

The Role of Tour Guides in Enhancing Revisit Intentions of Couple Tourists to Bali

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Abstract: This study examines the role of tour guides in enhancing the intention of couples to revisit Bali, using the framework of experiential marketing theory. The research aims to understand how human-touch elements provided by tour guides influence the travel experience and subsequent revisit intentions of couples visiting Bali. A descriptive, qualitative research design was employed, utilising a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and observations with 16 couples of foreign tourists from diverse countries, including Europe, Asia, Australia, and the United States, aged 24-40 years, who had utilised tour guide services during their visit to Bali. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 software to analyse data based on the Experiential Marketing framework, encompassing five dimensions: Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate. The findings reveal that tour guides play multidimensional roles as sensory interpreters, emotional architects, cultural translators, experiential facilitators, and social connectors. Four key functions emerged: facilitators overcoming language and cultural barriers, knowledge transfer agents providing deep destination insights, emotional support providers creating memorable experiences, and social catalysts enhancing security and connectedness. The analysis demonstrates that successful tour guides simultaneously address the sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social needs of couple travellers, creating holistic experiences that significantly influence revisit intentions. Human-touch elements remain critical differentiators in tourism experiences, particularly for couples seeking personal and intimate travel encounters that cannot be replicated through digital alternatives. Practically, tourism stakeholders should strengthen tour guide training in emotional intelligence, storytelling, intercultural communication, and personalized service strategies.

Keywords: Bali; Couple Tourists; Experiential Marketing; Human Touch; Revisit Intention; Tour Guide.

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Introduction

Bali is one of the destinations that is suitable for tourists from all walks of life (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS Provinsi Bali, 2025), in 2024, more than 6.3 million foreign tourists visited Bali, with tourists from Australia, India, China, the United Kingdom, and South Korea as the largest contributors to the number of visits. One of the main contributors to the number of visits comes from honeymooners and couple travellers, which can be seen from the award won by the island of Bali as a nominee for the most suitable destination for couples tourists at the prestigious World Travel Awards 2024 (The Bali Sun, 2024). This is due to various supporting factors, such as beautiful and personal natural settings, such as beaches and mountains, couple-friendly accommodation, and deep and emotional cultural experiences (Buenviaje et al., 2024; Yandi et al., 2023).

The strategy of Bali in attracting tourists to visit does not escape its primary goal, which is to ensure the comfort and safety of tourists, so that with this, tourism supporting elements are also very much considered by tourism industry stakeholders (Candranegara et al., 2021). The needs of tourists are supported by the development of accessible tourism facilities, including hotels, restaurants, shopping centres, and transportation services, reflected in Bali's well-developed infrastructure network and diverse accommodation options ranging from simple to luxurious (Criswandari et al., 2021; Sufa et al., 2024). Aside from the infrastructure development, service quality also becomes one of the most important components that must be calculated and controlled to provide an impressive experience for the tourists (Manyangara et al., 2025).

The background of each tourist who comes to Bali also influences the strategies of tourism stakeholders, especially in terms of service (Pasaco-González et al., 2023). The various backgrounds of tourists can be observed from multiple perspectives, ranging from country of origin, age, occupation, gender, social status, and others (Widiana et al., 2025). Therefore, tourism service providers face both challenges and opportunities in managing their services (Cejudo, 2024). The challenge is in the form of demands for the quality of Human Resources in terms of tourism services, and opportunities related to the opening of opportunities for various types of businesses, because they already have their market segments (Saiffudin et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023). By capitalising on favourable opportunities, it is hoped that this will have a positive impact on Bali's tourism development, particularly in attracting returning tourists to the island (Koerniawati, 2022). Tourism stakeholders can drive revisit intention by focusing on human-touch elements (Supina et al., 2024). The human-touch element is still considered to have a significant influence on the sustainability of the tourism sector in Bali in this era of digitalisation, where this human-touch consists of many elements that can make tourists more impressed (Jaya et al., 2024). It can be seen that every type of tourism industry, starting from the accommodation business, attraction business, culinary business, and travel business, are involving human touch element (Carvalho & Alves, 2023).

In the tourism business, one of the human-touch elements that plays a direct role is the tour guide (Tsai et al., 2016). Tour guides have the main task of spearheading a country's tourism image (Al-Okaily, 2022). In Bali, in addition to helping tourists in terms of navigation and information, tour guides also have a role as a link between the tourist's point of view and the point of view of the local Balinese culture, which tends to be very different (Abas et al., 2025). Tourists can understand and appreciate Balinese culture more deeply through how tour guides convey stories, implied moral values, and Balinese customs in an engaging, informative, and easy-to-understand way for the general public (Susanthi & Warmadewi, 2020). Likewise, for tourists who travel with their partners, the role of tour guides is very crucial in creating meaningful experiences, both in terms of emotions, safety, and the quality of interaction offered, especially with a different perspective from the guided tourist pairs (Tsaur et al., 2021). With a good quality tour guide, it will undoubtedly form a deep impression on tourists during a tourist trip, so that tourists' desire to revisit Bali can be formed in their hearts (Yusuf et al., 2024).

Previous research by Tiwari et al. (2023) revealed that human touch has a significant indirect effect on the tourist experience. This human touch includes emotions such as joy, love, positive surprises, fear, and displeasure from tourists themselves, helping them form an impression in their hearts to revisit (Pestana et al., 2020). This relates to the tour guide's role, specifically when they interact with tourists, which, of course, involves a human touch. This is also supported by Agarwal & Mohan (2022) in their research, who stated that social interaction is essential in shaping the experience and loyalty of tourists, agreeing with Syakier & Hanafiah (2022), who emphasized that the performance of tour guides has a significant effect on satisfaction and intention to return, with satisfaction serving as the primary mediator. This social interaction needs to be supported by strong communication skills to foster positive perceptions of tourists toward tourist destinations (Li et al., 2021). Another finding by Guleria et al. (2024) also found that memorable travel experiences have a significant impact on the development of traveller attachment and satisfaction with tourist destinations, which further forms substantial destination brand equity. Kovačić & Šagovnović, (2023) have emphasized this through their research showing that positive emotional experiences facilitated by the destination environment are closely correlated with satisfaction and intention to revisit. Hill et al. (2022) reveal that safety, knowledgeable tour guides, and pricing are critical factors in the success of guided tours, which in turn influence tourists' tendencies to recommend, revisit, and make future destination choices. While Zou & Yu (2022) examined it from a social constructivist perspective, they found that travellers' sense of security is built through subject matter and key content at different stages of the journey, including before, during, and after the trip. On the other hand, research by Tu et al. (2020) found that tour guides' humour influenced tourists' behavioural intentions, either directly or indirectly, through positive emotions. Other research also discusses how aesthetic experiences (Zhang & Xu, 2020), guarantees of tourist safety and security (Bhatt et al., 2024), tourists' trust

in a tourist visit (Pujiastuti, 2020), and service quality (Ardani, 2021; Wijayanti, 2020) can influence tourists' intention to revisit.

Although interaction between tour guides and tourist couples is widely believed to influence revisit intention, empirical studies that explore in depth the *human-touch* aspect within tour guiding activities remain limited. More importantly, existing studies often treat tourists as a homogeneous group, overlooking the unique characteristics of couple tourists, whose travel experiences are strongly shaped by emotional connection, shared meaning, and interpersonal dynamics between partners.

Compared to solo travellers, who tend to prioritize efficiency and information (Zhang et al., 2024), or family tourists, who often focus on safety and child-oriented services (Tseng et al., 2023), couple tourists seek romantic atmosphere, emotional engagement, personalized attention, and meaningful shared experiences (Coffey et al., 2024). These expectations require tour guides to apply different forms of human-touch, such as empathetic communication, sensitivity to couple dynamics, storytelling that evokes emotions, and the ability to create intimate and memorable moments during the tour (Aytekin et al., 2025).

Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the role of tour guides, it is necessary to examine the extent to which tour guides contribute to couple tourists' desire to revisit Bali, specifically from the perspective of couples themselves. By understanding how tour guides deliver human-touch interactions tailored to couples, this study highlights how such personalized engagement not only enhances the travel experience but also strengthens emotional attachment and increases revisit intention to Bali in the future.

Methodology

This research was applied with a descriptive qualitative research design. As noted by Creswell (2018), A qualitative approach aims to gain a deeper understanding of a program, event, activity, process, or experience of a group or individual. With this, it can be said that the design of this study is suitable for analyzing behaviours, perceptions, and motivations from the perspective of tourists (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The descriptive qualitative approach has several characteristics, including exploring the informant's experience in detail, in-depth interviews, and limited between time, place, and object of research (White & Cooper, 2022). The descriptive qualitative approach is well-suited to producing an in-depth picture of couples' perspectives and experiences when using a tour guide in Bali. Validity was achieved through in-depth and contextual explanations of the lessons learned (Aisyah et al., 2023). To understand the raw data brought to the research, the researcher's self-reflection was also carried out in this study (Liu, 2024).

The study involved 16 couples of tourists who visited Bali, and each couple was represented by one name as a representative. Of these 16 couples, 12 couples completed the open-ended questionnaire, and 4 couples participated in in-depth interviews, accompanied by their tour guides. Resource persons and informants were recruited through social media advertisements and direct searches at several tourist destinations, with explanations of the study's criteria and eligibility requirements. The resource persons and informants are tourists aged 20-40. With this number, researchers can interpret and describe research phenomena in depth. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on their ability to explain specific themes, concepts, or phenomena. This technique enables the selection of samples based on criteria relevant to the research objectives (Denieffe, 2020).

Interviews and observations were used as data collection techniques in this study. The interviews were conducted to gather information based on the direct experiences of the couples tourists when experiencing services from tour guides during their visits to Bali. Raw data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guide included open-ended questions that explored elements of the Experiential Marketing theory (EM) put forward by Schmitt (1999). In the tourism field study, EM was also used by Alam (2024) to analyze the influence of experiential marketing on tourism service providers. This theory encompasses sensory experiences (Sense), emotional (Feel), cognitive and creative (Think), behaviour (Act), and social interaction (Relate). The data was recorded in the journal as reflective notes during the observation. Tour guides, as a human-touch element in the travel industry, play a vital role.

The experience gained from using a local tour guide's service can be one of the factors that encourage tourists to return. The data analysis technique carried out in this study was inductive thematic analysis, which involves reading a series of raw data and looking for patterns of meaning from the data to understand the meaning from the perspective of the research informants (Heriyanto, 2018). The data were processed and analyzed using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. The analysis followed a systematic coding procedure, beginning with open coding to identify initial concepts, followed by axial coding to establish relationships among categories, and concluding with selective coding to refine core themes aligned with the Experiential Marketing dimensions. NVivo facilitated data identification, organization, visualization, and classification, thereby enhancing the transparency and credibility of the qualitative analysis (Houghton et al., 2017).

Results and Discussions

Informant Description

The informants in this study were 16 couples from various countries who had used the services of tour guides during their visits to Bali. Of these, 12 couples completed the open-ended questionnaire, and 4 participated in in-depth interviews, for a total of 16 couples in this study. The demographic profile reveals significant diversity, with informants originating from Europe (Belgium, Russia, Poland, France, the United Kingdom), Asia (India, Myanmar, Taiwan, the Philippines, the UAE), Australia, and the United States. The age range of the informants spans 24 to 40 years, with most falling within the productive age range of 30 to 35 years. Tables 1 and 2 show the descriptions of the informants.

Table 1. Couples' descriptions of the open-ended questionnaire.

No.	Name (couple rep)	Country	Age	Gender
1	Jan Paredis	Belgium	40	Male
2	Viktoriia	Russia	24	Female
3	Gokul Kambhampati	India	33	Male
4	Wai Yan Htet Tin	Myanmar	32	Male
5	Lin Xinyu	Taiwan	32	Female
6	Bhawana	New Zealand	36	Male
7	Tomasz	Poland	32	Male
8	Pratik Patil	India	34	Male
9	Alan	Australia	27	Male
10	Amine	France	40	Male
11	Zineb Mansouri	France	27	Female
12	Michael	UK	34	Male

Table 2. Couples' Description of the Depth Interview.

No.	Name (couple rep.)	Country	Age	Gender
1	Michael	Philippines	33	Male
2	Ahmad	UEA	31	Male
3	Matthew	USA	30	Male
4	Heba	England	40	Female

This demographic diversity provides a comprehensive perspective on international travellers' perceptions of the role of tour guides in Bali. The variety of the informant's cultural

The appearance of the words suggests that experiential learning and participation are essential components of tour guide services for couples, as they provide opportunities for shared activities and new experiences that strengthen their bond while creating unique memories during the tour in Bali. These participatory experiences are often the most memorable aspect of their trip and a powerful motivator for return visits. These findings suggest that tour guides act as "experience facilitators" who encourage couples to actively engage with local culture. They create opportunities for co-creation experiences that strengthen couples' bonds while introducing local traditions.

Feel Dimension Analysis

The feel dimension represents the emotional aspect of using tour guide services in terms of the quality of travel in Bali. Figure 3 illustrates the intensity of the 'feel' dimension in influencing the couple's tourist trip.



(Source: Nvivo 12, 2025)

Figure 3. Wordcloud Feel

Word cloud analysis revealed that prominent words such as Comfortable, Safe, Trust, Convenient, and Kindness dominated the informant's narrative, suggesting that tour guides successfully created a deep emotional connection. The emotional dimension possessed by the guide indicates favourable conditions towards romance, joy, passion, peace, and intimacy. This shows that the tour guide creates and enhances the romantic, cozy atmosphere that couples of tourists are looking for. The prominence of positive emotional terms suggests that tour guides play a significant role in enhancing the couple's emotional satisfaction during their visit. The following is an excerpt of the interview with the speaker:

"With a tour guide there is much less pressure to organise and make a strict schedule because you trust the local guide to adapt and still make your experience a great one even if certain schedules are not met. Summing up it is the local perspective, sense of security and relaxation knowing they will manage and attempt to provide the best and most authentic experience and convenience of transport." (Alan, Couple Tourist, Australia)

Facilitator

Tour guides help travellers overcome language or cultural barriers that may hinder their experience. They also help couples navigate tourist attractions more comfortably and efficiently (easier, convenient, efficient, smooth). As facilitators, tour guides play a crucial role in assisting travellers to overcome various obstacles that can disrupt the smooth flow of their experience. One of the main challenges that tourists often face is language and cultural differences, which can be a barrier to understanding information, interacting with locals, or even enjoying the tourist attractions themselves. In this context, tour guides serve as a bridge of communication, helping tourists interact more easily with their surroundings.

More than just translators, tour guides also facilitate the couple's experience by ensuring that the trip becomes more comfortable, efficient, and smooth. They help tourists navigate tourist attractions, provide clear directions, and ensure that all tourists' needs are well met. For example, they can help travellers locate essential destinations, such as restrooms, restaurants, or souvenir shops, and provide practical tips to help them explore destinations with greater confidence. In addition, tour guides also help tourists optimize their visit time by delivering a well-planned schedule, allowing them to explore more places within a limited time. They can also provide recommendations for additional activities or authentic local experiences that travellers may not be aware of when travelling independently.

Knowledge Transfer

Tour guides help tourists gain in-depth knowledge of local destinations, history, and culture. The word cloud in Figure 6 emphasizes words such as knowledge, information, and history, which highlight the importance of educational aspects in the travel experience. Tour guides serve as a bridge of understanding, connecting tourists with the intellectual heritage of a destination. The depth of knowledge shared spans various dimensions, ranging from traditional architecture that reflects the philosophy of life of the local community to rituals and traditions that are still preserved today. Effective knowledge transfer through authentic storytelling and accurate data creates a memorable and continuous experience, so that tourists not only take-home photos and souvenirs, but also a deep understanding of the cultural and historical diversity they visit.

Emotional Support and Alive Experience

Tour guides often share stories, jokes, or anecdotes that make the experience more interesting, memorable, and feel 'alive'. This is reflected in the words that appear in figure 6, such as *excellent, enthusiastic, enjoy, personally, fantastic, adventure*. The emotional support provided by the tour guide is a crucial element that transforms a physical journey into a profound and transformative emotional journey.

Through passionate storytelling, tour guides not only convey historical facts but also bring each location to life with emotionally rich narratives, timely humor, and personal anecdotes that create emotional resonance with tourists. Their ability to read the group's mood and adjust the tone of communication makes every moment of the trip feel more personal and meaningful. The skill at weaving emotions into each explanation creates a multi-sensory experience that goes beyond visual consumption. Well-timed jokes are not only entertaining, but they also relieve any tension that may arise from culture shock, creating a comfort zone that allows couples to be more open to new experiences. The personal touch dimension brought by tour guides, through sharing their personal experiences, creates an authentic connection that makes tourists feel like local friends, not just customers being entertained. The sincere enthusiasm for the destinations they present can inspire tourists to look at every detail with a more appreciative perspective. On the other hand, a fantastic moment created through a combination of profound knowledge, charismatic demeanor, and genuine care can result in memories that are not only etched in photographs but are firmly embedded in the emotions of the couple's travellers. These are often the most memorable highlights in a long period of time after the trip has ended.

Social Connectedness

The presence of a tour guide allows tourists to interact socially with both the guide and other tourists. This creates a sense of community, reduces loneliness, and increases a sense of security. Words such as helping, important, learn, together, and sharing in the word cloud in Figure 6 support this aspect of connectivity. The social connectedness facilitated by tour guides creates a dynamic and multidimensional ecosystem of interaction in the travel experience.

Through guided activities, a natural space is created to share stories, perspectives, and life experiences that enrich the social dimension of travel. The intertwined interactions go beyond ordinary transactional relationships, evolving into authentic interpersonal connections. Additionally, the psychological security aspect created through this social connectedness cannot be overstated. Couples travellers feel more confident exploring new destinations when they are part of a supportive temporary community. Sharing experiences, whether joyful, surprising, or small challenges during the trip, creates a deep bond between participants. Collaboration in learning about local cultures, providing mutual assistance with language or navigation barriers, and offering spontaneous emotional support all contribute to creating memorable social experiences. This connection often continues beyond the duration of the tour, with many tourists maintaining friendships formed during the trip. Social media and modern communication technologies allow these social networks to be maintained, creating a global community of travellers who share information, recommendations, and even plan future trips together.

The Relationship of Human Touch to the Decision to Revisit

The analysis results show that the presence of tour guides plays a significant role in increasing the intention of tourists to revisit, especially among couples travellers. The presence of a tour guide acts as a facilitator, providing relevant information, emotional experiences, and a sense of security to couples on vacation. This is especially helpful for couples who are visiting a particular destination for the first time.

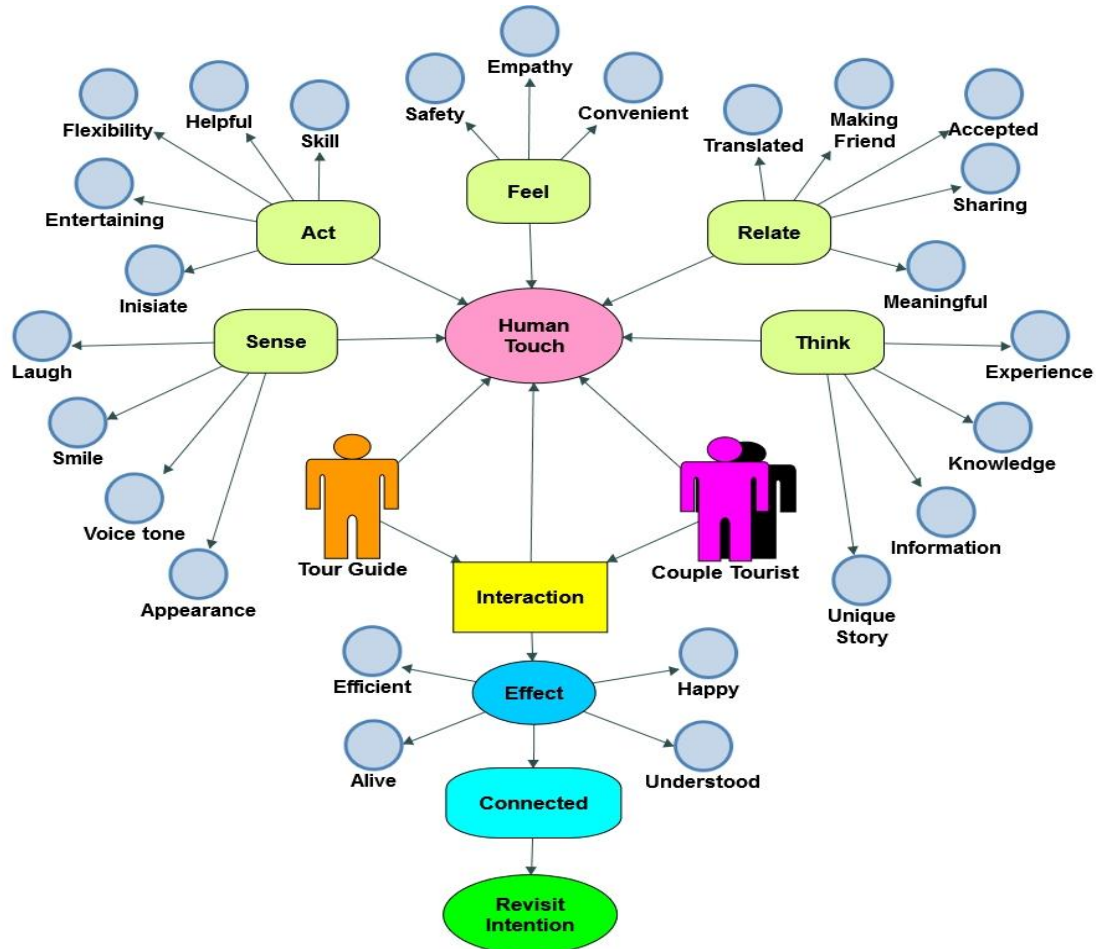


(Source: Personal Data, 2025)

Figure 7. The Interaction between a Tour Guide and a Couple Tourists in Tourist Destinations

For couples travellers, a tour guide not only helps them understand local history and culture but also fosters a sense of social and emotional connection through interactions during the tour. The presence of a tour guide helps tourists feel welcome, safe, and connected to the destination they are visiting. Human Touch aspects, including empathy, comfort, safety, and the guide's ability to respond to tourists' needs, are among the main reasons couples feel more connected to tourist destinations. Meanwhile, for tour guides, their presence is a platform to interact directly with partner travellers, promote tourism products and services, and build more personal relationships with tourists. These interactions positively impact the tourist's experience, ranging from satisfaction and happiness to a sense of "connectedness" that encourages revisiting.

Nonetheless, tour guides also need to anticipate challenges in dealing with tourists with diverse preferences and expectations. This relationship is shown in Figure 8.



(Source: NVivo 12, 2025)

Figure 8. The Interaction between a Tour Guide and a Couple Travellers

Figure 8 illustrates the pattern of interaction between tour guides and couple travellers. This diagram illustrates the relationships among elements such as Human Touch, Interaction, Effect, Connected, and Revisit Intention, all of which are linked by emotional connections, cognitive experiences, and information provided by tour guides. This diagram also shows how tour guides, through various aspects such as Act, Sense, Feel, Think, and Relate, can create meaningful travel experiences for couples travellers. The human touch element that tour guides provide emerges as a critical differentiator in the travel experience, offering personalized, culturally mediated, and emotionally rich interactions that cannot be replicated through digital alternatives. Especially for couple travellers, tour guides serve as facilitators of romantic experiences, cultural understanding, and relationship enhancement. The findings suggest that tour guides’ success in increasing return visit intent lies in their ability to create an integrated experience that simultaneously addresses the sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social needs of couples travellers. This holistic approach to experience creation yields strong, positive outcomes that directly translate into destination loyalty and advocacy behaviour.

Conclusions

This study successfully achieved its goal of understanding how tour guides influence couples' interest in revisiting Bali through a comprehensive analysis of their multidimensional role in experiential marketing. The study reveals that tour guides function as crucial facilitators who

create holistic experiences through five dimensions of human touch: Sense (sensory interpreter), Feel (emotional architect), Think (cultural translator), Act (experiential facilitator), and Relate (social connector). Through systematic analysis, four key roles have been identified: facilitators who overcome language and cultural barriers, knowledge-transfer agents who provide deep insights into destinations, emotional support providers who create memorable experiences, and social catalysts who enhance a sense of security and connectedness.

The results demonstrate that effective tour guides enhance couples' revisit intention by simultaneously addressing their sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social needs. Importantly, couples placed strong value on specific soft skills demonstrated by tour guides, particularly empathetic communication, emotional sensitivity to couple dynamics, storytelling ability, attentiveness, and photography assistance. Practical skills such as helping couples capture meaningful photographs were perceived not merely as technical support but as an expression of care and personal attention, contributing to lasting emotional memories of the destination.

These findings confirm that human touch remains a critical differentiator in tourism experiences that cannot be replicated by digital alternatives, especially for couples seeking personal, intimate, and emotionally meaningful travel. Accordingly, this study offers practical implications for Bali's tourism industry by highlighting the need for targeted tour guide training programs that extend beyond technical knowledge to include soft skills such as empathy, interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, storytelling, situational awareness, and basic photography skills. Strengthening these competencies can enhance couples' satisfaction, foster emotional attachment to the destination, and ultimately increase revisit intention and destination loyalty.

From a broader destination management perspective, the findings also suggest important implications for the sustainable development of tourism in Bali. Tour guides play a strategic role as cultural ambassadors who mediate interactions between tourists and local communities. By strengthening the human-touch elements in guiding services, Bali can create more authentic and emotionally engaging travel experiences that differentiate the destination from mass tourism competitors. This approach can support the development of higher-quality tourism experiences that encourage repeat visitation, strengthen destination branding, and contribute to the long-term competitiveness of Bali as one of the world's leading cultural tourism destinations.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size of 16 couples limits the generalisability of the findings. Second, the research was conducted exclusively in Bali, which may restrict the applicability of the results to other destinations with different cultural and tourism contexts. Future research could involve larger and more diverse samples, comparative studies across multiple destinations, or quantitative approaches to statistically examine the relationship between human-touch dimensions and revisit intention. Longitudinal studies may also provide deeper insight into how emotional experiences translate into long-term destination loyalty over time.

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