

## **The Integration of Escape and Relaxation on Tourist Engagement with Tourist Inspiration as a Mediating Variable in Bali SPAS**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes the effect of escape and relaxation on tourist engagement, with tourist inspiration as a mediating variable among Bali spa tourists. A mixed-methods approach gathered quantitative data from 180 tourists via purposive sampling across spa facilities and qualitative data from in-depth interviews with 12 spa managers and tourists. The structural model used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0, with bootstrapping for mediation tests. Results show escape and relaxation positively affect tourist inspiration ( $\beta = 0.627$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), which influences tourist engagement ( $\beta = 0.584$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The direct effect on tourist engagement is significant ( $\beta = 0.412$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), with partial mediation by tourist inspiration (indirect effect = 0.366;  $p < 0.001$ ). The model explains 71.3% of variance in tourist engagement ( $R^2 = 0.713$ ). Qualitative findings indicate spa experiences fostering deep relaxation and cultural immersion inspire emotional attachment, positive word-of-mouth, and revisit intentions. Theoretically, the study validates inspiration's mediating role in wellness tourism. Practically, it advises spa managers to integrate relaxation with inspirational elements like Balinese healing traditions, natural ambiance, and personalized programs. Recommendations: develop transformative spa packages, train staff in emotional intelligence, and use digital platforms for post-visit engagement via wellness content and communities.

**Keywords:** Escape and Relaxation; Tourist Inspiration; Tourist Engagement; Wellness Tourism; Spa Tourism.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The wellness tourism industry has experienced remarkable growth over the past two decades, emerging as one of the most dynamic segments of global tourism. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2023), the global wellness economy reached USD 6.32 trillion in 2024, with wellness tourism accounting for USD 919 billion—a 14.5% annual growth rate. This exponential growth reflects a fundamental shift in tourist behavior, from traditional sightseeing toward experiential travel focused on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being (Buckley, 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Tripathi & Said, 2023; Zhang & Xiao, 2024). Bali, Indonesia, has positioned itself as a premier wellness destination in Asia, leveraging its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and traditional healing practices to attract millions of wellness seekers annually.

Within this context, the concepts of escape and relaxation form a crucial foundation of wellness tourist behavior (He et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2018; Wulandari, 2025). Pearce (1982), through the Travel Career Ladder Theory, explains that escape—the psychological need to break away from daily routines and pressures—represents a primary travel motivation. Iso-Ahola (1982) further elaborates that tourists seek both escape from mundane environments and pursuit of personal fulfillment through novel experiences. In spa tourism specifically, relaxation transcends

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mere physical rest; it encompasses psychological rejuvenation, stress reduction, and restoration of mental equilibrium (Karagianni et al., 2025). Research by Lee, Chang, and Ko (2015) demonstrates that spa experiences providing deep relaxation significantly enhance psychological well-being and reduce stress levels, confirming the therapeutic value of wellness tourism.

However, the experience of escape and relaxation does not end with temporary emotional satisfaction (Chang et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2018). From a positive psychology perspective, calming and rejuvenating experiences can generate tourist inspiration—a motivational drive that emerges when individuals encounter something that profoundly moves them, sparking new insights, aspirations, or creative energy (Emilova et al., 2023; Filep & Laing, 2019; Zhang & Xiao, 2024). Thrash and Elliot (2003) define inspiration as a motivational state characterized by evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation. In tourism contexts, Böttger et al. (2017) suggest that inspirational experiences create lasting impressions that influence future behavior, including repeat visits, destination loyalty, and active engagement with the destination brand.

Tourist engagement represents the behavioral outcome of these inspirational processes. Hollebeek (2011) explains that engagement encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, where tourists not only passively consume services but actively participate, interact, and form psychological connections with destinations or service providers. In wellness tourism, Singh, Manhas, and Quintela (2022) found that highly engaged tourists demonstrate stronger emotional attachment, greater willingness to recommend destinations, higher spending patterns, and sustained post-visit interactions through digital platforms and community participation.

Despite Bali's rapid spa industry growth, current data reveals discrepancies between facility quantity and experiential quality. The Bali Provincial Tourism Office (2024) reports over 1,200 spa facilities across the island, yet tourist satisfaction surveys indicate that only 62% rate their experiences as "highly satisfying," with common complaints regarding standardized treatments lacking authentic cultural elements and superficial service interactions. Furthermore, spa managers often focus on physical service delivery—massages and body treatments—without addressing deeper emotional experience components. This gap suggests that while Bali's spa infrastructure is substantial, there remains significant potential to enhance experiential value through holistic approaches integrating relaxation with inspiration and engagement mechanisms.

### **METHOD**

This research employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies to comprehensively analyze the relationships among escape, relaxation, tourist inspiration, and tourist engagement. The quantitative component used an explanatory survey design to test hypothesized relationships through structural equation modeling, while the qualitative component provided contextual depth through in-depth interviews exploring participant experiences and managerial perspectives.

The quantitative sample comprised 180 international and domestic spa tourists selected through purposive sampling across five major spa districts in Bali (Ubud, Seminyak, Sanur, Nusa Dua, and Uluwatu) during May–August 2024. Inclusion criteria specified tourists aged 21–65 who

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had completed at least one spa treatment during their current Bali visit and were willing to participate. Sample size determination followed Hair et al. (2019) recommendations for PLS-SEM analysis, requiring a minimum of 10 observations per predictor variable. Data were collected via structured questionnaires using validated scales: Escape and Relaxation measured through adapted scales from Lee et al. (2015) with 6 items, Tourist Inspiration using Böttger et al. (2017)'s 7-item scale, and Tourist Engagement through Hollebeek et al. (2014)'s 9-item scale encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. All items employed 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Prior to main data collection, classical assumption tests ensured data quality and appropriateness for PLS-SEM analysis. Normality assessment using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that while some variables showed slight deviations from perfect normality, PLS-SEM's robustness to non-normal distributions (Hair et al., 2019) made it an appropriate analytical choice. Multicollinearity diagnostics revealed Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranging from 1.23 to 2.87—all well below the threshold of 5.0—confirming the absence of problematic collinearity. Outlier detection through Mahalanobis distance identified three extreme cases, which were removed prior to final analysis, resulting in a final sample of 180 respondents.

Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 12 participants: 6 spa managers representing various facility types (luxury resorts, standalone spas, traditional Balinese spas) and 6 international tourists from diverse nationalities. Interview protocols explored perceptions of spa experiences, factors contributing to inspiration, and engagement behaviors. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, were conducted in English or Indonesian with professional translation, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

Quantitative analysis employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The analysis involved a two-stage assessment: measurement model evaluation (outer model) examining construct validity through convergent validity ( $AVE > 0.5$ , outer loadings  $> 0.7$ ) and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion, HTMT ratios  $< 0.90$ ), plus reliability assessment (composite reliability  $> 0.7$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.7$ ); and structural model evaluation (inner model) testing hypothesized path relationships using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to determine path coefficient significance. Mediation effects were assessed following Baron and Kenny (1986) procedures, examining direct, indirect, and total effects. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo 12, identifying patterns, themes, and narratives supporting quantitative findings.

Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings followed a triangulation approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), wherein quantitative results identifying significant relationships were enriched and explained through qualitative insights. Specifically, statistical findings regarding the strength of relationships between constructs were complemented by interview narratives explaining the psychological mechanisms and experiential dimensions underlying these relationships. Convergence between quantitative effect sizes and qualitative themes strengthened

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overall conclusions, while divergences prompted deeper investigation into contextual factors. This methodological triangulation enhanced validity by ensuring that conclusions were supported by multiple independent data sources and analytical approaches.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Measurement model evaluation confirmed adequate construct validity and reliability. Convergent validity assessment showed all outer loadings exceeded 0.70 threshold (range: 0.748-0.892) and AVE values surpassed 0.50 requirement (Escape and Relaxation AVE=0.673, Tourist Inspiration AVE=0.691, Tourist Engagement AVE=0.708). Discriminant validity was established through Fornell-Larcker criterion, where square roots of AVE for each construct exceeded inter-construct correlations, and HTMT ratios remained below 0.90 (highest HTMT=0.812 between Tourist Inspiration and Tourist Engagement). Reliability indicators demonstrated strong internal consistency with Composite Reliability values ranging from 0.916 to 0.943 and Cronbach's Alpha values from 0.887 to 0.928, all exceeding 0.70 benchmark.

**Table 1. Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	ER $\rightarrow$ TI	0.627	12.483	<0.001	Supported
H2	ER $\rightarrow$ TE	0.412	7.294	<0.001	Supported
H3	TI $\rightarrow$ TE	0.584	10.856	<0.001	Supported
H4 (Indirect)	ER $\rightarrow$ TI $\rightarrow$ TE	0.366	8.721	<0.001	Supported
Total Effect	ER $\rightarrow$ TE	0.778	15.632	<0.001	Supported

Structural model results reveal significant support for all hypotheses. H1 proposes that Escape and Relaxation positively influences Tourist Inspiration, which is strongly confirmed ( $\beta=0.627$ ,  $t=12.483$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), explaining 39.3% variance in Tourist Inspiration ( $R^2=0.393$ ). This substantial effect demonstrates that deeper relaxation and psychological escape experiences generate inspirational states among spa tourists. H2 testing direct effect of Escape and Relaxation on Tourist Engagement shows significant positive relationship ( $\beta=0.412$ ,  $t=7.294$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). H3 examining Tourist Inspiration's effect on Tourist Engagement is also strongly supported ( $\beta=0.584$ ,  $t=10.856$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The model explains 71.3% variance in Tourist Engagement ( $R^2=0.713$ ), indicating robust predictive capability. H4 testing mediation reveals Tourist Inspiration partially mediates the Escape and Relaxation-Tourist Engagement relationship, with indirect effect of 0.366 ( $t=8.721$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and total effect of 0.778, confirming that inspiration serves as a crucial psychological mechanism translating relaxation into sustained engagement.

Qualitative findings enrich quantitative results by revealing mechanisms through which spa experiences generate inspiration and engagement. Spa managers emphasized that authentic Balinese healing traditions—including herbal compress ceremonies, chakra balancing rituals, and meditation practices—create transcendent moments differentiating Balinese spas from generic

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wellness facilities. One luxury resort spa manager noted: "Guests often describe profound emotional releases during traditional Balinese healing sessions. They feel they've touched something deeper than physical relaxation—a spiritual renewal inspiring lifestyle changes." Tourists corroborated these insights, with participants describing experiences of "finding inner peace," "connecting with ancient wisdom," and "discovering new perspectives on self-care." These narratives align with Kim, Lee, and Wong's (2018) findings that inspiration emerges from experiences involving cultural immersion and spiritual elements.

The strong mediation effect (indirect effect=0.366) substantiates theoretical propositions that inspiration serves as psychological bridge between experience and behavior. In practical terms, this means that while relaxation directly influences engagement, its impact amplifies significantly when accompanied by inspirational elements. Spa facilities focusing solely on technical service quality—massage techniques, facility aesthetics—may achieve baseline satisfaction but miss opportunities for deeper emotional connections driving loyalty and advocacy. Conversely, spas intentionally designing experiences to evoke wonder, cultural appreciation, and personal insight create memorable moments translating into sustained engagement behaviors including repeat visits, social media sharing, and enthusiastic recommendations.

The high R-squared value for Tourist Engagement (0.713) indicates that escape-relaxation and inspiration together explain approximately 71% of engagement variance, suggesting these variables capture core drivers of tourist behavioral outcomes in spa contexts. This finding has strategic implications: rather than viewing relaxation and engagement as direct input-output relationships, managers should recognize inspiration as intervening state requiring deliberate cultivation. Effective strategies include training staff in emotional intelligence to recognize opportunities for meaningful interactions, curating ambiance through multisensory design (aromatherapy, traditional music, natural materials), offering personalized wellness consultations addressing individual needs, and creating post-visit touchpoints sustaining inspirational connections through wellness content, online communities, and alumni programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that Escape and Relaxation significantly influences Tourist Engagement both directly ( $\beta=0.412$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and indirectly through Tourist Inspiration as mediating variable (indirect effect=0.366,  $p<0.001$ ), with the integrated model explaining 71.3% variance in Tourist Engagement. These findings validate theoretical propositions that wellness tourism experiences operate through psychological mechanisms beyond immediate satisfaction, generating inspirational states that foster sustained emotional connections and behavioral engagement. In practical terms, Bali's spa industry can enhance competitive advantage by designing holistic experiences integrating authentic cultural elements, personalized wellness journeys, and transformative moments that transcend conventional service delivery. Recommendations for spa managers include developing experience-based packages emphasizing personal transformation rather than mere treatments, investing in staff training focused on emotional intelligence and cultural storytelling capabilities, leveraging technology for pre-visit

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personalization and post-visit engagement through wellness apps and digital communities, and collaborating with local healers and cultural experts to ensure authenticity in traditional healing practices. For destination marketing organizations, findings suggest positioning Bali not merely as a relaxation destination but as a transformative wellness journey inspiring lifestyle changes and spiritual renewal. Research limitations include cross-sectional design preventing causal inference verification, geographical focus limiting generalizability to other wellness destinations, and reliance on self-reported measures potentially subject to social desirability bias. Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking inspiration and engagement evolution over time, conduct comparative studies across diverse wellness destinations examining cultural context influences, explore additional mediating variables such as mindfulness, authenticity perception, or service quality, and investigate moderating effects of tourist characteristics including wellness involvement, cultural background, or previous spa experience. Additionally, examining the role of digital technologies in sustaining post-visit inspiration and engagement through virtual wellness communities, telemedicine integration, and personalized wellness content delivery represents a promising avenue for advancing wellness tourism scholarship and practice.

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