

Exploring Local Wisdom for Holistic Wellness Tourism in an Island Destination: Evidence from Bintan Regency, Indonesia

Putri Fistyaning Army^{1*}, Indah Andesta², Mashudi Mashudi³, Andiko Firlansyah⁴, Hilda Yunita⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Program Studi Diploma 3 Perjalanan Wisata, Politeknik Bintan Cakrawala
putriarmy@pbc.ac.id^{1*}, indah@pbc.ac.id², mashudi@pbc.ac.id³, andiko@pbc.ac.id⁴,
hilda@pbc.ac.id⁵

Abstract

Wellness tourism is increasingly shifting toward authentic experiences rooted in local culture and natural environments. This study explored how local wisdom can serve as the foundation for holistic wellness tourism development in Bintan Regency, Indonesia. This study employed an exploratory qualitative design using the holistic wellness framework of body, mind, spirit, and environment. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving seven purposively selected tourism stakeholders and community representatives. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the body dimension is reflected through coastal physical activities, traditional cuisine, herbal beverages, and indigenous body treatments. The mind dimension emerges from environmental education and mindfulness experiences, while the spirit dimension is expressed through cultural participation and contemplative activities. The environment dimension is supported by conservation practices, visitor-capacity management, ecological interpretation, and responsible destination management. Local wisdom provides a culturally grounded and sustainable foundation for integrating the physical, psychological, spiritual, and environmental dimensions of holistic wellness tourism. This study is limited to a qualitative exploration in Bintan Regency involving a small number of stakeholders, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other tourism destinations. This study contributes a context-sensitive framework for community-based wellness tourism development that strengthens local identity, community participation, and environmental sustainability while providing practical guidance for destination management organizations.

Keywords: Bintan Regency, Community-Based Tourism, Holistic Wellness, Island Destination, Local Wisdom, Wellness Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry has experienced a substantial transformation as travelers increasingly prioritize physical, mental, and emotional well-being when selecting travel destinations. This shift has accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened public awareness of preventive health, healthy lifestyles, and holistic well-being ([Azzouzi et al., 2022](#); [Cao et al., 2022](#)). Consequently, wellness tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry, emphasizing travel experiences that enhance personal well-being rather than merely providing leisure activities ([Dillette et al., 2021](#)). Wellness tourism expenditure reached approximately USD 894 billion in 2024 and is projected to continue growing significantly over the coming years, reflecting the increasing global demand for authentic, health-oriented tourism experiences that integrate physical, psychological, social, and environmental dimensions of well-being.

The rapid expansion of wellness tourism has encouraged many destinations to diversify their wellness products and services. Nevertheless, many destinations continue to rely predominantly on modern wellness facilities such as spas, yoga retreats, meditation centers, luxury resorts, and medical wellness services, often resulting in standardized experiences that are weakly connected to local culture and destination identity ([Arida et al., 2025](#); [Global Wellness Institute, 2024](#)). Recent studies increasingly argue that authentic wellness tourism should be grounded in local wisdom, community participation, and sustainable destination management. Local traditions, indigenous knowledge, and community-based governance not only strengthen destination authenticity but also enhance cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and local economic resilience ([Darto et al., 2025](#); [Ginting et al., 2025](#); [Husen et al., 2025](#); [Rahmawati et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, community-based wellness tourism has been shown to create more equitable tourism benefits by promoting local ownership,

cultural guardianship, and participatory governance while minimizing economic leakage and cultural commodification ([Bozdaglar, 2023](#); [Dillette et al., 2021](#); [Giampiccoli et al., 2022](#); [Hubner et al., 2025](#)). These developments suggest that local wisdom should no longer be regarded merely as a cultural attraction but as a strategic foundation for holistic wellness tourism development.

Indonesia possesses considerable potential for developing wellness tourism based on its rich cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge, and local wisdom. Traditional healing practices, local gastronomy, coastal livelihoods, environmental conservation, and community traditions provide distinctive resources for creating authentic holistic wellness experiences ([Indaryati, Gunawan, & Sari, 2026](#)). Recent studies across Indonesian destinations demonstrate that local wisdom contributes to sustainable tourism by strengthening cultural identity, environmental conservation, community empowerment, and inclusive economic development ([Darto et al., 2025](#); [Manurung et al., 2026](#); [Pardosi et al., 2024](#); [Septarini, 2024](#)). Similar evidence from Pangandaran and Pentingsari further shows that integrating local wisdom into tourism governance enhances environmental stewardship, social cohesion, cultural preservation, and economic resilience through community participation ([Ginting et al., 2025](#); [Husen et al., 2025](#)). Despite this potential, wellness tourism research in Indonesia continues to focus primarily on Bali and traditional healing destinations, while comparatively little attention has been devoted to island destinations where wellness values emerge naturally from everyday community life and coastal cultural practices.

Despite the expanding literature on wellness tourism and sustainable tourism, several important gaps remain. First, previous studies have largely examined local wisdom as an instrument for sustainable tourism, heritage tourism, or community-based tourism rather than as a multidimensional foundation for holistic wellness tourism ([Dillette et al., 2021](#); [Hubner et al., 2025](#); [Manurung et al., 2026](#); [Pardosi et al., 2024](#); [Septarini, 2024](#)). Second, studies on wellness tourism have predominantly emphasized destination governance, wellness facilities, therapeutic services, or community participation without systematically explaining how local wisdom contributes simultaneously to the interconnected dimensions of body, mind, spirit, and environment ([Dini & Pencarelli, 2021](#); [Thojumpa et al., 2023](#)). Third, empirical evidence remains concentrated in established wellness destinations such as Bali, Thailand, and health-oriented tourism settings, whereas island destinations characterized by coastal livelihoods, environmental education, traditional gastronomy, and indigenous daily practices remain underexplored ([Ginting et al., 2025](#); [Husen et al., 2025](#); [Rahmawati et al., 2024](#)). Consequently, a comprehensive conceptual understanding of how local wisdom functions as the underlying mechanism connecting cultural identity, sustainability, and holistic wellness tourism remains insufficiently developed.

Bintan Regency represents a distinctive island destination with considerable potential to address this research gap. The region possesses abundant natural landscapes, coastal ecosystems, Malay cultural heritage, traditional culinary practices, community-based tourism initiatives, and environmental conservation programs that collectively provide opportunities for developing authentic wellness experiences. Activities such as exploring mangrove forests, participating in coastal community traditions, consuming traditional herbal products and local cuisine, engaging in environmental education, and interacting with local residents demonstrate characteristics consistent with the principles of holistic wellness ([Giampiccoli et al., 2022](#); [Global Wellness Institute, 2024](#); [Hubner et al., 2025](#)). However, these practices have generally been promoted as cultural or ecotourism attractions rather than being recognized as integral components of wellness tourism. This situation highlights the need for a conceptual framework that reinterprets local wisdom as a strategic resource for sustainable wellness tourism development in island destinations.

Accordingly, this study aimed to explore how local wisdom could serve as a foundation for holistic wellness tourism development in Bintan Regency by using the body, mind, spirit, and environment dimensions proposed by [Dillette et al. \(2021\)](#). The novelty of this study lies in repositioning the holistic wellness framework from a lens for interpreting tourists' personal outcomes into a destination-development lens for identifying wellness resources embedded in everyday coastal life. The study theoretically extends the framework by showing that the four dimensions can be

generated relationally through interactions among indigenous knowledge, coastal livelihoods, cultural practices, community participation, and environmental stewardship, rather than through purpose-built wellness facilities alone. This perspective positions local wisdom not merely as a cultural attraction, but as the integrating mechanism that connects holistic wellness with community-based and sustainable tourism development in an island destination.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wellness tourism has evolved from a niche tourism market into one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global tourism industry. Unlike conventional tourism, which primarily emphasizes leisure and recreation, wellness tourism focuses on improving travelers' overall well-being through experiences that promote physical health, psychological restoration, emotional balance, and environmental connectedness. The growing demand for wellness-oriented travel has been influenced by changing lifestyles, increasing health awareness, population aging, and the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have encouraged tourists to seek meaningful and health-enhancing travel experiences rather than passive sightseeing ([Azzouzi, Stratton, Muñoz-Velasco, Wang, Fourtassi, Hong, Cooper, Balikuddembe, Palomba, Peterson, Pandiyan, Krassioukov, Tripathi, Tuakli-Wosornu, & Hajjioui, 2022](#); [Cao, Ma, Zhang, & Zhang, 2022](#)). Consequently, wellness tourism has become an important strategy for destinations seeking to diversify tourism products while supporting sustainable development and community well-being.

Recent studies have expanded the definition of wellness tourism beyond spa treatments and medical services by emphasizing the importance of authentic experiences, local culture, environmental sustainability, and community participation. [Dini and Pencarelli \(2022\)](#) argued that wellness tourism should be understood as a holistic tourism system integrating natural resources, cultural heritage, healthy lifestyles, and destination management. Similarly, [Karagianni, Kalantonis, Tsartas, and Sdrali \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that memorable wellness tourism experiences are influenced not only by service quality but also by meaningful interactions, environmental aesthetics, tranquility, and authenticity, indicating that wellness tourism is increasingly experience-oriented rather than facility-oriented. These findings suggest that destinations should integrate local identity and community values into wellness tourism products to enhance visitor satisfaction and long-term destination competitiveness.

The concept of holistic wellness provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding wellness tourism because it considers health as a multidimensional condition rather than merely the absence of illness ([Shalahuddin, Aswan, Abdullah, Jimainal, & Yusof, 2026](#)). In tourism research, holistic wellness encompasses interconnected dimensions of physical, psychological, spiritual, and environmental well-being that collectively influence tourists' overall experiences ([Dillette, Douglas, & Andrzejewski, 2021](#)). Through an analysis of international wellness tourism experiences, Dillette et al. identified four principal dimensions body, mind, spirit, and environment which have become one of the most widely adopted conceptual frameworks for explaining how tourism contributes to personal well-being. This framework emphasizes that wellness experiences emerge from the interaction between individuals, destinations, local communities, and natural environments rather than from isolated wellness facilities alone.

Subsequent literature has reinforced the multidimensional nature of wellness tourism. [Liao, Zuo, Xu, Law, and Zhang \(2023\)](#), through a systematic review, concluded that wellness tourism contributes to four major health outcomes, such as physical fitness, psychological well-being, quality of life, and environmental health. Their review also highlighted that meaningful interactions with natural environments, local communities, and culturally embedded experiences significantly enhance tourists' wellness outcomes. These findings support the argument that successful wellness destinations should integrate ecological conservation, cultural authenticity, and community participation into tourism planning rather than relying exclusively on commercial wellness facilities. Therefore, holistic wellness has increasingly become a comprehensive framework for evaluating sustainable wellness tourism development, particularly in destinations characterized by rich cultural heritage and

environmental resources ([Wijaya, & Sanjaya, 2026](#); [Mauliza, Amira, Lestari, Fazia, & Zulkarnain, 2026](#)).

Local wisdom has increasingly been recognized as a strategic resource for sustainable tourism because it embodies knowledge, values, practices, and community identities formed through long-term interaction with local environments ([Saadah & Gunanda, 2026](#)). However, its tourism value does not arise automatically from displaying cultural symbols; it depends on whether local knowledge remains connected to community control, ecological responsibility, interpretation, and everyday practice ([Judijanto, 2025](#); [Pardosi, Putra, & Napitupulu, 2026](#)). In this study, local wisdom in a coastal and island context is operationalized through five observable forms, such as coastal livelihood practices, locally rooted food and herbal knowledge, traditional ecological management, communal customs and social values, and community-based host–guest interaction. These forms provide the empirical basis for mapping local wisdom onto the body, mind, spirit, and environment dimensions.

Previous studies agree that local wisdom can support sustainable tourism, but they emphasize different mechanisms. Research on traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous resource management foregrounds conservation, whereas studies of gastronomy, cultural festivals, and community governance emphasize identity, livelihoods, and participation. Taken together, these strands show that local wisdom is multidimensional; yet they also reveal a conceptual fragmentation because cultural, social, economic, and ecological contributions are often examined separately. Moreover, local wisdom can be reduced to staged performances when it is detached from community authority, visitor interpretation, and destination management. A holistic wellness perspective is therefore useful for examining how these mechanisms operate together rather than treating them as isolated tourism assets.

The increasing demand for authentic tourism experiences has shifted wellness tourism toward community-based and sustainability-oriented approaches. Community-Based Wellness Tourism (CBWT) provides a bridge between local wisdom and holistic wellness by emphasizing local ownership, participation, environmental stewardship, and equitable benefit distribution. Nevertheless, community-based tourism should not be assumed to be automatically sustainable or wellness-enhancing. Without community control, cultural safeguards, capacity limits, and clear benefit-sharing arrangements, local practices may be commodified while environmental pressures remain unresolved. CBWT is therefore most relevant when wellness experiences are co-designed with communities and managed as living cultural and ecological systems rather than packaged as detached attractions ([Giampiccoli, Dłużewska, & Mnguni, 2022](#); [Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, & Djakasaputra, 2025](#)).

Empirical evidence from Indonesia illustrates both the potential and the limitations of this integration. Studies in Ubud and other destinations show that local traditions, community participation, cultural authenticity, traditional healing, and herbal knowledge can enrich wellness tourism and strengthen destination sustainability ([Hubner et al., 2025](#); [Widarini, Wijaya, & Albert, 2022](#)). However, much of this evidence remains concentrated in established healing destinations or discusses local wisdom broadly within sustainable tourism. The literature therefore explains why local knowledge matters, but less often demonstrates how specific practices simultaneously generate physical, psychological, spiritual, and environmental wellness outcomes.

Despite these advances, island and coastal destinations remain underexamined even though their local wisdom is closely tied to marine livelihoods, coastal ecosystems, environmental education, traditional gastronomy, and daily community interaction. Existing studies also rarely distinguish between local wisdom as a symbolic cultural resource and local wisdom as an operational basis for destination management. This study addresses that theoretical and empirical gap by mapping observable coastal practices in Bintan onto the four-dimensional holistic wellness framework and examining how they can be organized as an integrated, community-based wellness tourism system.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate how local wisdom could serve as a foundation for holistic wellness tourism development in Bintan Regency. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand the meanings, experiences, and interpretations of local communities and tourism stakeholders regarding cultural practices that potentially contribute to wellness tourism. Rather than measuring predefined variables, exploratory qualitative research facilitates an in-depth understanding of complex social and cultural phenomena within their natural settings ([Braun, & Clarke, 2021](#); [Creswell, & Poth, 2024](#)). This approach also aligns with interpretivist research, which emphasizes participants' perspectives in explaining social reality.

The research was conducted in Bintan Regency, Riau Islands Province, Indonesia, an island destination recognized for its coastal ecosystems, Malay cultural heritage, community-based tourism initiatives, and biodiversity conservation. Data collection was carried out at several tourism destinations representing different forms of local wisdom, including Doulos Phos The Ship Hotel, Kampong Teripang, Gudem Bee Farm, Edu Tour Lagoi, D'Bamboo Kamp Desa Wisata Ekang, and Pengudang Tourism Village. These locations were selected purposively because they demonstrate diverse tourism experiences related to local culture, environmental conservation, gastronomy, traditional practices, and community participation, all of which are relevant to the dimensions of holistic wellness ([Arida, Nugroho, Rusadi, & Saputra, 2025](#); [Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, & Djakasaputra, 2025](#)).

The participants consisted of seven key informants selected using purposive sampling. They represented tourism destination managers, local community leaders, tourism entrepreneurs, academics, local government representatives, and community members directly involved in tourism activities. The sample was designed around information power rather than numerical representativeness, each participant was selected as a key gatekeeper with detailed knowledge of a distinct part of Bintan tourism and local-wisdom system. Across interviews, observations, and documents, the analysis identified recurring patterns and no additional major theme was required to explain the four wellness dimensions by the end of data collection. This thematic sufficiency was treated as saturation within the bounded, exploratory scope of the study. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research when information-rich participants are required to address a focused research objective ([Braun and Clarke, 2021](#); [Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters, & Walker, 2020](#)).

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation enabled the researchers to examine tourism activities, local traditions, visitor interactions, and environmental conditions directly within the research settings. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility for participants to explain their experiences while allowing researchers to explore emerging issues relevant to wellness tourism. Supporting documents, including tourism development reports, promotional materials, government publications, and previous studies, were also reviewed to strengthen contextual understanding. The integration of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings through methodological triangulation ([Creswell & Poth, 2024](#)).

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the framework developed by [Braun and Clarke \(2021\)](#). The analytical process involved six iterative stages, such as familiarization with the interview transcripts and field notes, generation of initial codes, development of preliminary themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and preparation of the analytical report. Throughout the analysis, the identified themes were interpreted using the holistic wellness framework comprising the dimensions of body, mind, spirit, and environment. Reflexive thematic analysis was selected because of its flexibility in identifying patterned meanings while accommodating researchers' interpretative engagement with qualitative data ([Braun and Clarke, 2021](#); [Byrne, 2022](#)).

To ensure research trustworthiness, several strategies were implemented. Methodological and source triangulation were employed by comparing findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. Member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary interpretations with selected participants to enhance interpretive accuracy. Furthermore, thick description was provided to improve transferability, while the systematic documentation of coding and analytical decisions enhanced dependability and confirmability ([Braun, & Clarke, 2025](#); [Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, & Ranfagni, 2023](#)).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview of Findings

The thematic analysis identified that local wisdom in Bintan Regency contributes to the development of holistic wellness tourism through four interconnected dimensions, such as body, mind, spirit, and environment. The findings demonstrated that although tourism stakeholders and local communities did not explicitly recognize the concept of wellness tourism, many traditional practices, cultural activities, environmental initiatives, and community-based experiences inherently reflected the principles of holistic wellness. These practices were embedded in everyday community life and represented valuable cultural resources that could be transformed into authentic wellness tourism experiences. Similar observations have been reported in previous studies emphasizing that wellness tourism increasingly evolves from community knowledge, cultural identity, and environmental sustainability rather than relying solely on commercial wellness facilities ([Dillette, Douglas, & Andrzejewski, 2021](#); [Global Wellness Institute, 2024](#); [Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, & Djakasaputra, 2025](#)).

The coding process generated several recurring themes, including traditional local products, coastal community activities, environmental education, contemplative experiences, culinary traditions, community interaction, and destination experience management. These themes emerged consistently across interviews with tourism destination managers, community representatives, tourism entrepreneurs, and government stakeholders, indicating that local wisdom in Bintan functions as a multidimensional tourism resource. Rather than existing as isolated cultural attractions, these elements collectively contributed to visitors' physical health, psychological restoration, spiritual reflection, and environmental awareness. This finding supports recent arguments that successful wellness tourism destinations should integrate local culture, community participation, and ecological conservation into a unified tourism experience ([Karagianni, Kalantonis, Tsartas, & Sdrali, 2025](#); [Liao, Zuo, Xu, Law, & Zhang, 2023](#)).

The analysis further revealed that local wisdom in Bintan differs from conventional wellness tourism commonly found in internationally recognized destinations. Whereas many wellness destinations primarily emphasize luxury spas, yoga retreats, meditation centers, and traditional healing services, the wellness experiences identified in this study originated from ordinary community practices. Activities such as *bekarang* (traditional shellfish gathering), mangrove exploration, herbal beverages, honey therapy, traditional communal dining (*makan berhidang*), environmental conservation, and participation in local daily life illustrated how wellness values naturally emerged through interactions among local culture, nature, and community life. These findings extend previous research by demonstrating that authentic wellness experiences may develop from everyday cultural practices rather than from purpose-built wellness facilities ([Arida, Nugroho, Rusadi, & Saputra, 2025](#); [Hubner et al., 2025](#)).

To facilitate interpretation, the identified themes were subsequently categorized according to the holistic wellness framework proposed by [Dillette et al. \(2021\)](#). The Body dimension included physical activities, traditional food, herbal beverages, and natural body treatments. The mind dimension encompassed environmental education, ecological interpretation, and mindfulness experiences. The spirit dimension represented contemplative experiences, cultural participation, and meaningful social interaction with local communities. Finally, the environment dimension referred to destination management practices that promoted environmental conservation, visitor comfort, privacy, and high-quality tourism experiences. This thematic categorization illustrates that local wisdom functions not

merely as a cultural asset but as an integrated framework capable of supporting holistic wellness tourism development.

Table 1. Mapping of local wisdom to the dimensions of holistic wellness

Local Wisdom	Evidence from Findings	Body	Mind	Spirit	Environment	Wellness Contribution
Traditional herbal beverages (butterfly pea tea, herbal drinks)	Served as welcome drinks prepared from local ingredients	✓				Promote healthy nutrition and local health traditions
Sea cucumber (<i>gamat</i>) products	Utilized as traditional health products and spa ingredients	✓				Support physical recovery through indigenous medicinal knowledge
Honey therapy (<i>Kelulut</i> honey)	Honey consumed directly and used in wellness experiences	✓	✓			Improve physical health while creating relaxing experiences
Coastal shellfish gathering (<i>bekarang</i>)	Traditional coastal activity involving walking and collecting shellfish	✓	✓	✓		Encourage physical exercise, mindfulness, and interaction with nature
Mangrove exploration	Guided tours through mangrove ecosystems	✓	✓		✓	Combine physical activity with environmental awareness
Environmental education	Learning about mangroves, seagrass, coral reefs, bees, and turtle conservation		✓		✓	Enhance ecological knowledge and environmental responsibility
Traditional communal dining (<i>makan berhidang</i>)	Shared meals using traditional Malay customs	✓		✓		Strengthen cultural identity and social connectedness
Mindfulness ("No Mind" concept)	Quiet reflection within natural environments		✓	✓		Improve emotional balance and self-reflection
Community participation	Tourists engage in village life and local cultural activities			✓	✓	Foster meaningful cultural exchange and social well-being
Visitor capacity management	Limiting visitor numbers and providing private tourism experiences				✓	Improve visitor comfort while supporting environmental sustainability

Table 1 summarizes the integration of local wisdom and tourism activities within the four dimensions of holistic wellness, such as body, mind, spirit, and environment. The findings indicate that traditional practices, nature-based experiences, cultural participation, and environmental conservation collectively contribute to visitors' physical health, psychological well-being, spiritual enrichment, and ecological awareness. These results demonstrate that wellness tourism in Bintan is developed through authentic community-based experiences rooted in local culture and environmental sustainability rather than purpose-built wellness facilities.

The mapping also demonstrated that several tourism destinations simultaneously represented multiple wellness dimensions, indicating that wellness experiences are multidimensional rather than independent phenomena. Destinations such as Doulos Phos, Kampong Teripang, Gudem Bee Farm, D'Bamboo Kamp Desa Wisata Ekan, and Pengudang Tourism Village incorporated activities that addressed all four dimensions of holistic wellness. Meanwhile, Edu Tour Lagoi emphasized physical wellness, environmental education, and ecological awareness but provided relatively limited opportunities for spiritual engagement. These variations suggest that each destination possesses unique strengths that may collectively contribute to the development of an integrated wellness tourism network within Bintan Regency.

Overall, the findings indicate that local wisdom should not merely be interpreted as cultural heritage preserved for tourism purposes. Instead, it represents a dynamic system of indigenous knowledge, environmental practices, community participation, and cultural identity that collectively supports physical, psychological, spiritual, and ecological well-being. Therefore, this study proposes that local wisdom constitutes the fundamental conceptual basis for holistic wellness tourism

development in island destinations, extending existing wellness tourism literature beyond conventional facility-based approaches.

4.2 The Body Dimension: Local Wisdom Supporting Physical Wellness

The findings revealed that the body dimension was strongly represented through various local wisdom practices emphasizing physical activity, traditional food, herbal beverages, and natural body treatments. Across all observed tourism destinations, physical wellness was not promoted through structured fitness programs but rather through authentic daily activities embedded in local culture and coastal livelihoods. Tourism stakeholders consistently described these activities as ordinary community practices that unintentionally generated health benefits for visitors. This finding suggests that physical wellness in Bintan emerged naturally through interactions between tourists, local communities, and the natural environment rather than through commercially designed wellness services ([Dillette, Douglas, & Andrzejewski, 2021](#); [Global Wellness Institute, 2024](#)).

One of the most distinctive findings was the traditional coastal activity known as bekarang, during which participants searched for shellfish during low tide. The activity required walking, balancing, squatting, and navigating shallow coastal ecosystems, thereby providing moderate physical exercise while exposing participants to fresh sea air and natural coastal landscapes. Several informants emphasized that international tourists perceived this activity as a unique recreational experience rather than physical exercise, although it simultaneously contributed to cardiovascular activity, muscle movement, and relaxation. Similar findings have been reported by [Buckley and Brough \(2017\)](#), who argued that nature-based physical activities improve physical health while simultaneously reducing psychological stress through direct exposure to natural environments. Furthermore, [Liao, Zuo, Xu, Law, and Zhang \(2023\)](#) identified outdoor recreational activities as an essential contributor to physical wellness within holistic tourism experiences.

"Tourists take part directly in mangrove planting, canoeing, snorkeling, and bekarang, which foreign tourists find highly memorable." (Informant interview, Bintan, August 2024)

Traditional culinary products also emerged as important components of the body dimension. The study identified locally produced herbal beverages, butterfly pea flower tea mixed with stingless bee honey, traditional Malay cuisine, sea cucumber (*gamat*) products, and locally grown agricultural products as integral parts of visitors' wellness experiences. Unlike commercial functional foods, these products reflected indigenous knowledge accumulated over generations regarding nutrition, health maintenance, and the sustainable utilization of local natural resources. Informants explained that many of these products were initially prepared as everyday community foods before gradually becoming tourism products offered to visitors. This finding supports previous studies indicating that local gastronomy contributes not only to destination authenticity but also to healthy lifestyles, cultural sustainability, and visitor well-being ([Abduwaiti, Liu, Yan, Xue, Jin, Wu, He, Bao, & Liu, 2021](#); [Widarini, Wijaya, & Albert, 2022](#)).

Another important finding concerned the utilization of natural resources for traditional body treatments. Several destinations introduced wellness experiences using sea cucumber oil, herbal ingredients, natural sea water, and locally produced essential oils within spa and relaxation services. Unlike standardized wellness treatments commonly found in luxury resorts, these practices emphasized the use of locally available resources and traditional knowledge maintained by coastal communities. According to [Arida, Nugroho, Rusadi, and Saputra \(2025\)](#), integrating indigenous healing knowledge into tourism products enhances destination authenticity while preserving traditional cultural practices. [Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, and Djakasaputra \(2025\)](#) argued that wellness tourism should prioritize community-based knowledge systems rather than merely replicating commercial wellness facilities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the body dimension of wellness tourism in Bintan Regency extends beyond physical fitness or medical wellness services. Instead, physical wellness is achieved through an integrated combination of active participation in coastal livelihoods, healthy

traditional food consumption, indigenous herbal products, and nature-based body treatments. These findings expand the current understanding of wellness tourism by illustrating that local wisdom embedded in everyday community practices may serve as a sustainable and culturally authentic foundation for promoting physical well-being. Consequently, the body dimension identified in this study reinforces the proposition that island destinations can develop competitive wellness tourism products without relying exclusively on modern wellness infrastructure, but rather by optimizing existing cultural and environmental resources ([Dillette et al., 2021](#); [Global Wellness Institute, 2024](#); [Hubner et al., 2025](#)).

4.3 The Mind Dimension: Local Wisdom Supporting Mental Well-Being and Environmental Awareness

Environmental education emerged as one of the most prominent themes within the mind dimension. Several tourism destinations incorporated educational programs focusing on mangrove ecosystems, seagrass conservation, coral reef protection, turtle conservation, and stingless bee cultivation. Visitors were encouraged to actively participate in learning activities rather than merely observing environmental attractions. According to informants, these educational experiences frequently stimulated curiosity, environmental awareness, and deeper appreciation for local ecosystems. Previous studies have demonstrated that environmental learning contributes significantly to psychological well-being because it encourages cognitive engagement, personal reflection, and a stronger sense of connection with nature ([Isacs, Kenter, Wetterstrand, & Katzeff, 2023](#); [Liao, Zuo, Xu, Law, & Zhang, 2023](#)). Consequently, educational tourism activities in Bintan functioned not only as conservation initiatives but also as mechanisms for enhancing mental wellness.

The findings further indicated that natural environments played a critical role in facilitating mindfulness experiences. In destinations such as D'Bamboo Kamp Desa Wisata E kang and Pengudang Tourism Village, visitors were encouraged to slow down, observe their surroundings, listen to natural sounds, and engage fully with the present moment. The concept of no mind, promoted in Desa Wisata E kang, reflected this approach by inviting visitors to experience silence, tranquility, and conscious awareness while immersed in natural settings. Informants described how tourists often reported feelings of calmness, emotional relief, and reduced mental fatigue after participating in these activities. This finding aligns with [Richardson, Passmore, Barbett, Lumber, Thomas, and Hunt \(2020\)](#), who found that actively noticing nature significantly improves psychological well-being and strengthens emotional resilience. Similarly, [Martin, White, Hunt, Richardson, Pahl, and Burt \(2020\)](#) argued that meaningful interactions with natural environments promote restoration from cognitive overload and everyday stress.

"The 'No Mind' concept, or silence, is one way to read oneself and make peace with one's thoughts through a calm natural atmosphere." (Informant interview, Bintan, August 2024)

Another significant finding concerned the role of local wisdom in facilitating reflective learning experiences. The educational narratives provided by local guides often connected environmental knowledge with cultural values, traditional ecological practices, and community life. Rather than presenting scientific information in isolation, local communities explained how mangroves, seagrass beds, honey production, and marine resources were intertwined with local livelihoods and cultural traditions. This approach enabled visitors to develop a deeper understanding of sustainability while simultaneously reflecting on their own relationships with nature and society. Previous research suggests that experiential learning grounded in local knowledge enhances both cognitive engagement and emotional connection, resulting in more meaningful tourism experiences ([Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, & Djakasaputra, 2025](#); [Liao et al., 2023](#)).

From a wellness tourism perspective, these findings demonstrate that the mind dimension extends beyond relaxation and stress reduction. Mental well-being in Bintan was achieved through a combination of environmental learning, mindfulness practices, ecological awareness, and reflective engagement with local knowledge systems. The findings therefore support emerging perspectives that wellness tourism should integrate educational and environmental components into tourism

experiences rather than focusing exclusively on therapeutic services ([Dillette, Douglas, & Andrzejewski, 2021](#); [Global Wellness Institute, 2024](#)). By transforming local ecological knowledge into opportunities for learning and self-reflection, tourism destinations in Bintan contribute to a broader understanding of wellness that encompasses intellectual growth, environmental consciousness, and psychological restoration.

Overall, the results indicate that local wisdom plays a significant role in supporting mental wellness through experiential learning and nature-based reflection. The integration of environmental education, mindfulness practices, and indigenous ecological knowledge creates opportunities for visitors to achieve greater self-awareness and emotional balance while simultaneously developing a stronger appreciation for environmental sustainability. Consequently, the mind dimension identified in this study illustrates how local wisdom can generate wellness outcomes that are both personally meaningful and environmentally responsible, reinforcing the importance of community-based approaches in holistic wellness tourism development.

4.4 The Spirit Dimension: Local Wisdom Fostering Meaning, Cultural Connection, and Spiritual Well-Being

The findings indicated that the spirit dimension of holistic wellness tourism in Bintan Regency was primarily expressed through contemplative experiences, cultural participation, meaningful social interactions, and emotional connections with local communities. Unlike many internationally recognized wellness destinations that emphasize formal spiritual practices such as meditation retreats or traditional healing rituals, the spiritual experiences identified in this study emerged naturally through everyday cultural activities and direct engagement with the island's social and natural environments. Informants consistently described spirituality as a sense of inner peace, gratitude, belonging, and meaningful connection rather than as participation in religious ceremonies. This finding supports the holistic wellness framework proposed by [Dillette, Douglas, and Andrzejewski \(2021\)](#), which recognizes spirituality as an essential dimension of well-being that extends beyond religious practice toward meaning-making and personal transformation.

One of the most significant findings involved the use of natural landscapes as spaces for contemplation and self-reflection. Several destinations, including D'Bamboo Kamp Desa Wisata E kang, Pengudang Tourism Village, and Batu Junjung, intentionally provided quiet natural settings where visitors could experience silence, observe surrounding landscapes, and reconnect with themselves. Informants explained that many tourists appreciated these peaceful environments because they offered opportunities to escape urban routines, reduce emotional stress, and experience moments of tranquility. These findings are consistent with recent studies demonstrating that restorative natural environments facilitate emotional recovery, enhance spiritual well-being, and strengthen individuals' sense of purpose through meaningful interactions with nature ([Atari, & Dias, 2025](#); [Martin, White, Hunt, Richardson, Pahl, & Burt, 2020](#)).

The study also revealed that participation in local community life contributed substantially to visitors' spiritual experiences. Tourists were invited to engage in everyday village activities such as preparing traditional meals, harvesting coconuts, collecting natural resources, and interacting with local residents. Rather than functioning solely as tourism attractions, these activities enabled visitors to experience local values of cooperation, hospitality, simplicity, and mutual respect. Informants emphasized that many visitors expressed appreciation for the authenticity of these interactions, often describing them as memorable experiences that fostered gratitude and emotional fulfillment. Previous research has similarly suggested that community participation enhances visitors' sense of belonging and strengthens emotional attachment to destinations through meaningful cultural exchange ([Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, & Djakasaputra, 2025](#)).

"A truly local practice is makan berhidang. When guests arrive, we serve rice and side dishes together, sit on the floor, and eat with our hands." (Informant interview, Bintan, July 2024)

Traditional cultural practices further reinforced the spirit dimension. Activities such as *kenduri* (traditional communal feasts), storytelling, and cultural gatherings enabled visitors to observe and

participate in local customs that reflected collective values, social harmony, and mutual solidarity. Although these traditions were not intentionally developed as wellness products, they created opportunities for emotional engagement and intercultural understanding. According to [Arida, Nugroho, Rusadi, and Saputra \(2025\)](#), integrating indigenous cultural traditions into tourism experiences contributes to authentic wellness by strengthening visitors' appreciation of local identity while preserving intangible cultural heritage. Likewise, contemporary wellness tourism research recognizes cultural immersion as an important pathway for achieving emotional and spiritual well-being through meaningful tourism experiences.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings expand the understanding of the spirit dimension within holistic wellness tourism. Previous wellness tourism studies have frequently associated spirituality with formal healing traditions, yoga, meditation, or religious practices. However, the present study demonstrates that spirituality may also emerge through simple, everyday interactions with local communities, participation in cultural traditions, and emotional engagement with natural environments. This perspective broadens existing conceptualizations by suggesting that spirituality is fundamentally rooted in meaningful human experiences rather than specific therapeutic activities. Consequently, local wisdom in Bintan functions not only as cultural heritage but also as a source of emotional resilience, personal reflection, and spiritual restoration.

Overall, the findings indicate that the spirit dimension represents one of the distinctive characteristics of wellness tourism development in Bintan Regency. Through community participation, contemplative natural settings, and authentic cultural experiences, local wisdom enables visitors to develop deeper emotional connections with people, culture, and the environment. These experiences contribute to holistic well-being by fostering inner peace, gratitude, self-reflection, and a stronger sense of purpose, thereby reinforcing the role of local wisdom as an essential foundation for sustainable wellness tourism in island destinations.

4.5 The Environment Dimension: Local Wisdom Supporting Ecological Wellness and Destination Management

The environment dimension emerged through conservation activities, ecological interpretation, visitor-capacity management, and destination practices designed to maintain environmental quality. Across the observed sites, mangrove forests, seagrass areas, coral reefs, turtle habitats, and stingless-bee cultivation were not treated only as visual attractions. They were incorporated into learning activities and tourism operations that encouraged visitors to understand the relationship between ecosystem health, community livelihoods, and destination well-being. Local wisdom was evident in the way communities connected environmental protection with the continued availability of coastal and natural resources. Guided mangrove exploration, conservation education, and explanations of marine livelihoods translated ecological knowledge into visitor experiences. These practices positioned the environment not merely as a setting for wellness activities, but as a living system whose condition directly shaped the quality of physical activity, mental restoration, and cultural engagement.

Destination management also contributed to ecological wellness. Several sites limited visitor numbers, provided smaller or more private experiences, and controlled the intensity of activities to protect visitor comfort and reduce pressure on sensitive environments. This approach indicated that carrying capacity and experience quality were considered together. Rather than maximizing visitor volume, the destinations emphasized controlled access, tranquility, and responsible interaction with natural spaces.

"We limit snorkeling participants to a maximum of 20 people per trip so that the activity remains comfortable and environmental conditions are maintained." (Informant interview, Bintan, August 2024)

Overall, the environment dimension connected conservation with the management of wellness experiences. Environmental education strengthened awareness, while capacity controls and responsible destination practices protected the ecological conditions required for the body, mind, and

spirit dimensions to occur. The findings therefore show that environmental wellness in Bintan is both an outcome of tourism and an enabling condition for the other dimensions.

4.6 Discussion

The findings extend the holistic wellness framework of [Dillette, Douglas, and Andrzejewski \(2021\)](#) in two important ways. First, the framework is applied not only to interpret tourists' wellness outcomes, but also to identify and organize destination resources. Second, the Bintan case shows that body, mind, spirit, and environment can emerge from everyday coastal practices, such as bekarang, communal dining, ecological learning, and community interaction, rather than from specialized spas, retreats, or formal therapeutic programs. This shifts the analytical focus from wellness facilities to the relationships among people, culture, livelihoods, and ecosystems.

Bintan coastal local wisdom therefore challenges a facility-based understanding of wellness tourism. However, local character alone does not make an activity a wellness product. The activity must be interpreted, managed, and delivered in ways that protect safety, cultural meaning, environmental limits, and visitor well-being. This distinction is important because tourism can easily turn local practices into staged commodities. The findings support the argument that authenticity depends on meaningful interaction and local embeddedness, while also requiring professional destination management ([Dini & Pencarelli, 2021](#)).

The study also refines the role of the environment dimension. In Bintan, the environment is not simply one parallel category alongside body, mind, and spirit. Healthy coastal ecosystems, low-intensity visitor management, and environmental interpretation enable the other dimensions to occur. Mangroves and coastal landscapes support physical movement, psychological restoration, contemplation, and learning at the same time. This relational pattern suggests that environmental stewardship functions as the supporting infrastructure of holistic wellness in island destinations.

These findings have direct implications for Community-Based Wellness Tourism. CBWT can provide a governance structure through which communities retain ownership of cultural knowledge, participate in product design, and receive a fair share of tourism benefits. Yet community participation must be substantive rather than symbolic. Local residents should help determine which practices may be shared, how they are interpreted, how many visitors are acceptable, and how revenue supports cultural and environmental continuity. This approach is consistent with research emphasizing local control, equitable benefits, and cultural guardianship in community-based tourism ([Giampiccoli, Dłużewska, & Mnguni, 2022](#); [Hubner, Juliana, Lemy, Pramezwary, & Djakasaputra, 2025](#)).

For destination management organizations, the practical implication is not to convert every local practice into a separate commercial product, but to build an integrated network of complementary experiences. Bintan destinations can be connected through a shared framework that combines coastal activity, local gastronomy, ecological education, cultural interaction, contemplation, and conservation. Product standards should include community consent, cultural interpretation, carrying-capacity limits, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and indicators for visitor and community well-being. Such an approach would preserve local distinctiveness while making holistic wellness tourism operational and assessable.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrated that local wisdom constitutes a valuable foundation for the development of holistic wellness tourism in Bintan Regency. The thematic analysis revealed that local wisdom contributes to the four interconnected dimensions of holistic wellness body, mind, spirit, and environment through authentic tourism experiences embedded in community life, cultural traditions, and natural environments. Physical wellness was promoted through traditional culinary products, herbal beverages, nature-based activities, and indigenous health practices. Mental well-being was supported by environmental education, mindfulness experiences, and ecological learning, while the spirit dimension emerged through meaningful cultural participation, social interaction, and

contemplative experiences. Furthermore, environmental wellness was strengthened through conservation initiatives, sustainable destination management, and responsible tourism practices. These findings indicate that local wisdom extends beyond its role as cultural heritage and functions as a multidimensional resource capable of supporting sustainable wellness tourism development.

This study contributes to wellness tourism literature by extending the holistic wellness framework beyond conventional destinations centered on spas, yoga retreats, and formal healing services. It demonstrates that authentic wellness experiences can emerge from everyday community practices, indigenous knowledge, coastal livelihoods, and environmental stewardship. The central takeaway is a conceptual framework in which coastal local wisdom functions as the integrating mechanism linking body, mind, spirit, and environment. This framework provides future researchers and destination management organizations with a practical basis for identifying, designing, and evaluating community-based wellness tourism in island destinations without detaching wellness products from the communities and ecosystems that give them meaning.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted exclusively in selected tourism destinations within Bintan Regency, limiting the transferability of the findings to other geographical and cultural contexts. Second, the qualitative exploratory design relied on a relatively small number of purposively selected informants, emphasizing depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. Third, the study focused primarily on tourism stakeholders and local communities, without directly examining visitors' perceptions or measuring wellness outcomes experienced by tourists. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the context of this exploratory investigation.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

The findings suggest that local governments, destination management organizations, and tourism stakeholders should incorporate local wisdom more explicitly into wellness tourism planning and marketing strategies. Community participation should remain central to tourism development to preserve cultural authenticity while ensuring equitable economic benefits for local residents. Furthermore, tourism destinations should strengthen environmental education, cultural interpretation, and nature-based wellness experiences as integral components of holistic wellness tourism. Collaborative partnerships among local communities, government agencies, tourism businesses, and academic institutions are also recommended to develop integrated wellness tourism products that balance visitor satisfaction, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

Future research is encouraged to examine holistic wellness tourism using mixed-methods and quantitative designs. A measurement model could first be developed for the four local-wisdom-based dimensions identified in this study and then tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to estimate their effects on perceived tourist well-being, satisfaction, destination attachment, and loyalty. Comparative multi-group analysis across island destinations could assess whether the strength of these relationships differs by visitor segment or cultural context. Future studies should also involve tourists directly, examine community-level economic and social outcomes, and use longitudinal designs to compare wellness perceptions before, during, and after travel. These approaches would test the proposed framework while retaining attention to cultural authenticity, community benefit, and environmental sustainability.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PFA contributed to the conceptualization, methodology design, literature review, data collection, thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the original manuscript. IA contributed to the research design, data validation, and critical review of the manuscript. MM contributed to the field investigation, interpretation of the findings, and manuscript revision. AF contributed to the literature review, data interpretation, and improvement of the final manuscript. HY contributed to the supervision, validation of the research framework, and critical editing of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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