address such conflicts resulting from these differences, it is imperative to foster tolerant behavior, mutual respect, and acceptance of diversity. This approach should be balanced and not excessive, ensuring harmony within society.²

One example of responsible tourism behavior is respecting local culture and traditions. This includes avoiding the dismissal of local customs, valuing and supporting the preservation of

traditional arts, actively participating in the preservation and development of local traditions, and demonstrating a positive attitude and coexistence with others. At a minimum, tourists visiting various regions in Indonesia are expected to exhibit good tourism behavior. Gradually, this can set an example for other tourists, both domestic and international, who are also vacationing in Indonesia. The diversity of cultures (multiculturalism) is an inevitability that must be embraced by Indonesian society. Being a pluralistic and multicultural nation, Indonesia is susceptible to conflicts involving religion, culture, race, and customs. Such tensions often arise due to the intersection of diverse cultures, interactions between individuals and groups with differing perspectives, and varying levels of knowledge and understanding.^{3,4}

Nitisastra, as a piece of Hindu literature, can serve as a valuable reference for formulating “do and do not” guidelines

for tourists, particularly in Bali. According to its etymological meaning, *niti* refers to organizing for the better in terms of morals and ethics. At the same time, *sastra* translates to lessons of dharma or sacred teachings and religious studies (as defined in the Balinese dictionary by Anandakusuma, 1986). Nitisastra is a part of traditional Hindu literature that conveys values of wisdom and ethics, guiding actions aligned with dharma (truth and moral obligations) in daily life. This teaching is particularly relevant for application in tourism, where it can help maintain harmony between humans, the environment, and local culture.

This article seeks to outline the key points within Nitisastra that can be utilized as guidelines for traveling in Bali. The object of this study is Nitisastra, chosen because it is widely recognized as a literary work offering guidance on wisdom and ethics, encompassing principles for acting in accordance with dharma in daily life. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through literature research. The findings are presented narratively, supported by descriptive paragraphs and relevant imagery.

AN OVERVIEW OF NITISASTRA

Nitisastra is a part of ancient Hindu literature that encompasses teachings on morality, wisdom, and life ethics. In Sanskrit, the term *niti* translates to wisdom or proper conduct, while *sastra* refers to sacred texts or teachings. Nitisastra focuses on guiding individuals toward an ideal way of life, emphasizing appropriate behavior in social relationships, interaction with the environment, and fulfilling duties based on the principles of dharma (righteousness).

The text of Nitisastra is often utilized as an ethical guide in societal life, particularly in decision-making, leadership, and fostering harmony among humans, nature, and spirituality. One of its core values is the importance of balancing actions (*karma*), wisdom (*jnana*), and devotion (*bhakti*) to achieve a harmonious existence. The primary discussions in Nitisastra are generally categorized into four key points: (1) ethics and morality, (2) leadership and governance, (3) balance with nature, and (4) social harmony.⁵

This section explores how Nitisastra guides proper behavior, both as individuals and as members of society. The ethical teachings include principles such as politeness, honesty, self-control, and respect for others. In the context of leadership, Nitisastra offers directives for leaders to act fairly, wisely, and responsibly toward the welfare of their communities. An ideal leader is portrayed as someone who prioritizes the interests of the people over personal gain. Through these teachings, Nitisastra remains a timeless reference for cultivating moral character, effective leadership, and sustainable harmony within society and the natural world.

One of the other significant messages in Nitisastra is the emphasis on maintaining harmony with nature. This principle is particularly relevant in modern contexts, especially concerning environmental sustainability. In terms of social harmony, Nitisastra underscores the importance of fostering positive relationships with others by observing proper etiquette, showing empathy, and avoiding conflict.^{7,8}

RECENT TOURISM PHENOMENON IN BALI

A recent viral incident in Bali involved a pair of foreign tourists clashing with local *Pecalang* (traditional Balinese security officers). The conflict arose when the tourists refused to comply with a restriction preventing them from passing through a road that was closed due to a Melasti procession, a ceremonial ritual in preparation for the Balinese Day of Silence (*Nyepi*). The altercation occurred on Sunday, March 19, 2023, in the Labuan Sait area, Pecatu, South Kuta, Badung Regency, Bali.

This incident is particularly concerning as it disrupts the peace and order of the local community. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case of foreign tourists behaving disrespectfully while vacationing in Indonesia, especially in Bali. Other common instances of misconduct include ignoring traffic regulations while riding motorcycles, violating cultural or tourism rules, and engaging in conflicts with other tourists.

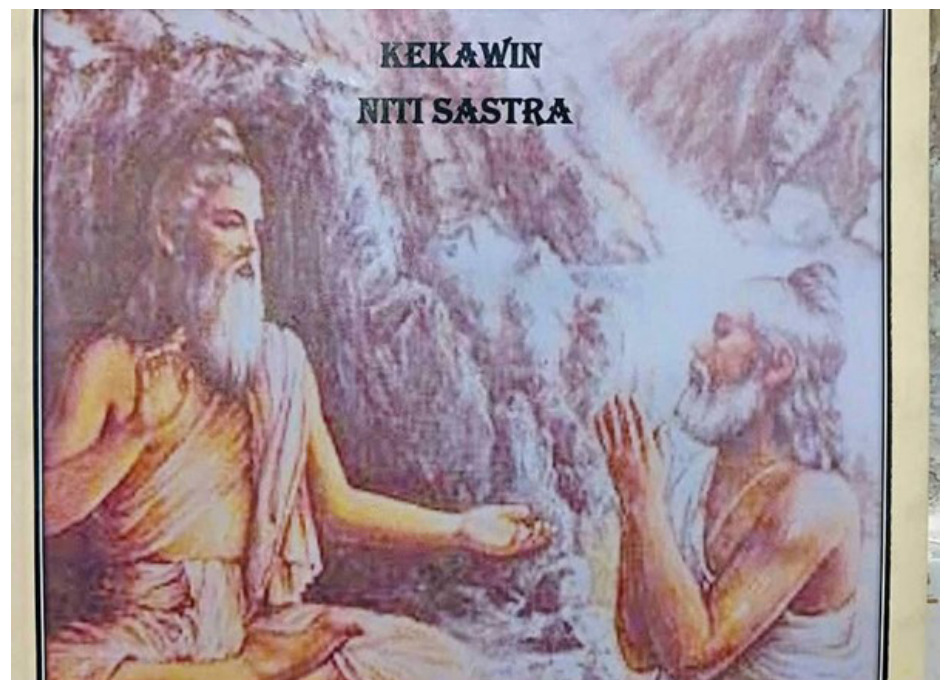


Figure 1. ⁶ The text of Nitisastra is often utilized as an ethical guide in societal life, particularly in decision-making, leadership, and fostering harmony among humans, nature, and spirituality.

Such occurrences highlight the growing perception that tourists must adhere to local rules and regulations to avoid becoming “disruptors” by disregarding established norms. Violations not only harm the tourists themselves but also negatively impact the local community. This observation emphasizes the necessity of implementing clear guidelines for responsible tourism behavior.

Additionally, Bali’s commitment to realizing its ecotourism vision must remain a priority. Responsible tourism practices, such as maintaining cleanliness, are essential. Simple actions like carrying reusable water bottles to reduce plastic waste and disposing of trash properly can significantly enhance the comfort and cleanliness of tourist destinations.

Beyond encouraging good tourism behavior, continuous efforts are being made to educate tourists about the “do’s and don’ts” of traveling in Indonesia, particularly in Bali. This initiative aims to foster a mutual understanding between tourists and local communities, ensuring a harmonious and sustainable tourism experience.

UNETHICAL TOURIST BEHAVIOR: SOLVING SOLUTIONS FROM NITISASTRA

Unethical behavior among tourists can be analyzed through the lens of Nitisastra, particularly in how individuals perceive Artha (wealth). According to Nitisastra, the most enduring form of Artha—one that cannot be stolen—is knowledge. Compared to those who merely possess material wealth, individuals with knowledge are more respected and remembered. Knowledge equips a person to adapt to any environment and thrive, unlike someone lacking intellectual resources.

However, lacking knowledge does not equate to being foolish. It merely highlights the need for more diligent and focused learning. The primary barrier to acquiring knowledge often lies within oneself—namely, laziness. Beyond laziness, other obstacles may include birth circumstances and external factors. According to Kekawin Nitisastra Sargah XIV, sloka 3 and 4, there are six primary impediments or “enemies” to gaining knowledge:



Figure 2. ¹² A recent viral incident in Bali involved a pair of foreign tourists clashing with local Pecalang (traditional Balinese security officers)

1. Negligence
2. Habitual misconduct or dishonesty
3. Illness or physical weakness
4. Youthful indulgence in lust or promiscuity
5. Persistent poverty
6. Gambling

These six obstacles hinder individuals from acquiring knowledge, as they corrupt the mind. Knowledge can only be attained through a pure and clear mind, free from these distractions.

When interpreted in the context of Bali’s tourism challenges, these teachings underline the importance of educating tourists. While tourists pay for goods and services during their visit, this transactional nature of tourism should not serve as a justification for ignoring established rules. Disregarding regulations—especially actions that disrupt local security and order—is unacceptable.^{9 10 11}

The principle drawn from Nitisastra emphasizes that respect for knowledge and ethical conduct should prevail in all interactions, including tourism. Tourists must understand that their financial expenditure does not exempt them from respecting local customs, norms, and community well-being.

Nitisastra is a text in Hindu teachings that provides guidance on leadership (Suhardana, 2008:5). The concept of leadership in Nitisastra is not limited to state leadership but also includes self-leadership, family leadership, and

community leadership. This text also teaches values such as responsibility, social ethics, respect, appreciation, discipline, and self-control, both in thought, speech, and action.

To achieve a harmonious life, individuals are expected to maintain good relationships with the natural environment, fellow humans, and the Creator. This harmony can be realized through the alignment of thought, action, and speech. The teachings emphasize the importance of balance in daily life to foster peace and collective happiness.

Understanding and applying the teachings of Nitisastra should begin with oneself to more effectively serve as an example to others before engaging with the broader community. Three main aspects of the self need to be purified, known as Tri Kaya Parisudha, which are Manacika Parisudha (thinking positively and rightly), Wacika Parisudha (speaking kindly), and Kayika Parisudha (performing good deeds). When an individual can manage these three aspects well, leadership qualities will naturally emerge.^{13 14 15}

Leadership is defined as the ability of an individual to coordinate and communicate with their members. A leader plays a foundational role in the development of an organization or state. Without a competent leader who serves as a role model, it is difficult for an organization or state to achieve its collective goals. The relationship



Figure 3. ¹⁶The concept of leadership in Nitisastra is not limited to state leadership but also includes self-leadership, family leadership, and community leadership.

between the leader and the members is interdependent, where the leader provides guidance and motivates members to act in accordance with the established vision. This interaction becomes an indicator of a leader's success in fulfilling their duties. According to Siagian (1990), leadership within an organization plays a crucial role in influencing the success of the organization, especially in terms of implementation and the performance of its members.

In broad terms, leadership is a process in which an individual influences and sets an example for their members to achieve common goals. In Nitisastra, leadership is regarded as a form of management, emphasizing the importance of moral and ethical values in leadership. By combining these principles, a leader is expected to create harmony within an organization and achieve success through effective coordination and sound management.

Nitisastra can be used as a guide in tourism, particularly in maintaining tourists' behavior. Nitisastra is one of the teachings in traditional Hindu literature that encompasses values of wisdom and ethics, offering guidelines for acting in accordance with dharma (truth and moral obligations) in daily life. These teachings are also relevant to be applied in the context of tourism, especially in

maintaining harmony between humans, the environment, and local cultures.

Self-management is an important point that needs to be emphasized for tourists when visiting Bali. One approach to creating this condition is by selecting the quality of tourists. When clear prerequisites and reputations are established about what is permissible and what is not, it will influence the behavior of tourists both before and during their visit. The government and tourism managers need to prepare clear regulations, along with strict consequences for violations. When these two elements are in place, they will naturally create a situation where responsible tourists are distinguished from irresponsible ones. The firmness of these rules will prevent potential rule-breakers from visiting.

The teachings of Nitisastra emphasize the importance of respecting the traditions and customs of the local community. In the context of tourism, this means that tourists must understand and respect local customs, religious ceremonies, and cultural values. For example, wearing appropriate clothing when visiting places of worship or adhering to the rules in traditional villages.¹⁷

From the perspective of the teachings on maintaining harmonious relationships with nature in Nitisastra, tourists can

implement this by not damaging the environment, reducing plastic waste, and participating in eco-friendly activities such as ecotourism. These actions align with the sustainability principles that have increasingly become a focus in modern tourism.¹⁸

The teachings of Nitisastra underline the need for good behavior, speaking politely, and displaying humility. In tourism, this can be applied by speaking courteously to residents, avoiding disturbances, and showing respect to both fellow tourists and locals. Another guideline from this text teaches not to cause harm to others. Tourists can apply this principle by traveling responsibly, such as choosing accommodations or activities that support the welfare of the local community, avoiding cultural exploitation, and not supporting practices that harm local communities. Tourists not only can enjoy a more meaningful travel experience, but they also contribute to preserving culture and the environment, which is the core of sustainable tourism.

CONCLUSION

The recent incident involving foreign tourists clashing with local Pecalang in Bali highlights the growing concerns about unethical tourist behavior that disrupts local peace and order. This event, alongside similar incidents, underscores the importance of ensuring that tourists adhere to the local rules and regulations during their visits. Such behavior not only harms the tourists themselves but also negatively impacts the local community, leading to the necessity for clear guidelines and stricter enforcement to prevent misconduct. Bali's tourism sector must, therefore, prioritize education and awareness for visitors to foster respect for local customs, traditions, and the environment.

The teachings of *Nitisastra* provide valuable insights into addressing these issues by emphasizing the importance of self-management, respect for knowledge, and ethical behavior. According to *Nitisastra*, the pursuit of knowledge and adherence to moral principles are central to responsible leadership and personal growth. For tourists, this translates into respecting local norms, practicing

humility, and contributing to the welfare of the community. The *Nitisastra* perspective teaches that true wealth lies in knowledge and ethical conduct, which should guide interactions with local communities and the environment. These principles, when applied to tourism, can help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism and promote a more harmonious relationship between visitors and the local population.

Ultimately, Bali's vision of sustainable tourism relies on the collective responsibility of tourists, local communities, and tourism managers. By incorporating the ethical teachings of *Nitisastra* into tourism practices, it is possible to ensure that tourism remains beneficial to both the local community and the environment. Encouraging responsible tourism behavior—through clear regulations, education, and respect for local culture—will contribute to a more sustainable and meaningful tourism experience. Tourists who embrace these values not only enhance their own travel experience but also play a crucial role in preserving Bali's cultural heritage and natural beauty for future generations.

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