International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship

Vol. 01 No.01 August 2026, ISSN: 3163-2912

Packaging Stingless Bee Honey Wellness Tourism through Storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan

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ABSTRACT

Wellness tourism has emerged as a form of tourism that emphasizes holistic experiences. At Gudem Bee Bintan, the potential for honey-based wellness tourism can be developed through educational beekeeping activities and direct interaction with the natural environment. However, the concept of wellness tourism is still relatively new for some managers, resulting in experiences that are not yet fully structured. In addition, not all managers are able to deliver storytelling in an engaging and consistent manner, which limits the depth of meaning and added value of the tourism product. This condition indicates the need for structured storytelling narratives as part of packaging wellness tourism products. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach through observation, in-depth interviews with managers and visitors, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with managers. The analysis focused on the structure of the visitor experience and the integration of narrative elements at each stage of the tour. The findings reveal that storytelling contributes to the formation of experiential satisfaction, which subsequently influences revisit intention. This study produces structured storytelling narratives as a guide for packaging wellness tourism experiences. Future research is recommended to quantitatively examine the influence of storytelling on experiential satisfaction and revisit intention.

Keywords: *wellness tourism, storytelling, tourism product, stingless bee honey*

1. INTRODUCTION

The packaging of experiences in wellness tourism has become a key factor in determining the quality and meaningfulness of tourist experiences. Without proper packaging, tourism activities risk becoming fragmented and may fail to generate emotional and reflective impacts. In this context, storytelling emerges as an approach capable of integrating various elements of experience into a coherent and meaningful whole, while also enhancing tourist engagement and memorability [1, 2].

Storytelling functions not only as a communication tool but also as a framework for designing tourism experiences (*experience design*). Through storytelling, tourists are engaged not only physically but also cognitively and emotionally. enabling a deeper and more immersive experience. This perspective aligns with the concept of narrative engagement, where structured narratives enhance visitor immersion and memorability [3].

Recent studies further emphasize that storytelling plays a significant role in shaping meaningful tourism experiences by integrating various elements of the journey into a coherent narrative and fostering emotional connection and personal interpretation [4]. In this sense, storytelling not only communicates information but also facilitates the co-creation of experience, allowing tourists to construct and internalize their own meanings throughout the journey.

In line with these developments, global tourism trends indicate a shift toward wellness tourism, which emphasizes physical, mental, and emotional well-being through holistic experiences [5]. In this context, local resources that possess health value and strong

connections to nature are increasingly relevant for tourism development. One such resource is stingless bee honey, which is widely recognized for its health benefits, including antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and therapeutic properties [6].

Particularly in Bintan Island, the cultivation of stingless bees is not only an economic activity but also reflects the relationship between humans, nature, and local wisdom. Gudem Bee Bintan, as one of the stingless bee farms, has strong potential to be developed as a wellness tourism destination. Activities such as observing bees, inhaling the aroma of the hive, and tasting honey directly from its source have the potential to create sensory and reflective tourism experiences.

However, current tourism practices still tend to focus on activities and information delivery, without being packaged into a narrative structure that fosters deep tourist engagement. As a result, the experiences offered are not yet optimal in creating meaningful wellness outcomes for visitors. Therefore, there is a need for an approach that can integrate natural potential, wellness benefits, and local wisdom into a cohesive tourism experience. Storytelling represents a relevant approach for packaging such experiences through engaging narratives that align with the components of wellness tourism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling has emerged as an important approach in tourism for enhancing visitor engagement and fostering deeper connections with destinations. In the context of wellness tourism, it contributes to the creation of immersive and impactful experiences that go beyond simple activity participation. Previous studies highlight its role in shaping visitor perceptions, strengthening a sense of place, and enhancing authenticity. By integrating storytelling into tourism experiences, destinations can offer encounters that are more engaging, distinctive, and memorable. Therefore, this literature review examines existing research on storytelling in tourism, with particular attention to its influence on visitor engagement and overall experience quality.

Similarly,[7] emphasize the role of storytelling in creating a sense of community and belonging among visitors. They suggest that storytelling can help to foster a sense of connection between visitors and the destination, leading to a more enriching and fulfilling tourism experience. By sharing stories about the history, culture, and traditions of the destination, tourism operators can create a more immersive and authentic experience for visitors.

Within the context of wellness tourism, narrative approaches play a significant role in enhancing the overall visitor experience. By connecting tourism activities with deeper meanings and personal reflection, they enable more immersive and engaging encounters. Previous studies highlight that such approaches can promote relaxation, strengthen emotional connection, and support visitors' overall well-being, [8] highlight the importance of narrative in promoting relaxation, healing, and personal growth among visitors. They argue that storytelling can help to create a sense of emotional connection and empathy, leading to a more transformative and fulfilling wellness experience.

Furthermore, [9] emphasize the role of storytelling in promoting mindfulness and self-reflection among wellness tourists. They suggest that storytelling can help visitors to connect with their inner selves and gain a deeper understanding of their own well-being. By sharing stories of healing, transformation, and personal growth, wellness tourism operators can create a more meaningful and impactful experience for visitors.

Research Gap while there is a growing body of research on storytelling in tourism and wellness tourism experiences, there is a lack of studies specifically focusing on the integration of storytelling into bee tourism operations. The study conducted at Gudem Bee Bintan fills this research gap by exploring the potential of storytelling in enhancing wellness tourism experiences at a stingless bee farm in Bintan Island. By engaging with destination managers, stakeholders, and secondary data sources, the study provides valuable insights into the role of storytelling in shaping meaningful and memorable tourism experiences at Gudem Bee Bintan.

The findings from this research can inform future strategies for integrating storytelling into tourism operations and enhancing the overall visitor experience at Gudem Bee Bintan. By highlighting the potential of storytelling in wellness tourism experiences, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of narrative in shaping visitor perceptions and experiences in the tourism industry. The insights gained from this research can help tourism operators and destination managers to create more engaging, authentic, and memorable experiences for visitors, ultimately enhancing the overall sustainability and competitiveness of the destination.

In conclusion, storytelling plays a crucial role in enhancing wellness tourism experiences by creating emotional connections, fostering a sense of community, and promoting mindfulness and self-reflection among visitors. The study conducted at Gudem Bee Bintan provides valuable insights into the potential of storytelling in shaping meaningful and memorable tourism experiences at a stingless bee farm in Bintan Island. By filling the research gap in the literature on storytelling in bee tourism operations, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of narrative in enhancing visitor engagement and satisfaction in the tourism industry.

3. METHOD

The informant in this study were destination managers at Gudem Bee Bintan, a stingless bee farm located in Bintan Island. The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in managing tourism activities and their experience in delivering storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan. A total of 3 destination managers, Pak Meldi, Pak Prayitno and Ibu Ratmi were interviewed for this study,

providing a diverse range of perspectives on the topic. One of the managers, Pak Meldi, was identified as the main source of information due to his expertise in bee storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan. To ensure data validity, this study applied triangulation techniques, including data source triangulation (managers) and method triangulation (interviews, observations, and FGDs).

3.1. Interview Procedure

The interviews were conducted in person at Gudem Bee Bintan, allowing for a more immersive and contextual understanding of the destination. Each interview session lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in a semi-structured format to allow for flexibility and in-depth exploration of the topic. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure accurate data collection and analysis.

Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant, outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of the data collected. The participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous in the final research report to encourage open and honest responses.

The interview was developed based on a review of existing literature on storytelling in tourism and wellness tourism experiences. The questions were designed to elicit insights on current tourism practices, challenges, and opportunities for integrating storytelling into the visitor experience at Gudem Bee Bintan. The protocol included open-ended questions to allow participants to share their perspectives and experiences freely.

The interviews with the destination managers focused on the following key areas:

1. Current storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan
2. Opportunities for integrating storytelling into the visitor experience
3. Perspectives on the role of storytelling in shaping meaningful and memorable tourism experiences, particularly in the context of wellness tourism

3.2. Data Collection

In addition to the interviews with destination managers, data was also collected from the Gudem Bee website and articles related to bee storytelling in Bintan Island. This secondary data provided background information on the destination and helped to contextualize the findings from the interviews.

3.3. Focus Group Discussion

In addition to individual interviews, a focus group discussion was conducted with the managers and a group of stakeholders. The focus group aimed to gather insights on the impact of storytelling on their tourism experience and to identify areas for improvement. The discussion was facilitated by a trained moderator to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and meanings related to storytelling practices in wellness tourism. The analysis followed several stages. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Second, initial coding was conducted by identifying significant statements and assigning codes to relevant segments of the data. These codes included aspects such as “informal storytelling,” “lack of structure,” and “sensory experience.”

Third, the codes were grouped into broader categories based on similarities and relationships. These categories were then developed into key themes, such as “unstructured storytelling practices” and “potential for experiential storytelling development.” Finally, the themes were interpreted to understand how storytelling contributes to the formation of meaningful tourism experiences. The coding and theme development process was conducted iteratively to ensure consistency and depth of analysis.

In conclusion, the methodological approach adopted in this study allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the potential of storytelling in enhancing wellness tourism experiences at Gudem Bee Bintan. By engaging with destination managers, stakeholders, and secondary data sources, the study was able to gather diverse perspectives on the role of storytelling in shaping meaningful and memorable tourism experiences. The findings from this research can inform future strategies for integrating storytelling into tourism operations and enhancing the overall visitor experience at Gudem Bee Bintan.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. FINDINGS

The key findings of this study are summarized in Table 1, outlining the current storytelling practices, potential opportunities for integration, and the role of storytelling in enhancing meaningful wellness tourism experiences.

Table 1. Key Issues and Finding

Key Issues	Finding
Current storytelling	1) Informal & spontaneous delivery 2) Descriptive / informational focus 3) Based on personal knowledge of guides 4) Lack of structured narrative (no clear opening–body–closing) 5) No integrated storytelling framework 6) Limited emotional engagement

	7) Not yet designed as experiential journey 8) Absence of mindfulness elements 9) Functions as information transfer, not experience creation
Opportunities for integrating storytelling into the visitor experience	1) Presence of attractive narratives (bee behavior, interactions) 2) Existing natural storytelling (untapped potential) 3) Multiple experience touchpoints: bee education, honey tasting, nature interaction 4) Potential to structure visitor journey: 5) Integration with sensory experience: Aroma (damar), Taste (honey), Environment (nature) 6) Opportunity to embed mindfulness practices: Breathing exercises, Mindful tasting 7) Strengthening connection: visitor – nature – local knowledge
Perspectives on the role of storytelling in shaping meaningful and memorable tourism experiences, particularly in the context of wellness tourism	1) Enhances emotional connection 2) Increases sensory awareness 3) Encourages present-moment awareness (mindfulness) 4) Bridges knowledge – experience – reflection 5) Adds meaning to tourism activities 6) Transforms product → experience 7) Supports relaxation 8) Creates memorable and personal experiences 9) Facilitates interpretation of natural processes (bees → honey → wellness) 10) Acts as experiential design strategy (not just communication tool)

4.1.1. Current Storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan

Storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan remains largely informal and unstructured, where guides tend to rely on spontaneous explanations rather than a planned narrative flow. As a result, the experience is often fragmented and lacks emotional. Information regarding stingless bees and honey production is primarily delivered by local guides in a spontaneous and descriptive manner, largely based on their personal knowledge and lived experiences. As expressed by one local manager, "*We usually just explain directly what we know about the bees and the honey, depending on what visitors ask. There is no specific storyline or structure, so sometimes the explanation feels different for each visito*r" (Manager 1). While this approach allows for a degree of authenticity in communication, it tends to emphasize factual explanation rather than narrative engagement.

Consequently, the delivery of storytelling at Gudem Bee Bintan lacks a clear narrative structure, such as a defined beginning, middle, and end, and is not yet intentionally designed to guide visitors through a cohesive experiential journey. Instead, storytelling tends to emerge spontaneously during the tour, depending on the guide's personal knowledge and the flow *of interaction with visitors. As one informant explained, "there is no fixed way of telling the story; we just explain as we go, depending on what visitors ask"* (Manager 2). Another manager further emphasized this condition by stating, "*sometimes we only focus on explaining the bees and the honey, without thinking about how to make it into a story that connects from start to finish*" (Manager 1).

This indicates that storytelling is still positioned primarily as a medium for delivering information rather than as a structured experiential tool. Moreover, the current communication approach does not explicitly incorporate elements of emotional engagement or mindfulness. Visitors are not systematically guided to reflect, feel, or immerse themselves in the experience, which limits the potential depth of their engagement. As a result, the tourism experience remains largely descriptive and fragmented, rather than transformative and meaningful. Therefore, storytelling at its current stage functions predominantly as an informational tool, rather than as a medium for creating holistic and immersive wellness experiences

4.1.2. Opportunities for Integrating Storytelling into the Visitor Experience

Despite these limitations, Gudem Bee Bintan offers considerable potential for integrating storytelling into the visitor experience. The site is rich in local narratives, particularly those related to the behavior and characteristics of stingless bees. For instance, one manager described the interactions among bees by stating, *"Some bees are calm, but some can disturb others, so they end up fighting among themselves"* (Manager 3). These narratives reflect a form of natural storytelling that, although not formally structured, contains strong potential for further development.

Moreover, existing tourism activities—such as bee education, honey tasting, and interaction with the natural environment—serve as effective touchpoints for embedding storytelling. Visitors themselves expressed interest in more engaging experiences, as one visitor mentioned, *"I think it would be more interesting if there was a story behind what we are doing, not just explanations"* (Visitor 1). By organizing these activities

within a coherent narrative framework, storytelling can be integrated across various stages of the visitor journey, including attraction, interaction, consumption, and reflection.

This integration also creates opportunities to incorporate sensory and mindfulness-based experiences. As noted by a visitor, *"When we tried the honey slowly and focused on the taste, it felt more relaxing"* (Visitor 2). Such responses indicate that storytelling, when combined with sensory engagement, can enhance the depth of the visitor experience.

4.1.3. The Role of Storytelling in Shaping Meaningful and Memorable Tourism Experiences in a Wellness Context

Storytelling plays a pivotal role in shaping meaningful and memorable tourism experiences, particularly within the context of wellness tourism. Beyond the mere transmission of information, storytelling facilitates emotional engagement, enhances sensory awareness, and encourages visitors to be more present in the moment. As one visitor reflected, *"When the guide explained it like a story, I felt more connected to the place and the experience"* (Visitor 3).

In this study, storytelling is conceptualized as a mechanism that bridges knowledge, experience, and reflection. By connecting the life of stingless bees, the process of honey production, and its associated health benefits, storytelling provides a narrative framework that enables visitors to interpret and internalize their experiences. This aligns with another visitor's response: *"It's not just about tasting honey, but understanding where it comes from and how it affects our body"* (Visitor 4).

Furthermore, storytelling contributes to transforming tourism activities into meaningful experiences by adding depth and personal relevance. Activities such as breathing exercises, honey tasting, and nature-based interactions become more impactful when accompanied by narratives that guide attention and interpretation. This is illustrated by a participant who stated, *"When we were asked to breathe slowly while smelling the aroma, it felt calming, like we were really present"* (Visitor 5).

4.1.4. Development and Integration of Storytelling

Further observations and discussions with visitors indicate a growing demand for more meaningful tourism experiences. Visitors are not only interested in acquiring information but also seek direct engagement through hands-on activities and interaction with nature. As one visitor expressed, *"I prefer activities where I can experience things directly, not just listen"* (Visitor 5). This highlights the potential for developing mindfulness-based tourism experiences.

In response, storytelling was developed by transforming the original descriptive communication into a more accessible and engaging narrative form. This involved simplifying the language and structuring the narrative into an opening, body, and closing. A manager involved in the process noted, *"It is easier for us to explain when the story is short and flows naturally"* (Manager 1). Additionally, storytelling linked the life of bees, honey production, and wellness benefits, making the content more meaningful and relatable.

The storytelling was then integrated into each activity within the Kelulut Serenity package. For example, in the bee education stage, storytelling was used to explain bee characteristics, while in the aroma activity, it was combined with breathing techniques. During honey tasting, visitors were guided to experience the process mindfully. This integration is reflected in a visitor's feedback: *"Each activity feels connected, like there is a story from beginning to end"* (Visitor 5).

4.1.5. Human-Centered Adaptation of Storytelling

The implementation process also revealed the importance of adapting storytelling to the characteristics of local guides. Many managers experienced difficulty in memorizing lengthy narratives. As one guide stated, *"If the explanation is too long, it is hard for us to remember everything"* (Manager 2).

Therefore, storytelling was simplified into concise, flexible, and conversational narratives. This adaptation allows managers to deliver the story more naturally while maintaining its core message. As another guide explained, *"Short and simple stories are easier for us to deliver and still meaningful for visitors"* (Manager 1).

This finding underscores that the effectiveness of storytelling depends not only on its content but also on its usability, highlighting the importance of a human-centered approach in designing tourism experiences.

4.1.6. Storytelling integration

Building upon this insight, the study subsequently translated these considerations into a structured storytelling framework that is both practical for local guides and meaningful for visitors like diagram below, A describe as visitor greeted and drink a welcome drink, B is Honey education and sensory experience such as smell damar aroma in bee hives, C is tree hugging area, D is farm to table activities, E is mindful eating, and G is reflection and journaling.

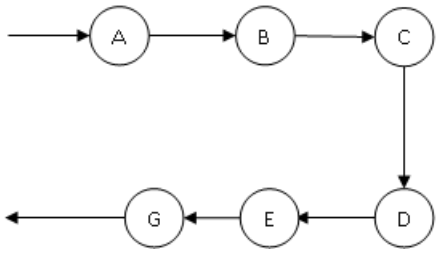


Figure 1. Storytelling Route

Table 2. Stage of Experience

Activity	Storytelling Focus
A – Welcome Drink	Gudem Bee Herbal as a natural drink from the farm
B – Education & Aroma	Bee life, honey tasting and damar aromatherapy

C – Tree Hugging	Human–nature connection, simple affirmation
D – Farm to Table	Natural process from farm to product
E – Mindful eating	The menu, simple mindful eating tips
G – Reflection	Personal meaning and wellness reflection

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that storytelling is consistently integrated into each stage of the experience, serving as a narrative thread that connects activities and enhances the overall coherence and meaningfulness of the visitor journey. This journey begins with a welcoming session through the "Gudem Bee Herbal" drink (A), which serves as an initial point of engagement and sensory introduction. It is followed by an educational session on stingless bee honey combined with damar resin aromatherapy (B), allowing visitors to gain knowledge while simultaneously engaging their senses.

The experience then continues with nature-based interaction through a tree-hugging activity (C), which encourages visitors to connect physically and emotionally with the natural environment. This is complemented by a farm-to-table experience (D), where visitors are introduced to the origins of natural products and their connection to local ecosystems.

Subsequently, the journey transitions into a mindful eating session (E), in which visitors are guided to consume honey consciously, focusing on taste, texture, and bodily sensations. The experience concludes with a reflective session (G), where visitors are invited to write a journal, enabling them to process and internalize the overall experience.

This structured sequence demonstrates how the tourism experience is intentionally designed to move from sensory introduction and knowledge acquisition toward deeper reflection and personal meaning. It also highlights the role of storytelling in linking each stage into a coherent and immersive wellness-oriented journey.

4.2. DISCUSSION

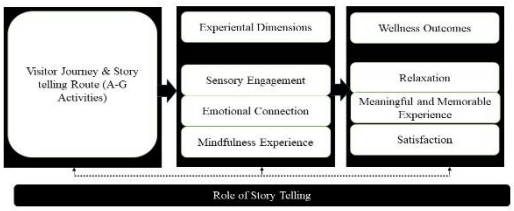


Figure 2. Storytelling Conceptual Model

Furthermore, the model highlights that storytelling operates through key experiential dimensions, namely sensory engagement, emotional connection, and mindfulness. These dimensions are embedded across each stage of the visitor journey, enabling tourists to actively engage their senses, develop emotional bonds with the environment, and cultivate present-moment awareness. In this sense, storytelling serves not only as a communication tool but also as an experiential design strategy that connects activities with deeper meaning.

As a result, the integration of storytelling and experiential elements leads to a range of wellness outcomes, including relaxation, emotional well-being, meaningful and memorable experiences, and revisit intention. This demonstrates that well-structured storytelling can transform tourism activities from simple information delivery into immersive and transformative experiences. Thus, the model provides a practical and conceptual contribution to the development of wellness tourism by illustrating how narrative-based approaches can enhance both visitor experience quality and overall well-being.

The findings of this study can be situated within the broader context of wellness tourism development, which emphasizes holistic and meaningful experiences. The integration of storytelling with sensory and mindfulness-based activities reflects the growing demand for tourism experiences that engage visitors physically, emotionally, and cognitively. This aligns with the principles of experiential design, where tourism products are intentionally structured to create immersive and memorable experiences.

The transformation of storytelling from a purely informational tool into an experiential design strategy highlights a shift in tourism practices from passive consumption to active experience creation. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how storytelling can function as a practical framework for designing wellness tourism experiences that are both meaningful and transformative.

Initially, the communication by local guides was largely descriptive and unstructured. However, through the integration of storytelling, these activities are restructured into a more coherent and engaging experience. This is consistent with recent studies on experience design, which emphasize that tourism value is created through staged and memorable experiences rather than simple information transfer .[3]

Furthermore, storytelling in this study contributes to the development of mindfulness within the tourism experience. By embedding narratives into activities such as breathing exercises, aroma sensing, and honey tasting, visitors are encouraged to focus on the present moment and engage their senses more consciously. This aligns with recent research highlighting the role of mindfulness in enhancing tourism experiences through increased awareness, sensory engagement, and emotional connection [10]. In this context, storytelling serves as a guiding mechanism that helps visitors interpret and internalize their experiences more deeply.

In terms of structure, the storytelling developed follows a simple yet effective narrative flow consisting of an opening, body, and closing. This structure supports the delivery of coherent and engaging narratives, enabling visitors to move through the experience in a more organized and meaningful way. Recent literature on

tourism storytelling also emphasizes the importance of structured narratives in enhancing visitor engagement and memory [1] Overall, this study demonstrates that storytelling functions not only as a communication tool but also as an experiential design strategy that integrates knowledge, sensory engagement, and mindfulness into a holistic wellness tourism experience.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is context-specific, focusing on Gudem Bee Farm Bintan, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other tourism settings with different characteristics. Second, the study primarily relies on qualitative approaches, including observations and interviews, which capture in-depth insights but may not fully measure the extent of visitor outcomes such as satisfaction, well-being, or behavioral change. Third, the implementation of storytelling was adapted to the capabilities of local guides, which may result in variations in delivery and consistency across different sessions.

Future research is recommended to further validate and expand these findings. Quantitative studies could be conducted to measure the impact of storytelling on visitor satisfaction, mindfulness, and overall well-being. In addition, comparative studies across different types of tourism destinations could provide a broader understanding of how storytelling functions in diverse contexts. Future research may also explore the integration of digital storytelling or interactive media to enhance visitor engagement. Lastly, longitudinal studies are suggested to examine the long-term effects of storytelling-based experiences on tourists' perceptions, emotional connection, and behavioral intentions.

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