

# Authenticity and Uniqueness of Paluang Car Temple as Tourism Attraction in Nusa Penida Isle, Bali

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## Abstract

This paper addresses a research gap in tourism studies by examining the distinctive case of the Paluang Car Temple in Nusa Penida. While discussions on authenticity and uniqueness in tourism are prevalent, research exploring these concepts in culturally unique, non-mainstream destinations like Nusa Penida remains limited. The unique cultural elements, exemplified by the car-shaped shrines at the Paluang Temple, influence a destination's appeal. By analyzing the impact of these features on tourist experiences and overall destination allure, this research provides insights into the development of tourism products that leverage local distinctiveness. It contributes to a broader understanding of how authenticity and uniqueness shape travel preferences, bridging a critical gap in tourism and cultural studies.

Employing a descriptive-qualitative approach aligned with the interpretive method, the article delves into the attraction of the Car Temple's unconventional design, which has attracted significant attention. Despite its modest place in the Balinese temple hierarchy, the temple consistently features on religious tour itineraries in Nusa Penida, driven by its unmatched uniqueness and authenticity. Additionally, the Car Temple often complements visits to the renowned Klingking Beach, a nearby tourism highlight. In summary, this paper underscores the pivotal role of the Car Shrines' uniqueness in motivating tourists, contributing to the temple's success in a competitive tourism market.

**Keywords:** authenticity, uniqueness, cultural tourism, Paluang Car Temple.

## INTRODUCTION

The exploration of uniqueness and authenticity has long been pivotal in assessing tourism resources. These concepts are recognized as crucial indicators for evaluating tourism potential, as outlined in Indonesia Regulation No. 10/2009. The discourse on authenticity in tourism has spurred ongoing debates and studies (Cohen, 1984; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Duffy & Overholt, 2013; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Thomsen, 2018a). Similarly, discussions on uniqueness have been equally extensive, highlighting that both concepts are often perceived subjectively rather than as absolute realities.

The tourism industry's evolution reflects a growing preference for unique experiences beyond conventional attractions. Uniqueness in tourism encompasses various elements that distinguish a destination, creating memorable and authentic experiences for travelers. This aspect is crucial in attracting and retaining visitors (Pitanatri & Pitana, 2019; Winanti & Seriadi, 2022)

Related to its uniqueness, Bali is well known as one of the best tourist destination in the world. This tiny island of Indonesia has been visited by tourists from all over the world since the

1920s. The number of tourist's arrival increased over time. Before the pandemic Covid-19, the island welcome 6.023 million international direct arrival, and around the same number of indirect arrivals (i.e. those who visit Bali via other entrances of Indonesia, not directly from abroad). In addition, some 15 millions domestic tourists also visit Bali every year. In the last decade, tourists do not only wander on the island, but also in surroundings small isles, notably Nusa Penida, Lembongan, and Ceningan isles, collectively known as Nusa Penida sub-District.

Nusa Penida Sub-District was previously known as a poor, the least developed region in Bali. However, starting in around 1998, opened by Bounty Cruise, the isles are developing fastly through tourism. In 2019 (prior to pandemic era), Nusa Penida was visited by more than 100 thousand foreign tourists, who came to the isles by ferry from Benoa, Sanur, Padang bay, and Kusamba seaports. A number of tourist attractions with their unique characteristics, different to those of Bali, are the main capitals attracting tourists. Among the most famous attractions are Diving spot famous with Mola-mola fish; the unique Kelingking Beach; religious pilgrimage to famous temples such as Pura Penataran Dalem Ped, Pura Goa Giri Putri, Pura Puncak Mundi, Pura Dalem Kerangkeng, and Pura Batu Medawu (Buda 2012). One of the attractions is Paluang Temple, better known as "The Temple of Cars" (Pura Mobil), located in Dusun (hamlet) Karang Dawa, the village of Bunga Mekar, on the southern part of Nusa Penida isle.

The existence of the shrines of Cars in the innermost part of this temple raises a number of questions, such as how it came into being, how the people perceive the shrines, and how the visitors see the uniqueness of the temple.

The Paluang Car Temple, or "The Temple of Cars," located in the village of Bunga Mekar on Nusa Penida, stands out for its unique car-shaped shrines. This paper aims to delve into the significance of such distinctive tourism attractions, exploring how they enhance the appeal of destinations, influence travel

decisions, and contribute to the success of these locations. It begins with an analysis of the concepts of authenticity and uniqueness in tourism, using the Car Temple of Nusa Penida as a case study to unravel their importance in the development and success of tourism products.

This paper addresses a significant research gap in the field of tourism studies by focusing on the unique case of the Paluang Car Temple in Nusa Penida. Despite extensive discussions on authenticity and uniqueness in tourism, there is limited research exploring how these concepts are perceived and valued in less mainstream, culturally unique destinations like Nusa Penida.

This study is pivotal in understanding how distinctive cultural elements, such as the car-shaped shrines of the Paluang Temple, contribute to the allure of a destination. By examining the impact of these unique features on tourist experiences and destination appeal, this research offers valuable insights into the development of tourism products that leverage local uniqueness. This contributes to a broader understanding of how authenticity and uniqueness shape travel preferences and decisions, filling a critical gap in tourism and cultural studies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: UNIQUENESS AND AUTHENTICITY**

Authenticity seems to attract more discussions among tourism scholars. Cohen (1972) and MacCannel (1999) argue that "tourism is a modern quest for authenticity". Literally, authenticity is defined as "Not false or copied: Genuine and original, as opposed to being a fake or reproduction". In other words, authenticity means something that is real, true, or original. Historically the terms authenticity was commonly used in Archaeology and Museum, to distinguish whether an heritage object or antiquity is real or newly made (fake), for which the archaeologist define the value of the object (Brown, 2013; Wang, 1999). The terms authenticity is then applied in tourism, particularly in culture-related tourism, such as village tourism, heritage tourism, festivals,

rituals, architecture, and gastronomic tourism. In tourism, authenticity is associated whether the product is original or genuine (Park et al., 2019; Zhu, 2012)

The task of defining what qualifies as "real" or "original" in our intricate world is inherently problematic due to the pervasive nature of modifications and adaptations that characterize virtually all aspects of existence. Pure originality, it seems, is an elusive ideal, as nearly everything we encounter and experience represents a form of transformation or reinterpretation of preexisting elements (Le et al., 2019). This intricacy is particularly conspicuous when examining culture, where the classification of an aspect as original or authentic becomes increasingly challenging. In the majority of cases, what is commonly perceived as original is, in reality, a product of adaptation, alteration, or the amalgamation of preexisting cultural elements (Mikuš, 2009; Saputra & Pitanatri, 2023). Consequently, the conventional understanding of "originality" necessitates a broader and more nuanced examination.

Wang (2021) contributes significantly to the discourse on authenticity by delineating three distinct analytical approaches: objectivism, constructivism, and postmodernism. These approaches offer valuable perspectives for a comprehensive examination of authenticity, revealing its multifaceted nature and diverse manifestations. Within this framework, Wang identifies three distinct types of authenticity, each possessing its own unique characteristics and implications.

The first type, known as objective authenticity, aligns with an objectivist perspective, positing that there exists an inherent and measurable authenticity within an object or experience. This perspective often hinges on empirical and tangible attributes that can be objectively validated. In cultural contexts, objective authenticity may entail considerations such as historical accuracy, provenance, and the preservation of original elements (Wu et al., 2020). Essentially, this perspective seeks to establish criteria or standards against which authenticity can be objectively assessed.

The second type, constructive or symbolic authenticity, emerges from a constructivist standpoint. Here, authenticity is perceived as a construct or symbolic representation that derives its meaning and significance from the collective beliefs, interpretations, and narratives of individuals or communities (Arnould et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2020). Constructive authenticity emphasizes the subjective nature of authenticity, where cultural elements acquire authenticity through the meanings assigned to them by society. In this view, authenticity is not an inherent quality but rather a product of human interpretation and cultural discourse.

The third type, existential authenticity, originates from the postmodernist perspective. In this framework, authenticity is closely tied to individual experiences and existential encounters. It revolves around the idea that authenticity is a deeply personal and existential phenomenon. It is less concerned with objective criteria or collective interpretations and instead focuses on the authentic experience as perceived by an individual (Pitanatri & Wiarti, 2022). Existential authenticity underscores the authenticity of one's subjective encounters, emotions, and feelings within a cultural context, often transcending established norms and conventions.

Wang's typology of authenticity provides a comprehensive lens through which scholars and practitioners can navigate the intricate landscape of authenticity in various contexts, including cultural heritage, tourism, and beyond. Each type of authenticity underscores the complexity of the concept, highlighting the interplay between objective, subjective, and existential dimensions in our quest to comprehend and appreciate what is deemed "authentic" in our multifaceted world.

Objective authenticity concerned with the authenticity of the object being toured, such as the authenticity of the heritage as tourism attraction. In this sense, authenticity is measured using archaeological criteria. Constructive authenticity is a result of social construction, related to points of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers (I. G. Pitana &

Pitanatri, 2016; Ren & Qiu, 2019). As a social construction, this type of authenticity is contextually determined, relative, and negotiable. Existential authenticity concerns with tourist's experience, "intersubjective feelings activated by the liminal process of tourist activities" (Wang, 2018).

Wang further states that

"in postmodern conditions, both objective and constructive authenticity, as object-related notions, can only explain a limited range of tourist experiences, whereas existential authenticity, as activity-related situation, is germane to the explanation of a greater variety of tourist experiences" (Wang 2021: 349).

MacCannell clearly argued that tourism involves the search for authenticity or authentic experience, meaning that tourists are concerned with the objective authenticity and the feeling of being authentic. However, the tourist often come to the staged authenticity, whereas they think that the toured objects are authentic, while in reality they are intentionally constructed to look real or authentic, merely to satisfy the tourists' needs and wants (Pitana, 2010; Pitana, 2003).

Wang's comprehensive review of existing literature in 2021 has yielded significant insights into the multifaceted concept of authenticity, shedding light on several fundamental understandings that permeate the discourse in this domain. These key insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how authenticity is perceived and constructed in various contexts, particularly within the realm of cultural heritage and tourism.

First and foremost, Wang underscores the absence of an absolute notion of authenticity. This observation is rooted in the understanding that culture is not a static entity but an ever-evolving and dynamic phenomenon. The recognition that culture is in a perpetual state of change challenges the notion that there exists a fixed and unchanging state of authenticity (Damanik et al., 2020, 2022). Instead, authenticity is inherently contingent upon the specific historical and cultural context in which it is situated.

A fundamental tenet of Wang's analysis revolves around the idea that cultures and traditions are not static relics of the past but are, in fact, actively invented, constructed, and modified through social processes. These adaptations are driven by the evolving needs and requirements of the contemporary context. This perspective underscores the malleability and adaptability of cultural elements, blurring the boundaries of what is considered authentic and emphasizing the role of societal dynamics in shaping authenticity (Picard, 2008).

Another crucial dimension of Wang's insights lies in the relativity of authenticity. She aptly points out that authenticity or inauthenticity is not an inherent quality but rather a result of individual perspectives and interpretations. Consequently, authenticity becomes highly subjective and context-dependent (Arnould et al., 2014; Richards, 2006). What one tourist or observer perceives as authentic may appear inauthentic to another, highlighting the deeply subjective nature of authenticity and its variation from one individual to another.

Moreover, Wang also draws attention to the notion that authenticity often functions as a label attributed to visited cultures. This labeling can, in turn, lead to the stereotyping and simplification of the cultural image of a destination. These stereotypes, while convenient for marketing and perception, can oversimplify the complexities and nuances of the visited culture, potentially distorting the authentic experience (Ooi, 2019; Yang et al., 2019). This aspect underscores the potential for misrepresentations and simplifications in the context of cultural tourism.

One particularly intriguing facet introduced by Wang is the concept of emergent authenticity. She posits that something initially perceived as inauthentic or artificial may, over time, acquire an authentic status. This idea challenges static notions of authenticity and acknowledges that authenticity can manifest itself in unexpected and evolving ways. It underscores the dynamic nature of authenticity, wherein the passage of time and changing societal perspectives can redefine what is considered authentic.

Within the context of postmodern thought, Wang's observations align with the deconstruction of reality. This postmodern perspective deliberately blurs the boundaries between the original and the imitation, giving rise to the concept of "hyperreality." Coined by Ritzer in 2004, hyperreality describes a state in which the distinction between the real and the simulated becomes increasingly blurred, reflecting the complex and interwoven nature of authenticity in contemporary culture.

Within the framework of postmodern thought, a notable paradigm shift emerges in the conceptualization of reality, with profound implications for our understanding of authenticity. This postmodern perspective is characterized by a deliberate deconstruction of traditional notions of reality, a process that entails the deliberate blurring of the demarcation lines between what is considered original and what is categorized as imitation or simulation (Cuomo et al., 2021). This transformative shift in perception is succinctly encapsulated in the concept of "hyperreality," as articulated by Ritzer in 2004.

The postmodern view fundamentally challenges the conventional understanding of reality as an objective and immutable entity. Instead, it posits that in the contemporary milieu, reality has undergone a significant metamorphosis. This transformation is marked by the erosion of clear boundaries that once separated the authentic from the simulated or the real from the imitation. In essence, hyperreality signifies a condition where the distinction between the genuine and the contrived becomes increasingly elusive and convoluted.

At the core of hyperreality lies the idea that our contemporary culture is inundated with a proliferation of simulated experiences and representations. These simulations, which mimic or imitate reality, have become so ubiquitous and immersive that they often supersede the significance of their authentic counterparts. In this context, hyperreality contends that the simulated, rather than being a mere copy of reality, can assume a reality of its own, a reality that coexists and, at times,

supplants what is conventionally perceived as authentic.

The blurring of boundaries between the original and the imitation is further accentuated by the prevalence of technology and media in shaping contemporary perceptions of reality. In an era characterized by virtual reality, digital simulations, and hypermediated environments, the distinction between what is authentic and what is fabricated becomes increasingly obscured. Technological advancements have enabled the creation of hyperreal experiences that challenge our ability to differentiate between what is genuine and what is a product of artifice.

Moreover, this postmodern perspective underscores the role of consumer culture and the commodification of authenticity. In a society driven by consumerism, authenticity is often packaged and marketed as a consumable product (Thomsen, 2018b). Authentic experiences, once deeply rooted in cultural traditions and history, are commodified and sold as part of the tourism industry. The line between an authentic cultural encounter and a carefully curated, commercially driven performance becomes blurred, leading to a paradoxical situation where authenticity itself is commercialized and marketed.

Baudrillard's seminal work in 1983 also introduced the intriguing concept of the simulacrum, which has profound implications for our understanding of authenticity in the contemporary world. In the increasingly complex landscape of modernity, the traditional demarcations between the real and the imaginary, the true and the false, and the authentic and the fake have become blurred to the point of near obliteration (Baudrillard, 1983, 1994). According to Baudrillard, we are living in an era where everything is a simulation, devoid of any reference to an original or authentic reality. In this postmodern milieu, the real can metamorphose into the fake, and the fake can, paradoxically, assume the semblance of the real. Moreover, the advent of modern technology has amplified this phenomenon, enabling the artificial to mimic

the authentic to an extent where distinguishing between the two becomes an intricate endeavor.

This technological transformation is discernible in various domains, including the realm of artisanal craftsmanship. Traditional local products, such as Papuan and Ende's textiles, have benefited from advancements in technology, resulting in a notable enhancement in their quality. The artistry of these indigenous creations, once considered authentic expressions of local culture, now coexists with their technologically refined counterparts, blurring the lines between the authentic and the inauthentic (González Santa-Cruz & López-Guzmán, 2017). In this context, modern technology has empowered the replication of authenticity to such a degree that it can surpass the original in terms of quality and appeal.

However, the question of authenticity extends beyond the material realm to encompass a psychological dimension. Authenticity is not an objective quality but rather a subjective perception or sentiment held by consumers. This notion finds particular relevance in the realm of tourism. In the tourism industry, the perception of authenticity by tourists ultimately defines whether an attraction is deemed authentic or not (Porja et al., 2013). Consider the case of tourists visiting Bali with the aspiration of immersing themselves in the authentic Balinese culture. Anthropological analysis may reveal that this culture is, in fact, an amalgamation of Balinese and Chinese influences. Nevertheless, for the majority of mass tourists, the cultural experience is perceived as authentic, representing an authentic encounter with the Balinese way of life. Conversely, individuals with a more discerning understanding of cultural heritage may regard the same experience as inauthentic due to its blended origins. Therefore, the authenticity of toured attractions is not contingent upon their status as original artifacts or practices but primarily on the subjective perception of tourists.

While the concept of authenticity may hold less significance in the context of nature-based tourism and leisure tourism, where the emphasis is on relaxation and enjoyment, it

remains a prominent concern for cultural and heritage tourists. For these discerning travelers, the issue of authenticity is paramount, and the blurred boundaries between the authentic and the inauthentic pose a continuous challenge in their quest for genuine cultural experiences (Park et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020). Thus, the evolving interplay between technology, perception, and cultural heritage underscores the complexity of authenticity in contemporary tourism, emphasizing its multifaceted and subjective nature.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted in the hamlet of Dusun Karang Dawa, Bunga Mekar village, Nusa Penida Subdistrict, on the isle of Nusa Penida, Klungkung Regency, focusing on the existence of Car Shrines in the temple Paluang of Karang Dawa village. This temple was intentionally chosen for some reasons. Firstly, it is highly unique, because the existence of shrines in the form of cars in a temple is out of tradition, cannot not be found in other temples; secondly, this temple has attracted a great number of visitors, both domestic and international; and thirdly, a few has been known on this temple from tourism perspectives.

Data collection for this study involved a multifaceted approach, incorporating observation, in-depth interviews, and survey techniques (Creswell, 2013). A diverse set of participants, referred to as key informants, were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation. These key informants encompassed individuals such as the management of the temple, venerable village elders with extensive knowledge of local traditions, and visitors to the temple. By incorporating insights from these various perspectives, a holistic view of the temple's dynamics and its role within the community was achieved.

The observational component of this research was executed through multiple site visits to the temple in question, spanning from the year

2022 to 2023. These visits allowed for the collection of firsthand data through the meticulous observation of activities, rituals, and interactions within the temple environment. This methodological approach enabled the researchers to gain a nuanced understanding of the temple's daily operations, its significance, and its influence on the community.

Data analysis for this study adopted a descriptive-qualitative approach, closely aligned with the interpretive method. This method emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural phenomena within their specific context, emphasizing the interpretive nature of the research process (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1976; Taherdoost, 2016). By employing this approach, the researchers aimed to delve deep into the intricacies of the temple, its rituals, and its significance within the local community.

Furthermore, the interpretations drawn from the collected data were grounded in post-structural theories, which have significantly shaped contemporary academic discourse. In addition to post-structural theories, this research also drew upon theories related to tourist behavior (Beeton, 2005; Doxey, 1975). Understanding the behavior of temple visitors was essential in comprehending the temple's role as a tourist attraction and its impact on the local community. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the researchers aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the temple's multifaceted dynamics, understanding on its cultural significance, power structures, and its place within the broader context of contemporary society.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### The Temple and the Shrines

Pura Paluang is one of the temples in the Karang Dawa customary village, located on the southern part of Nusa Penida isle. The temple congregation consists of 80 families, who believe that the manifestations of the God worshipped in Pura Paluang is named Ida Bhatara Ratu Gede Sakti Ngurah and Ida

Hyang Mami. Pura Paluang is visited by a great number of visitor, mostly for spiritual tourism, and is known as a good place to ask for health, charisma for healers, success in economy especially in trading, asking for having children.

In building a temple for Balinese Hindus, there are general rules and guidelines, detailed in the old inscriptions, such as Asta Kosala Kosali, Astabhumi, Dewa Tattwa, Kusumadewa, Iti Prakerti, Padmabhuwana, and Anda Bhuwana (Dwijendra 2008, Tim Penyusun 2009). A temple is generally divided into three sections, i.e. outermost part (nista mandala), middle part (madya mandala), and innermost part (uttama mandala). Outermost part is the location for supporting facilities, such as meeting hall (wantilan), sosial facilities, and place for economic activities. In the middle part, there are religious related facilities, such as hall for gamelan music, sacred kitchen, sacred meeting hall, tower for wooden bell (Bale Kulkul), and a number of lower level shrines. The innermost part is the most sacred place, the location of the main shrines, halls for placing sacred effigies, and shrines to save sacred statues and other sacred symbols.

The layout, distance of buildings, orientation, structure, architecture, and ornaments of shrines are also regulated in the old inscriptions mentioned above. In such sources, car shrine architecture is not found. The existence of car shrines in the temple of Paluang is hence quite unique, extremely unusual.

There is no account found regarding the history of the construction of the Car shrines in the Paluang temple. According to the village elders, the construction of the temple was based on spiritual whispering. The story goes that when a group of farmers opened the forest for cultivation, there was a big stone that could not be removed. Once removed, the stone was back to its previous position on the next day. This phenomenon occurred several times. Based on advice from an elder, the farmers constructed a makeshift shrine on the location, and this became the location of the present day temple, through several renovation and enlargement.

The story went on that the deities of the temple own a four-wheel cart without horse. The local people often heard the roar and the horn of a car with bright light at night, heading north-west. Nearly in every yearly temple festival, there were people going into trance, asking the folk to constructed a shrine in the form of “four-wheel cart without a horse”, i.e. in the form of a car (Interview with a temple priest, 2022). At present (2024), there are two shrines in the temple in the form of car, the first resembles Volkswagen Beetle (VW Kodok) and the second resembles Jeep Jimny of Suzuki. It was said that the car shrines have been in place for more than 100 years. However, observing the forms of the cars, i.e. VW and Jimny, it seems that the shrines were constructed after 1938, because Volkswagen Beetle was first produced in 1938, designed by Ferdinand Porsche. The Jimny type of Suzuki, was even released much later, i.e. in the 1970s.

The car in the form of Jimny was renovated in July 2003, hence the car is given sign police-number DK 28703 GL. DK is police code for Bali Province; 28703 stands for 28 July 2003, the date of the inauguration, and GL stand for Gunung Lebah, meaning Mountain and Ravine, as the temple is located in the mountainous area, right on the ravine of the sea. At present, the VW Shrine stands on a high platform, surrounded by guardian statues in the form of wanara (monkey army).

The Jimny shrine is dedicated to Ida Bhatara Ratu Gede Ngurah and Hyang Mami, standing in the corner of the temple, using police number KD 013, signifying the inauguration date of the renovation, that is Karang Dawa 01 Januari 2013. Amidst the unusual design of the shrine, people believe in the sacredness of the shrine. The folklore goes that there were a number of people had witnessed the cars departed from the temple, going north-west (to Bali island). It is said that the god drive the cars, while two people from the village were assigned spiritually as the driver's helpers (kernet).

Fig. 1 Shrine of Volkswagen Beetle



Source: Author's documentation

The temple is mostly visited by spiritual travellers, notably from Bali main island, as well as from other islands in Indonesia. A number of non-Hindu domestic tourists also visit this temple. Foreign tourists also visit the temple, attracted by the uniqueness of the shrine's architecture. Of those of non spiritual, most tourists visit this temple as an addition to the visit to Klingking beach, one of the most famous tourist spot on the isle, only around 1 km of distance from the temple. When the observation was conducted, there were a number of tourists from Spain, France, UK, and Australia. They visited the temple especially to see the uniqueness of the shrine, i.e. in the form of cars.

The uniqueness of this temple is acknowledged by spiritual travellers, as stated by Suyoga (2018):

“With no doubt, Nusa Penida isle is famous as spiritual tourism destination, especially among Balinese Hindus. There are a number of great temples in every corner of the isle, such as Pura Dalem Ped, Pura Giri Putri or Pura Puncak Mundi. Out of these, there is one temple considered unique, a must visit one, named Pura Paluang which is better known as Pura Mobil (Car Temple), since there are shrines in the form of VM Beatle dan Jimmy. These shrines are the main attractions for tourists visiting this temple” (Suyoga, 2018, translated by author)

Hotel.com (2023) also promotes the temple as the most unique attraction in Nusa Penida:



“Pura Paluang is one of the most unique temples in Bali. Located on the island of Nusa Penida, this unique complex is often called the Bali Car Temple by travellers, mainly because it has shrines in the form of two cars”.

The distinctive and unparalleled nature of Pura Paluang, colloquially known as the "Bali Car Temple," has garnered recognition and acclaim from both spiritual pilgrims and travel platforms. This acknowledgment underscores the temple's unique standing within the realm of spiritual tourism, particularly among devout Balinese Hindus.

This convergence of perspectives from spiritual travelers and travel platforms serves to accentuate Pura Paluang's significance and allure as an exceptional cultural and religious destination. It transcends the conventional boundaries of temple architecture, encapsulating a fusion of spirituality and artistic ingenuity. The temple's ability to captivate the attention and admiration of diverse visitors attests to its enduring cultural significance and the allure of its distinctive automotive-themed shrines.

#### Uniqueness and Authenticity as Main Motivation

Interviews with visitors to the temple disclosed that the uniqueness of the shrine is indeed the main motivation of the visit. In the cosmology of temple in Bali, Car temple is not on the map; it is merely a temple belongs to a small village, far away from the status of public temple (*kahyangan jagat*). Before the 2000s, religious tour to Nusa Penida isle only listed a number of bigger and spiritually significant public temples, such as Pura Dalem Peed and Goa Giri Putri. After the Car Temple is promoted as a unique temple, this temple is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

They come with the main motivation to see the uniqueness of the shrine. A visitor from Tabanan, Bali, who went for pilgrimage in a group to Nusa Penida disclosed:

“In the planning, we would visit a number of temples, which are considered important and related to Bali, such as Pura Dalem Peed and

Pura Goa Giri Putri. But upon hearing the uniqueness of the temple of Paluang, nicknamed Pura Mobil (car temple), we decided to visit this temple” (Made Latri, Interview 29 Oct 2023).

Fig. 2 Pilgrimage group to Nusa Penida



Source: Author's documentation

However, observations also discover that not all visitors come to the car temple as the main destination in traveling. For some visitors, visit to the Car Temple is a side itinerary after visiting Klingking beach, a unique and famous tourism spot near the Car Temple. Klingking beach has become one of the most visited attraction in Nusa Penida isle, thanks to the viral promotion on social media.

“I visit this temple as an additional agenda, after visiting the famous Klingking beach. It is a pity not to visit this unique temple because the distance from Klingking beach is of no more than 1 km” (Wayan Cidra, interview 29 October 2023).

Tourism brokers, exemplified by travel agencies, adeptly seize the opportunity presented by the allure of the Car Temple. In the contemporary consumer society, where travel has seamlessly integrated itself into the fabric of lifestyle and self-identity, embarking on a journey to distinctive and prominently featured destinations holds a distinct allure. These unique and culturally significant sites resonate with the modern traveler, seeking to craft an individualized and memorable experience. Consequently, within the context of organizing travel to Nusa Penida, travel agencies invariably incorporate the Car Temple

as an integral component of their meticulously curated tour packages.

The modern traveler's aspiration extends beyond the conventional paradigms of tourism; it encompasses a quest for authentic experiences and a desire to construct a personal narrative through travel. (Hsu et al., 2017; Pitanatri et al., 2022) Travel agencies astutely recognize this evolving trend and capitalize on it by weaving the spiritual tour to the Car Temple into broader and more comprehensive touristic itineraries. These tour packages represent a fusion of spirituality and popular tourist destinations, a harmonious blend that caters to the multifaceted interests of today's travelers.

For the contemporary traveler, visiting the Car Temple transcends the boundaries of a mere religious pilgrimage. It becomes a holistic journey, encompassing not only encounters with sacred and revered religious objects but also exploration of secular tourism destinations. This nuanced approach reflects the modern traveler's inclination towards enriching and multifaceted experiences that offer insights into both the spiritual and cultural aspects of a destination.

In this context, the Car Temple serves as a symbol of the evolving landscape of spiritual and cultural tourism, where traditional boundaries are blurred, and tourists seek to engage with the multifaceted tapestry of a destination's heritage. It is within this framework that travel agencies adeptly curate tour packages, catering to the evolving preferences of contemporary travelers. These packages not only satisfy the spiritual yearnings of tourists but also immerse them in the vibrant and diverse cultural milieu of Nusa Penida, affirming the Car Temple's status as a captivating cultural and spiritual icon within the broader realm of travel experiences.

#### Story-telling and signs of the Uniqueness and Authenticity

The fame of the Car temple as a must visit destination on Nusa Penida isle is closely associated with its virality on Social Media. This temple is often promoted as a place worth

to visit hand in hand with the nearby spot, i.e. Klingking Beach. Interviews with foreign tourists on the beach strongly indicate that they would visit the temple after enjoying the beauty of the beach. Informants stated that they are kin to visit the temple, because the social media they read triggers their willingness to see by their own eyes the uniqueness of the temple, something they cannot see on other temples.

The common travel pattern for foreigners in the visit to Nusa Penida isle is diving, visit the countryside, visit a number of beach (broken beach, Angel's Billabong, Chrystal bay, Diamond Beach, and Klingking Beach), and a number of temples as heritage, notably the Car temple.

For domestic tourists, the classic idiom of tourism 'I have been there' is strongly motivate the visit. This is stated from several interviews and observations, that they visited the object because they read on their mobile phone (social media), and they want to be known by their friends that they have visited the famous and trendy destinations. Apparently, their main activities during the visit are taking pictures, selfy, and uploading their pictures to social media, mainly Instagram and Facebook.

Tourists are consuming signs not the object toured per se (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). This is aptly significant in the case of tourist visiting the Car Temple of Paluang. While the form of the objects (VW and Jimny cars) are not really aesthetic, and the function of the cars are to seat the gods to be worshipped by the folk, the visitors consume the object as a commodity, totally out of its real function. The signs are promoted through communication both in printed and social media.

Fig. 3 The uniqueness of the Car Temple of Paluang



Source: Author's documentation

## CONCLUSION

In the competitive landscape of global tourism, the unique appeal of attractions is a decisive factor for travellers. Seen from tradition in designing a shrine, the existence of Car Shrine in Paluang temple, Nusa Penida, is extremely unique, some may say 'out of context'. Because of the existence of the shrine in the forms of cars, this temple is famously nicknamed Car Temple (Pura Mobil).

This exceptional uniqueness and authenticity have, in recent times, been significantly magnified by the pervasive influence of social media. The shrine's unconventional and visually striking design has emerged as a potent magnet, drawing a substantial influx of visitors. While the Car Temple may not occupy a lofty position in the cosmological hierarchy of Balinese temples, it consistently finds its place

on the itineraries of religious tours to Nusa Penida. The primary motivation for this inclusion is the shrine's unparalleled uniqueness and authenticity, which have become the central driving forces behind visitor engagement. Moreover, the Car Temple often serves as an additional attraction for tourists, following their visit to the renowned Klingking Beach, a famous tourism spot located in close proximity to the temple.

In sum, it is evident that the uniqueness embodied by the Car Shrines has assumed a pivotal role in motivating tourists to visit the temple, primarily for its spiritual and religious significance. This uniqueness has not only propelled the temple into prominence within the competitive tourism market of Nusa Penida but has also contributed significantly to its success as a compelling destination.

As the ever-evolving tourism industry continues to shape travel preferences and choices, the emphasis on the uniqueness of attractions remains a constant and decisive factor. Uniqueness and authenticity are the cornerstones of the industry's evolution towards the provision of more meaningful and enriching travel experiences, exemplified vividly by the Car Temple. This paper underscores the multifaceted nature of authenticity and uniqueness in the realm of tourism products, shedding light on how destinations and businesses can embrace and promote genuine experiences to the mutual benefit of both tourists and host communities.

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