
Local Economic Retention in Bali Tourism: the Role of Community-Based Tourism in Reducing Economic Leakage

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Abstract: *study examines the issue of local economic retention in Bali's tourism sector, focusing on the role of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in reducing economic leakage. Although tourism significantly contributes to regional economic growth, a substantial portion of its benefits does not remain within the local economy due to weak economic linkages, reliance on external supply chains, and foreign ownership structures. This research aims to develop an integrated conceptual framework that explains how structural factors namely economic linkages, infrastructure, and destination specialization interact with CBT as a mediating mechanism to enhance local economic retention. The study employs a conceptual qualitative approach using secondary data analysis, synthesizing empirical findings, macroeconomic data, and theoretical perspectives. The findings indicate that while infrastructure development and specialization drive tourism growth, they do not automatically ensure equitable benefit distribution. CBT plays a crucial role in strengthening local participation, promoting local ownership, and enhancing value capture within the community. However, its effectiveness depends on institutional capacity and governance quality. This study highlights the importance of shifting from growth-oriented tourism to a retention-based development approach to achieve more inclusive and sustainable outcomes.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the sectors that plays a crucial role in economic development, particularly in regions that position it as a leading sector such as Bali. The economic structure of Bali indicates that the tourism sector contributes significantly to regional economic growth as well as to locally generated revenue (Husein & Aisyah, 2023). In addition, the development of the tourism sector is associated with increased economic activity and employment absorption, although its impact on employment is not always directly significant (Ardin Hutama et al., 2023). In a broader context, tourism is viewed as a sector capable of driving economic transformation

and higher-quality development, particularly through its contributions to income, investment, and the development of other sectors (Li et al., 2025). However, Bali's economic dependence on the tourism sector also reveals a degree of vulnerability, especially in the face of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a substantial impact on the regional economy (Sanjaya et al., 2024).

Despite its significant economic contributions, various studies indicate that the economic benefits of tourism are not always fully enjoyed by local communities. One widely discussed issue is tourism leakage, a condition in which a portion of the revenue generated from tourism activities does not remain within the local economy because it is used to pay for external goods, services, and interests (Chaitanya et al., 2026). This leakage can occur through various mechanisms, such as the importation of goods, payments to external parties, and business ownership structures that are not locally based. This condition limits the real contribution of tourism to local communities, even though at a macro level the sector continues to contribute to economic growth. Furthermore, studies also show that the benefits of tourism are not always evenly distributed and may exacerbate inequality if not managed in an inclusive manner (Chaitanya et al., 2026).

In the context of sustainable development, it is essential to ensure that revenue from the tourism sector is retained and provides benefits to local communities. The concept of economic linkages is particularly relevant in this regard, where the use of local goods and services can enhance the economic impact of tourism at the local level (Mtapuri et al., 2022). One approach discussed in the literature is strengthening the relationship between the tourism sector and the agricultural sector through agro-tourism. (Zhang & Omar, 2025) demonstrate that linkages between agriculture and tourism can increase local economic opportunities, although in practice they still face challenges such as limited coordination and production capacity. Therefore, strengthening local sector linkages represents a potential strategy for enhancing the economic benefits of tourism.

In line with this, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has been widely discussed in the literature as an alternative approach to more inclusive tourism development. CBT emphasizes community involvement in tourism management as well as a more equitable distribution of economic benefits (Habiba & Lina, 2023). In practice, CBT is also associated with community empowerment and the enhancement of local capacity in managing tourism potential (Permatasari, 2022). Furthermore, the success of CBT is influenced by community participation, local governance, and support for the development of the community's social and economic capacities (Arsyad, 2025). Other studies also indicate that the development of community-based tourism villages can provide opportunities to increase income and improve the quality of life of local communities (Andini, 2024). However, the relationship between CBT implementation and socio-economic sustainability is not always direct, as there are other influencing factors involved (Escamis & Hinlayagan, 2024).

On the other hand, studies on the factors influencing tourism development also highlight the important role of infrastructure and marketing strategies in increasing tourist arrivals and economic growth (Jama et al., 2024). In addition, tourism specialization at the local level has been identified as a factor associated with tourism performance in a region (Ragagnin Pimentel & de Lima Pereira, 2025). However, most of these studies still focus on the relationship between tourism and economic growth and have not specifically examined how these factors contribute to the distribution of economic benefits at the local level. Furthermore, studies on tourism development in Indonesia indicate that existing approaches are still predominantly oriented toward economic growth, meaning that aspects of benefit distribution and community empowerment have not yet become primary focuses (Dede Rusmana et al., 2024).

Although the literature on tourism development, economic linkages, infrastructure, specialization, and CBT continues to expand, existing studies remain fragmented and tend to examine these variables in isolation. Most prior research focuses predominantly on macro-level economic growth, infrastructure development, or tourism performance, without sufficiently addressing how these structural factors interact with community-based approaches to influence the distribution and retention of economic benefits at the local level. Consequently, there is still a lack of an integrated framework that explains the mechanisms through which structural tourism factors and community participation collectively contribute to enhancing local economic retention and reducing economic leakage.

In response to this gap, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework that explains how key structural variables in tourism namely economic linkages, infrastructure, and destination specialization interact with CBT as a mediating mechanism to enhance local economic retention in Bali's tourism sector. By adopting a conceptual research approach based on secondary data, this study seeks to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical insights into a more comprehensive and integrative model. Theoretically, this study contributes to the tourism and development literature by advancing a more holistic perspective that moves beyond the conventional growth-oriented paradigm toward a retention-based approach. It offers a novel integration of structural economic dimensions and community participation within a single analytical framework, positioning CBT not merely as an alternative tourism model but as a strategic mechanism for strengthening local value capture. Furthermore, this study provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research and policy formulation aimed at fostering more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable tourism development, particularly in tourism-dependent regions such as Bali.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative content analysis approach to systematically examine secondary data and construct a conceptual framework of local economic retention in Bali's tourism sector. The data processing follows a structured and transparent procedure consisting of data collection, screening, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Initially, relevant documents are collected from Input-Output tables (BPS), institutional reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles. All collected data are then organized into a database and subjected to a screening process to ensure alignment with the research objectives.

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to maintain analytical rigor. Data are included if they: (1) directly discuss tourism economics, economic linkages, CBT, or local economic retention; (2) are published in credible sources such as peer-reviewed journals, official statistics, or institutional reports; (3) are relatively recent and contextually relevant; and (4) provide empirical, theoretical, or policy-related insights that support conceptual development. Conversely, data are excluded if they: (1) are not directly related to the core variables of the study; (2) lack methodological clarity or academic credibility; (3) are outdated or contextually irrelevant; or (4) contain duplicated or redundant information across sources. This selection process ensures that only high-quality and relevant data are analyzed.

The data processing stage involves a directed coding process based on predefined theoretical constructs. Each selected document is systematically reviewed, and relevant content is coded into key themes such as economic retention, economic leakage, economic linkages, CBT, infrastructure, and tourism specialization. The coded data are then categorized into thematic clusters to identify relationships and patterns across sources. This is followed by thematic synthesis, which integrates findings from multiple studies, and trend analysis, which examines macro-level developments and structural patterns within the tourism economy.

The analytical process follows the framework of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involves selecting and simplifying relevant information, while data display organizes findings into structured themes and conceptual relationships. Finally, conclusions are drawn by interpreting how the identified themes interact within the proposed framework, particularly in explaining the mediating role of CBT in enhancing local economic retention. To ensure robustness, the study applies data and theoretical triangulation, while maintaining transparency throughout the analytical process to support dependability and confirmability. Despite this rigor, the reliance on secondary data limits the ability to capture micro-level and real-time dynamics, positioning the findings as a conceptual foundation for future empirical validation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study is structured to systematically examine the relationships between the key variables within the proposed conceptual framework. It begins by analyzing the structural characteristics of Bali's tourism economy, followed by an evaluation of core exogenous factors, namely economic linkages, infrastructure, and tourism specialization. Subsequently, the discussion focuses on the role of CBT as a mediating mechanism that connects structural conditions with local economic outcomes. The analysis then proceeds to assess how these interactions influence local economic retention and, ultimately, their implications for reducing economic leakage.

Tourism Structure and Economic Dependency in Bali

Based on the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) of Bali Province by Industry 2020–2024 published by BPS, Bali's economic structure demonstrates a strong dependence on tourism. This dependency is reflected in the dominance of service-based sectors that are directly and indirectly linked to tourism activities. The core tourism sector, particularly accommodation and food service activities, contributes approximately 22–24% of the total GRDP, followed by transportation and warehousing at around 8–10%. In addition, tourism-supporting sectors such as wholesale and retail trade account for about 18–20%, real estate contributes approximately 8–9%, and other service activities range between 6–8% (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2025).

When combined, these tourism-related sectors contribute an estimated 60–70% of Bali's total GRDP, indicating a highly tourism-driven economy. This structure highlights the dominance of the tertiary sector, while primary sectors such as agriculture contribute a comparatively smaller share. Consequently, Bali's economy can be characterized as highly vulnerable to external shocks affecting tourism demand, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the urgent need for economic diversification to enhance regional resilience.

The growth of tourism in Bali can be observed through data on the number of tourist arrivals to the island. The data on international tourist arrivals to Bali from 2021 to 2025 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Data on International Tourist Arrivals to Bali from 2022 to 2025

Year	Number of International Tourist Arrivals
2022	2.155.747
2023	5.273.258
2024	6.333.360
2025	6.948.754

Source: BPS Provinsi Bali (2025)

The data on international tourist arrivals to Bali from 2022 to 2025 as presented in Table 1 demonstrate a strong and consistent upward trend, reflecting a significant post-pandemic recovery in the island's tourism sector. In 2022, the number of arrivals remained relatively low at 2.15 million, indicating the early stage of recovery following global travel restrictions due to COVID-19. However, a substantial increase occurred in 2023, with arrivals reaching 5.27 million, highlighting a rapid rebound driven by the reopening of international borders and the restoration of tourist confidence. This growth trend continued in 2024 and 2025, with arrivals rising to 6.33 million and 6.95 million, respectively, although the rate of increase began to moderate, suggesting a transition toward a more stable growth phase. These findings underline the resilience of Bali's tourism industry while also emphasizing its continued economic dependence on international visitors.

Bali's economic dependence on tourism can be further analyzed through a comparative analysis of the periods before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Bali's economy before COVID-19 showed stable growth above 5% but was highly dependent on tourism, creating structural vulnerability to external shocks. The pandemic exposed this weakness, causing a sharp contraction of -9.33% in 2020 due to the collapse of tourism, reduced consumption, and disrupted investment. It also weakened labor absorption, especially in tourism-related sectors, reflecting high sensitivity to global mobility restrictions. From a vulnerability perspective, Bali exhibits high exposure and sensitivity, with adaptive capacity initially limited but gradually improving through policy responses such as domestic tourism promotion, MSME support, and health protocol implementation (Aprilianti & Utama, 2024).

One of the primary indicators for assessing a region's economic dependency is the extent of labor absorption within a particular sector. In the case of Bali, the dominance of the tourism sector in generating employment indicates that the region's economic structure is highly dependent on tourism-related activities. Based on the research findings conducted by (M. E. Apriyanti & Hatmoko, 2024), the tourism sector in Bali has been shown to have a very strong relationship with employment absorption. This is evidenced by a coefficient of determination of 0.985415, indicating that 98.54% of the variation in employment absorption is explained by Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), which is largely driven by tourism-related activities.

Furthermore, approximately 75% of Bali's economic activities are derived from the tourism sector, highlighting its dominance within the regional economic structure. Significant contributions are also observed in the accommodation and food service sector, accounting for 17.18%, as well as the trade, hotel, and restaurant sector, contributing around 32% to the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP). This condition underscores that the tourism sector not only serves as the primary engine of economic growth but also as the main absorber of labor, thereby reinforcing the indication of Bali's high level of economic dependency on tourism (Aprilianti & Utama, 2024).

Bali's economy is structurally highly dependent on tourism, with tourism-related sectors contributing around 60–70% of GRDP and serving as the primary driver of employment, indicating a strong concentration in the tertiary sector. While the post-pandemic surge in international tourist arrivals reflects the resilience of the tourism industry, it simultaneously reinforces this dependency rather than signaling diversification. The sharp economic contraction during COVID-19 highlights the region's vulnerability to external shocks, demonstrating that reliance on a single sector creates structural fragility. Therefore, although tourism remains the main engine of growth, there is an urgent need to shift toward a more resilient economic model by strengthening local economic retention, enhancing intersectoral linkages, and reducing dependence on external tourism flows.

Weakness of Economic Linkages and the Persistence of Leakage

Although the tourism sector is widely recognized as a driver of economic growth, weaknesses in local economic linkages remain a key factor limiting the equitable distribution of its benefits. Economic linkages refer to the extent to which the tourism sector is integrated with other local economic sectors, such as agriculture, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and the creative industries. When these linkages are weak, the phenomenon of economic leakage occurs, whereby a significant portion of tourism-generated revenue flows out of the local economy (Chaitanya et al., 2026).

In many developing destinations, including Bali, economic leakage occurs through several key mechanisms, such as the importation of goods and services, the dominance of foreign ownership, and the repatriation of profits by external investors (Chaitanya et al., 2026). Studies indicate that economic leakage can reach significant levels up to 70–80% in some destinations thereby directly diminishing the multiplier effect of the tourism sector (Mtapuri et al., 2022).

This condition is further exacerbated by the tourism industry's dependence on external supply chains. For instance, the hospitality sector often imports food ingredients or high-quality products due to the limited capacity of local production (Mtapuri et al., 2022). As a result, despite increases in tourist arrivals and overall macroeconomic growth, the economic benefits experienced by local communities remain limited.

Furthermore, weak economic linkages hinder the integration of local communities into the tourism value chain, thereby creating a gap between economic growth and community welfare. This indicates that without strengthening local economic linkages, tourism development tends to produce growth that is exclusive rather than inclusive.

Infrastructure and Specialization: Growth without Distribution

Infrastructure development and destination specialization are often regarded as key drivers of tourism growth. Investment in transportation, accommodation, and tourism facilities has been shown to increase tourist arrivals and stimulate regional economic growth (Jama et al., 2024). However, such growth is not always accompanied by an equitable distribution of benefits.

Research indicates that tourism specialization and economic agglomeration tend to concentrate benefits within specific areas or among particular groups, thereby reinforcing spatial and social inequalities (Ragagnin Pimentel & de Lima Pereira, 2025). Rapid infrastructure development often prioritizes core tourism zones, while peripheral areas remain relatively underdeveloped.

Moreover, infrastructure development that is not accompanied by strong local economic integration can reinforce dependence on external actors. In this context, infrastructure functions as an enabler of growth but does not automatically serve as a driver of inclusive development. This aligns with findings that, while tourism can increase GDP and attract investment, its benefits are often concentrated and do not spread evenly across the population (Chaitanya et al., 2026).

Thus, a paradox emerges in tourism development: economic growth increases, yet the distribution of benefits remains uneven. This phenomenon underscores the importance of a development approach that is not solely oriented toward expansion, but also toward equity.

The Mediating Role of Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

CBT has emerged as an alternative approach that positions local communities as the primary actors in tourism development. CBT functions as a mediating mechanism that links community participation with socio-economic sustainability (Escamis & Hinlayagan, 2024).

Conceptually, CBT enables local communities to exercise control over tourism

management, thereby allowing a larger share of economic benefits to be retained at the local level (Habiba & Lina, 2023). Accordingly, CBT has the potential to reduce economic leakage by enhancing local ownership, promoting the use of local resources, and strengthening community capacity.

However, the effectiveness of CBT's mediating role is not always empirically significant. Several studies indicate that, although CBT enhances participation and sustainability, its mediating effect between community participation and economic well-being is not consistently strong (Escamis & Hinlayagan, 2024). This suggests that the success of CBT is highly contingent upon other factors, such as institutional capacity, market access, and policy support. Thus, CBT can be understood as a conditional mediator, whose effectiveness depends on the implementation context and the quality of governance.

Enhancing Local Economic Retention through CBT and Linkages

Enhancing local economic retention requires the integration of CBT with the strengthening of local economic linkages. CBT functions not only as a participatory approach but also as a strategic mechanism for reinforcing local value chains. One effective approach is the integration of the tourism sector with other sectors, such as agriculture through the concept of agro-tourism. Studies indicate that strengthening linkages between tourism and agriculture can enhance local economic retention by reducing dependence on imports (Zhang & Omar, 2025).

In addition, CBT promotes the use of local products, the development of MSMEs, and the creation of community-based employment opportunities. This is consistent with findings that CBT can enhance local incomes, strengthen skills, and improve overall living standards (Habiba & Lina, 2023).

However, the main challenges in enhancing local economic retention include limited local production capacity, a lack of intersectoral coordination, and weak policy support. Therefore, a systemic approach is required one that integrates CBT with strategies to strengthen local supply chains.

Based on the overall discussion, an integrated conceptual framework can be formulated to explain the relationship between tourism growth, economic linkages, the role of CBT, and local economic retention. This model illustrates that tourism growth drives increased investment, infrastructure development, and tourist arrivals; however, in the absence of strong economic linkages, such growth tends to result in economic leakage.

On the one hand, infrastructure development and destination specialization can accelerate growth, but they also have the potential to widen economic disparities. In this context, CBT functions as a mediating mechanism that links community participation with a more inclusive distribution of economic benefits. Strengthening local linkages in combination with CBT has been shown to enhance economic retention, thereby supporting a transition toward retention-based development as a foundation for long-term sustainability.

Overall, this model emphasizes that the success of tourism development should not be measured solely by economic growth, but also by the extent to which its benefits are retained and equitably distributed within the local economy.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that although tourism in Bali significantly contributes to economic growth, weak local economic linkages continue to limit the distribution and retention of benefits, resulting in persistent economic leakage. Structural factors such as infrastructure development and destination specialization primarily drive growth but do not automatically ensure

inclusive outcomes, as benefits tend to concentrate among specific actors and areas. In this context, CBT plays a critical mediating role by enhancing local participation, strengthening value chains, and promoting local ownership, thereby increasing economic retention. However, its effectiveness is contingent upon institutional capacity, governance quality, and integration with broader economic systems. Therefore, this study recommends a strategic shift from growth-oriented tourism development toward a retention-based approach by strengthening backward and forward linkages, particularly between tourism, agriculture, and MSMEs; enhancing local production capacity and supply chain integration; and formulating policies that support inclusive infrastructure and community empowerment. Additionally, future research should empirically test the proposed conceptual framework using primary data to validate the mediating role of CBT and quantify its impact on economic retention and leakage reduction.

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