

Strategic Workforce Recovery Plan for Bali, Indonesia

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1.0 Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major socioeconomic disruption in Bali, Indonesia, a popular tourist destination worldwide. Due to a sharp decline in foreign visitor arrivals brought on by the crisis, many businesses had to close, and the labor market was severely disrupted. The collapse of informal employment structures, wage suppression, and a mass exodus of workers from the tourism industry were among the main problems.

The purpose of this report is to assess how the crisis has affected Bali's tourism workforce and to suggest a thorough recovery plan. Using information from government publications, industry statistics, and scholarly literature, a qualitative, descriptive methodology was used.

The results show enduring structural flaws, such as a lack of social protections, seasonal employment patterns, and an excessive reliance on migrant labor. The suggested recovery plan consists of long-term tactics centered on institutional reforms, upskilling, and youth employment as well as short-term initiatives like skill development and re-employment programs.

This report offers a framework for reestablishing a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready tourism workforce for Bali, grounded in Human Capital Theory, Resilience Theory, and Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM).

2.0 Introduction

Prior to COVID-19, Bali, also known as the "Island of the Gods," accounted for almost 60% of Indonesia's GDP, making it the country's most famous tourist destination. From lodging and transportation to craftspeople and cultural performers, Bali's tourism industry supports a diverse ecosystem.

But the COVID-19 pandemic nearly stopped tourism, revealing serious weaknesses in Bali's labor market. Restrictions on international travel severely reduced the number of tourists arriving, which led to widespread migration back to agriculture or informal work, unemployment, and wage cuts.

In order to correct labor market distortions and establish a strong human capital base for Bali's post-crisis tourism economy, this report suggests a Strategic Workforce Recovery Plan.

Among the goals are:

- Evaluating labor dynamics before and after the crisis.
- recognizing patterns of dependency and structural flaws.
- putting forward sustainable, inclusive, and moral workforce recovery plans.

Strategic workforce planning is essential for maintaining Bali's cultural legacy and promoting community well-being in addition to economic recovery. By making investments in workforce resilience, Bali will be able to withstand future crises without causing the hundreds of thousands of people who depend on tourism to lose their jobs.

3.0 Literature review

3.1 Tourism labor economics

Labor markets for the tourism industry are extremely elastic and frequently characterized by precarity and informality, particularly in developing nations like Indonesia. Over a million people were employed in Bali's tourism industry prior to the pandemic, with many of them working in the hospitality, guiding, arts and crafts, and transportation sectors (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019). These positions are known for their high turnover, low formal training requirements, and low entry barriers. Employment in the sector is unstable due to its sensitivity to changes in international travel and world events.

Elasticity in tourism labor is demonstrated by quick reactions to shifts in demand; employment and wages decline disproportionately when visitor arrivals decline. Because of its dependence on discretionary consumer spending, the hospitality industry is one of the most vulnerable to external shocks, claim Baum and Nguyen (2020). Furthermore, many workers lack protections like severance pay, unemployment insurance, or healthcare due to the prevalence of informal hiring practices and part-time contracts.

Bali's tourism sector is also vulnerable to localized shocks because of its geographic concentration in important cities like Kuta, Ubud, and Seminyak. A significant portion of the workforce in the tourism industry works informally, often with little oversight of working conditions or compliance with labor laws. This reflects a broader pattern seen in tourism-dependent developing countries, where the dual labor market—formal and informal—shapes access to opportunities and resilience.

3.2 Crisis impact on workforce

An important case study for comprehending the vulnerability of tourism workers is the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UNWTO (2021) and Baum et al. (2020), the tourism industry experiences "first and worst" job

losses as a result of crises. During the busiest lockdown months in 2020, Bali saw a 99% decrease in visitor arrivals (BPS, 2021), which caused the majority of tourism-related businesses to close. As a result, more than 70% of workers in the tourism industry were either placed in the informal economy, laid off, or placed on furlough (Widiastuti, 2021).

The pandemic had psychological as well as economic effects. Bali workers who had relied on the tourism industry for decades were abruptly thrust into a state of uncertainty with no obvious path to recovery. Many went back to their villages and started doing informal trade or subsistence farming. This trend is similar to other crisis-affected areas around the world, where workers who depend on tourism had to switch to low-income survival techniques (ILO, 2021).

Additionally, deskilling and skill atrophy became serious hazards. Long periods of unemployment made it harder for workers who had received training in digital tools, foreign languages, or service excellence to find jobs outside of the tourism industry (Gursoy & Chi, 2022). This emphasizes how important it is to implement upskilling and skill-retention strategies as part of workforce recovery.

3.3 Workforce Vulnerabilities

Numerous structural flaws in Bali's labor market increase its susceptibility to crises. The heavy reliance on seasonal and informal labor is one of the most notable. Prior to the pandemic, over 60% of tourism-related jobs were informal, especially in micro and small businesses, according to BPS (2020). Workers frequently lacked access to health insurance, minimum wage protection, and written contracts.

Furthermore, a sizable section of Bali's tourism workforce is made up of internal migrants, or employees from other islands like Java, Lombok, and Sulawesi, who are frequently shut out of the community's support networks. According to Suwena and Mariyono (2021), these migrants are typically employed on ad hoc or short-term contracts and are less likely to be eligible for government assistance or labor protections. They were particularly vulnerable during the crisis; many of them returned to their home areas because they could not find work or housing.

Age and gender also increase vulnerability. Young people and women predominate in entry-level tourism jobs like food service, housekeeping, and customer service, but they are also frequently the first to lose their jobs during recessions. These groups are further marginalized by the lack of access to training, child care, and job security (ILO, 2021). Recovery runs the risk of becoming unequal and exclusive in the absence of focused policy interventions.

3.4 Human capital and resilience

A key component of post-crisis workforce strategies for the tourism industry is the idea of human capital. Higher productivity and adaptability are the results of investments in education, training, and skill development, according to human capital theory (Becker, 1964). Resilient economies in the tourism industry are ones that, even in recessions, retain and improve the skills of their workforce.

According to Gursoy and Chi (2022), upskilling improves the quality of tourism labor and sector resilience when paired with official certification and recognition. Reskilling initiatives in Bali that emphasize language skills, cleanliness standards, digital customer service, and sustainable practices may boost employees' adaptability and enhance the caliber of their work.

Furthermore, resilience theory emphasizes the value of redundancy and flexibility in systems (Holling, 1973). This entails providing basic protections (healthcare, wage guarantees), facilitating career mobility (e.g., between sectors), and integrating continuous learning into tourism employment models for the workforce. According to studies, countries like Thailand and Costa Rica that made investments in their workforce's adaptability recovered more quickly after the crisis (UNWTO, 2022).

3.5 Global case studies

International examples offer comparative insights into workforce recovery in tourism.

Thailand

In response to the pandemic, the Thai government introduced digital training platforms for laid-off tourism workers. Through partnerships with vocational institutions, courses on e-commerce, digital marketing, and foreign languages were offered online (ASEAN Tourism Association, 2021). Simultaneously, subsidies were provided to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to retain staff. These measures not only cushioned employment loss but also equipped the workforce with new skills relevant to post-pandemic tourism.

Spain

Spain, a significant international travel destination, focused recovery efforts on formalization and skill development. Policies governing the labor market promoted the conversion of short-term contracts into long-term positions. Campaigns for national reskilling assisted in the shift of tourism workers into green and digital occupations (OECD, 2021). In order to address age and gender disparities, Spain also provided incentives to companies that wanted to keep women and workers over 50.

The Caribbean

Post-COVID tourism labor strategies integrated cross-sectoral employment in small island states like Barbados and Jamaica. In order to combine tourism and agriculture and increase food security and create jobs, agro-tourism initiatives were promoted (CTO, 2021). By implementing microinsurance programs for unofficial tourism workers and providing tax incentives to encourage formal registration, these areas also improved social protections.

4.0 Methodology

This study examines workforce recovery tactics within the framework of Bali's post-crisis tourism industry using a qualitative and descriptive case-based research methodology. An in-depth examination of labor dynamics, sociocultural vulnerabilities, and institutional responses in a complex and changing environment is made possible by the selected methodology. Because of the region's strong reliance on foreign travel and the noticeable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on its workforce, a case study design with a focus on Bali, Indonesia, was chosen.

4.1 Research design and rationale

The study uses an interpretivist epistemology and is qualitative in nature. This paradigm is useful for comprehending how individuals and organizations react to crises within a particular socioeconomic and cultural setting. Qualitative methods enable a nuanced analysis of lived experiences, policy environments, and labor market characteristics, in contrast to quantitative approaches that depend on numerical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case of Bali makes it easier to examine how labor markets in the tourism sector respond to crises, how seasonal and informal workers deal with economic shocks, and how governments and institutions try to recover.

The methodology's descriptive component enables the study to record current circumstances without making an effort to change any of the variables. This is especially pertinent in post-crisis settings where the goal of the study is to comprehend "what is" rather than "what might be" in experimental settings (Yin, 2018). This methodology supports policy-relevant analysis and well-informed recommendations by emphasizing documentation, pattern recognition, and comparative insights.

4.2 Data Sources

This study used data from three main sources: (1) government and institutional reports, (2) peer-reviewed scholarly literature, and (3) comparative case studies from other economies that rely on tourism.

Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journals offered fundamental perspectives on workforce vulnerability, crisis response, resilience-building tactics, and tourism labor economics. ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar were among the important databases consulted. In order to ensure relevance, the literature review concentrated on works published between 2015 and 2024, with a particular focus on studies that addressed Southeast Asia, informal labor, and the volatility of the tourism sector. Human capital theory, informality, labor elasticity, and post-crisis recovery models were among the main themes (e.g., Baum & Nguyen, 2020; Gursoy & Chi, 2022).

Government and Institutional Reports: Grey literature, particularly reports and datasets from reputable national and international organizations, was the second main source. Important frameworks for sectoral recovery, skill development, and labor protections in the tourism industry were supplied by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik, or BPS) provided the national data, with an emphasis on the employment and tourism figures for Bali Province. We also looked for current strategies and regulatory interventions in ministerial briefings and publications from Bali's provincial government. These resources provided context-specific information on government recovery initiatives following COVID-19, informal employment, migration patterns, and workforce demographics.

Comparative Case Studies: The methodology included case studies from other areas with comparable socioeconomic reliance on tourism in order to improve the findings' transferability and produce insights into best practices. Examples included the Caribbean, Thailand, and Spain, all of which saw severe workforce disruptions and declines in tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. These examples were picked because they were pertinent to the adoption of creative workforce strategies, sectoral structure, and scale. Policy briefs, scholarly analyses, and reports from international organizations like the OECD, ASEAN, and Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) were the sources of the information. The comparative analysis revealed transferable models for Bali's recovery and enabled the triangulation of strategies.

4.3 Data Collection and Synthesis

Secondary research techniques were used to gather data, guaranteeing the use of trustworthy, legitimate, and morally sourced sources. Credibility, relevance, and recentness were given top priority in the selection criteria, and all sources were referenced according to APA guidelines. The synthesis process adhered to the principles of thematic analysis. Key themes including gendered impacts, informal labor, employment vulnerability, human capital development, and policy response were used to categorize the information.

Cross-comparing scholarly research with practical policy applications reduced bias and validated insights. Proxy indicators and triangulated results from international organizations were used in cases where national reporting lacked certain data (such as the size of the informal sector). In order to produce a comprehensive and context-sensitive analysis, this methodological rigor was crucial.

4.4 Case study approach

Due to its unique reliance on foreign tourism, which accounted for more than 50% of the province's GDP prior to the pandemic, Bali was chosen as the primary case study (BPS, 2019). From gendered labor patterns to migrant dependency, the island's economic, cultural, and labor features serve as a microcosm for larger trends in tourism economies. By concentrating on a single instance, in-depth analysis was possible while maintaining wider applicability through comparative learning.

Four analytical dimensions served as the foundation for the Bali case study: (1) pre-crisis labor market characteristics; (2) the impact of the pandemic on workforce structure and income; (3) institutional and policy response; and (4) recovery and resilience pathways. These dimensions were modified to fit Bali's sociocultural context after being taken from the ILO's framework for tourism recovery.

4.5 Ethical concentration and limitations

Since there were no direct human participants in the study and it was based on secondary data, there were few ethical risks. However, the use of reliable and appropriately cited sources was ensured through the application of ethical diligence in the data selection process. The results were not overgeneralized, and the limitations of secondary data were acknowledged, especially in situations where policy environments are changing quickly or where data on informal labor may be underreported.

The approach's reliance on the accuracy and accessibility of publicly available data is one of its main drawbacks. Since a large portion of Bali's tourism workforce works informally, official statistics might not accurately reflect social effects, income disruptions, or job losses. In order to lessen this, several data sources were compared, and case study insights were utilized to fill in interceptive gaps.

5.0 Findings

The main conclusions about the labor market dynamics of Bali's tourism industry, both prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic, are presented in this section. It highlights employment trends, structural weaknesses,

and dependency risks that impact workforce resilience in crisis situations using statistical data, government and international reports, and case-based observations.

Labor Dynamics Prior to the Crisis

Bali's economy was heavily reliant on tourism prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, employing about 1.1 million people, or nearly 25% of the island's workforce (BPS, 2019). A network of formal and informal job opportunities was created by the tourism industry, which included a wide range of services like lodging, food and drink, transportation, and cultural attractions.

In terms of demographics, women and young adults made up the majority of the tourism workforce. The sector was dominated by young people, especially those between the ages of 18 and 35, because of the perceived flexibility, low entry barriers, and chance to make money in places with lots of tourists (ILO, 2020). Although they were underrepresented in managerial or ownership positions, women were overrepresented in service occupations like spa therapy, front desk reception, and hospitality.

The majority of Bali's tourism employees lacked formal training in both education and skills. Although there were vocational programs in tourism-related fields, they were not sufficiently expanded to satisfy the demands of the industry. The most popular way to learn new skills was through on-the-job training. Due to the lack of standardized qualifications, this produced a workforce that was flexible and responsive, making cross-sector mobility and upskilling challenging (UNWTO, 2020).

The pay was low. The BPS (2019) reports that the average monthly salary for tourism-related jobs was between IDR 3 and 4 million (roughly USD 200–270), with regional differences based on the volume of tourists. Wages in coastal and urban areas were higher than those in rural or inland regions. However, because they were not legally protected, informal workers frequently made less than the minimum wage.

Conditions Following a Crisis

Bali's booming tourism industry came to an abrupt halt with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. International arrivals fell by more than 90% in 2020, and the island was compelled to close its borders and implement protracted lockdowns.

The industry saw a wave of layoffs and company closures. At the height of the pandemic, over 70% of tourism workers were either furloughed without pay or lost their jobs completely (ILO, 2021; UNDP Indonesia, 2022). The prolonged lack of revenue and the absence of state-backed financial relief caused many hospitality and service businesses to permanently close. Because they were usually not eligible for official severance or government assistance, contract workers, part-timers, and freelancers were particularly at risk.

The increase in return migration was one of the most obvious socioeconomic changes. Thousands of internal migrants, mostly from East Java and Nusa Tenggara, returned to their home provinces or villages after finding no work opportunities in Bali's tourist hubs (ADB, 2021). In addition to straining rural economies, this resulted in the informalization of employment as former tourism workers turned to digital micro-entrepreneurship, market vending, or agriculture as a means of subsistence.

A significant skills mismatch was also revealed by the crisis. Many workers in the tourism industry lacked the diversified competencies or digital literacy necessary to switch to new job sectors like online services, logistics, or e-commerce. Programs for upskilling that were already in place were either too limited in scope or inaccessible to meet the unexpected demand for reskilling (ILO, 2022). Widespread underemployment and a protracted recovery lag resulted from this, especially for workers without secondary or vocational education.

There was little wage recovery even after Bali's borders were reopened in 2022. The majority of returning workers discovered that their pay was either the same as or less than it was before the crisis. Wage stagnation was caused in part by an excess of labor and employers' cautious cost-control measures. Without union representation or collective bargaining power, informal laborers continued to take inferior wages to secure any available work.

Weaknesses in Structure

A number of structural flaws in Bali's tourism labor system were exposed, which increased the crisis's impact. Seasonality is the most important of these. With the highest demand during international holidays and regional celebrations, employment prospects in the tourism industry typically vary significantly with the high and low tourist seasons. Workers find it challenging to plan financially or make investments in long-term professional development as a result of the seasonality that causes erratic incomes and inconsistent employment contracts.

The high prevalence of informality is another enduring problem. Prior to the crisis, more than 60% of Bali's tourism-related jobs were unofficial, especially for freelance guides, transporters, vendors, and employees of family-run enterprises (ILO, 2021). Lack of formal contracts, exemption from health and safety laws, and inability to obtain unemployment or social security benefits are all common characteristics of informal employment. These workers had to rely on personal savings or community support during the pandemic because they were virtually invisible to official aid distribution systems.

Particularly for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), which are the foundation of Bali's tourism industry, labor law enforcement is still lax. Labor inspections are infrequent, and regulatory frameworks

pertaining to minimum wages, working hours, and occupational safety are applied inconsistently. This puts vulnerable workers at greater risk of exploitation and unstable income, particularly women and migrants (Baum & Nguyen, 2020).

Patterns of Dependency

Bali's dependence on foreign travel presents both advantages and disadvantages. Prior to the pandemic, foreign tourists accounted for over 80% of tourism revenue, making the economy particularly vulnerable to disruptions from around the world (BPS, 2019). The island's economy shrank by more than 9% in 2020, highlighting this excessive reliance on outside demand (Bali Provincial Government, 2021).

Regional inequality is made worse by economic centralization. While inland and eastern regions lag behind in development, most tourism-related activities and infrastructure are concentrated in a few well-known locations, including Kuta, Ubud, Nusa Dua, and Seminyak. Informal employment is fueled by this unequal spatial distribution, which also restricts the reach of tourism-generated income and increases competition for jobs in urban areas.

During the pandemic, efforts to shift the focus to domestic travel were mainly unsuccessful. By late 2021, some domestic travel had returned, but spending was still irregular and low. Because they typically travel for shorter periods of time and on tighter budgets, Indonesian tourists don't bring in enough money to cover losses abroad. Furthermore, domestic tourism's contribution to economic recovery was further constrained by the absence of destination diversification and customized marketing (MoTCE, 2022).

6.0 Discussion

Exposure of Systemic Workforce Flaws

The inherent flaws in Bali's tourism labor system were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the island's excessive reliance on seasonal, informal work, the workforce was particularly susceptible to shocks. A precarious employment structure was established prior to the pandemic by small and medium-sized businesses' (SMEs) lax enforcement of regulations, lack of formal labor rights, and limited access to social protection. This vulnerability resulted in widespread layoffs, quick income loss, and increased social precarity when tourism suddenly stopped.

Importantly, Bali lacked institutional mechanisms for redeployment or workforce upskilling. The island's economy depends heavily on tourism, yet the industry has made little investment in the long-term development of human capital. Due to their informal training and lack of transferable skills, the majority of workers were ill-

prepared to move into other industries during the crisis. This problem was made worse by the lack of integrated education-to-employment pathways in the tourism industry, particularly with regard to digital and multilingual competencies.

In summary, the pandemic sped up the revelation of long-standing structural flaws rather than causing a new crisis. Although the informal economy was adaptable during expansion, it was not sufficiently robust during contraction. Bali's tourism employment model was optimized for short-term gains, not long-term stability or crisis adaptability.

Sustainable and Ethical Recovery Routes

The future of Bali's tourism workforce must focus on a more moral and sustainable employment model rather than just economic recovery. Plans for recovery must be based on the values of long-term resilience, inclusion, and human dignity.

Integrating informal workers into the formal economy must come first. Punitive regulation is insufficient to accomplish this. Important elements include offering financial or training incentives to employers who comply, educating them about labor rights, and encouraging registration. Informality should be viewed as a chance to increase inclusive protections rather than as a liability.

Second, social protection programs need to be extended to include all workers, including gig workers, freelancers, and immigrants. The extreme income shocks seen during the pandemic would be lessened with a universal safety net, whether it be through health care, unemployment insurance, or skill development.

Third, it is essential to invest in skills that are ready for the future. The workforce in Bali needs to be ready for new tourism trends, such as digital hospitality, eco-friendly travel, adherence to health and safety regulations, and climate-resilient operations. Upskilling initiatives that are accessible, modular, and accepted in ASEAN markets should be jointly developed by government and private sector entities.

7.0 Short-Term Strategic Workforce Recovery Plan (0–2 years)

Re-employment Campaigns: Assign employees to hotels and attractions that have reopened.

Government wage subsidies for small and medium-sized tourism businesses are known as wage stabilization.

Temporary Skills Training: Modules on customer service, hygiene, and language.

Micro-Enterprise Support: Village-level tourism entrepreneurs receive grants.

Cross-Regional Workforce Flow: Returned migrants' legal routes.

Long-Term (2–5+ years)

Digital academies and tourism polytechnics are examples of institutional upskilling.

Frameworks for Labor Mobility: National certification schemes for jobs in tourism.

Youth Inclusion: Apprenticeships and internships with financial assistance.

Social Protection: Pension plans and microinsurance for unorganized laborers.

Reforms to the Labor Law: Increase enforcement and formalization incentives.

Education Partnerships: Curricula that meet the demands of sustainable tourism.

Integration of Theory

Human Capital Theory: Investing in knowledge and skills increases resilience and productivity.

Adaptability and learning from shocks are key components of resilience theory.

SHRM: Harmonizes labor planning for tourism with strategic economic goals

8.0 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the long-standing weaknesses of Bali's tourism industry. A sector that had historically relied on seasonality, informality, and low skill investment was unprepared to withstand such a significant and protracted upheaval. The effects of the crisis were immediate and extensive, affecting more than 70% of tourism workers at its height and resulting in widespread migration and wage stagnation.

This report has shown that structural flaws that have long gone unchecked are the root cause of Bali's tourism

labor market's problems rather than just an external shock. An unstable and unfair employment ecosystem has been exacerbated by informal employment, a lack of labor protections, an excessive reliance on foreign tourists, and a lack of reskilling opportunities. Therefore, going back to the way things were before the pandemic would only reinforce the same risks.

Bali needs to implement a coordinated, moral, and forward-thinking labor strategy in order to create a workforce that can withstand future crises and make a significant contribution to sustainable development. This entails creating strong, locally relevant upskilling programs, increasing access to social protection, and integrating informal workers into the formal economy through education and incentives. Additionally, integrating tourism with related industries like green energy, digital services, and agriculture will help diversify job opportunities and lessen overcentralization in tourist destinations.

The examined international case studies, which range from the Caribbean's cross-sectoral employment models to Thailand's digital retraining programs, provide insightful guidance for Bali's future. Any effective adaptation, though, needs to be based on the distinct sociocultural, institutional, and economic circumstances of the island.

A resilient, inclusive, and globally sustainable tourism labor system can replace Bali's current one if the integrated recommendations in this report—which combine short-term recovery mechanisms with long-term structural reform—are put into practice. In addition to shielding Bali's tourism industry from future shocks, investing in human capital, encouraging moral hiring practices, and broadening economic participation will guarantee that it supports the general well-being of society.

9.0 References

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