

Luxury in the jungle: Contemporary resorts, Balinese culture, and sustainability

By Ivy Tjoeng

AUTHOR BIO

Ivy Tjoeng is a junior at Episcopal High School in Alexandria, VA. With her diverse background merging Chinese, American, Indonesian, and French legacies; her distinct travel experiences; and her lasting passion for photography, she has grown interested in observing the fusion of culture and architecture in unique places. Stemming from her unique perspectives and opportunities, she focuses on the subtle yet potent connections between architecture and heritage, tradition, community, and identity. She is especially devoted to further exploring architectural history and approaches to sustainability.

ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and assesses the ability of luxury resorts to form and preserve a local community's culture and identity through their architectural designs, specifically analyzing the AYANA Resort and the Maya Ubud Resort in Bali, Indonesia. Two central factors are examined: how the contemporary designs incorporate references to vernacular architecture and how the design promotes sustainability by responding to the local climate. Sustainability, in this case, encompasses both environmental and cultural preservation. The paper further analyzes the significance of such architectural decisions in the resorts' roles in the grand scheme of the entire surrounding community. Specific details are also examined to unveil the historical meaning of the buildings. In contrast to standardized international hotels, these resorts have proven to have a more valuable impact on the region's community. The infusion of distinct local identity in architecture can fortify diversity and uniqueness in the modern world.

Keywords: *culture, identity, Bali, Indonesia, resorts, hospitality, architecture, traditional, vernacular, architecture, community formation, sustainability, design, heritage, indigenous, hotels, standardized style, tourism, globalization and urbanization, environment*

Bali, as one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, demonstrates a blend of native communities and foreign influence (Picard, 1990, p. 37). Several resorts have attempted to maintain this delicate balance, and have been highly influential in preserving and displaying the island's local culture for mass foreign tourism.

Architecture and interior design are essential for resorts such as Maya Ubud Resort and AYANA Resort to present an "authentic" Bali to visitors in comparison to the standardized international-style hotels of the major urban centers such as Denpasar. Through mirroring and referencing specific elements unique to traditional Balinese architecture, these resorts can recreate the *genius loci*, or the spirit of a space, of the local culture through architectural expressions. In addition to paying homage to the vernacular aesthetics of local buildings, the traditional methods and approaches to environmental sustainability are emphasized in the construction of these resorts. Directly referencing the indigenous background, these resorts execute the role of identity formation, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

These two resorts exemplify the architectural trends for luxury environments in contrast to generic hotels under large hospitality brands. This comparison delineates the differences between hospitality designs and how resorts can be in dialogue with the surrounding community and culture through their design. Vernacular architecture is a style of building grounded on local needs, utilizing available materials, and reflecting native traditions (Glassie, 1984, p. 9). This style is almost always more in tune with the local conditions, as details were developed before rapid, global technological advancements. The comprehensive definition of sustainability is the state of consistent maintenance or continued change that benefits a system over a certain period of time (Moore et al., 2017). By extension, sustainability does not simply mean lowering waste; it also encompasses a structure's contribution to preserving the indigenous culture (Blandy & Fenn, 2012, p. 273).

It is common for luxury hospitality properties to have a standard, modern design (Praporski, 2008, p. 2, 7). Oftentimes, travelers look for a standardized stay from the same company when they travel abroad (Praporski, 2008, p. 6). Instead of offering a unique and immersive experience, these hotels are much more standardized. Characterized by modern, sleek, international-style designs, they provide guests with what they are accustomed to anywhere in the world. Thus, these hotels rarely consider cultural elements, make minimal or no architectural adaptations for the local environment, and barely interact with the region's community beyond infrequent employment, preventing them from serving a valuable role in preserving the local identity or promoting sustainability.

This essay shows the different architectural practices in Bali that are present in buildings aimed toward tourists, and illustrates how culture can be reflected and created through architecture itself by evaluating two resorts while comparing them to standard hotels.

A systematic literature review was conducted using PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar for reputable sources. The databases were searched using the terms "myostatin inhibition," "cancer cachexia," and "MSTN gene therapy." Only articles written in English and published from 2018 to 2025

were eligible for selection. A total of 86 articles were reviewed, and ultimately 20 of the articles were used for analysis.. The AI tool Elicit was utilized in the introduction and results section to assist with source acquisition and partial synthesis. Additionally, ChatGPT's 4.5 model was used to summarize an abstract for this paper.

METHODOLOGY

The formation of identity and community

The physical connection between people and the official establishment of societies is often seen as a sign of a well-formed community (Rieger-Jandl, 2013, p. 141). Yet, what is frequently overlooked is a society's identity and common belief that truly defines a populace.

The delineation of what is truly "traditional Indonesian culture" has been blurred by colonization and subsequent assimilation. The Dutch colonization between 1846 and 1908 in Indonesia has been ingrained as a major part of the nation's history (Picard, 1990, p. 39). From the initial Dutch settlement of Batavia (now known as Jakarta, Indonesia) in 1619 to Indonesia's independence in 1945, Dutch influence continued to shape the Indonesian language, culture, political system, and architecture. Undeniably, the three-centuries-long period under foreign governance completely altered the national identity of the country. Even before mass tourism, colonization had already changed the Indonesian landscape. This raises the question of the meaning behind a true vernacular identity in a post-colonial community that is also highly influenced by foreign ideologies.

The concept of individual and shared identity is best summarized through Andrea Rieger-Jandl's claim, which summarizes the heterogeneous term as a combination of culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, social standing, and economic status in human self-perception. (Rieger-Jandl, 2013, p. 141).

Rieger-Jandl suggests two ways in which identity can be formed: "self-identity", or individuality, and "collective identities", which are consistently affected and redefined by other groups; he proposes two approaches to identity: a sense of belonging (belonging to a group) and alterity (being distinct) (p. 141). The presence of a "common identity" that can comprehensively represent the ideology of the whole community is immediately linked with several important concepts: individual uniqueness, shared unity, and the delicate dynamic between internal commonality and external distinction.

The formation and shaping of a community's identity are often manipulated in tourism (Picard, 1990, p. 74). The concept of "cultural tourism" has frequently been applied to tourism in Indonesia, specifically Bali (p. 42). Picard references the Balinese authorities' attribution of tourism to the island's "cultural renaissance", noting that, "According to them, tourist money has revived Balinese interest in their own traditions while stimulating their artistic creativity. And above all, the admiration of foreign visitors for Balinese culture is said to have reinforced the sense of cultural identity and pride of the people of Bali" (p. 43). Balinese officials have recognized tourism as a boost for the internal reignition of cultural

appreciation as well as an exterior factor prompting collective consciousness. This echoes Jandl's statement of the impact of "alterity" on the formation of shared identity.

Identity in its conceptual form is expressed by the architecture, but the physical construction of the community also influences identity in return, forming a two-way process. A society's establishment and the history behind its architectural composition prompt answers to the question that connects the theoretical idea of identity, the aspects of tourism, and the surrounding infrastructure.

The manifestation of history and culture in architecture

Culture and traditions are central elements that define each community. These historically shaped heritages are reflected in the details in the local art, design, and architecture. The connection between urban landscapes and a place's history is strengthened by John Brinckerhoff Jackson's famous statement: "The beauty that we see in the vernacular landscape is the image of our common humanity: hard work, stubborn hope, and mutual forbearance striving to be love" (Jackson, 1984, p. xii).

When analyzing a region's historical background, the most direct demonstration of the passing of time and the most explicit indication of cultural beliefs is in architecture. Each design, decoration, landscape, layout, material, and structure is a result of years of events that culminated in certain traditions and customs. Indeed, as Matthew Carmona summarizes, "The relationship between culture and environment is a two-way process. Over time, people's choices create distinctive local cultures that shape and reinforce their environments, and are symbolised within them" (Carmona, 2021, p. 38).

The Latin term *genius loci*, or "sense of place", is an important concept frequently referred to in urban design. This phrase, as defined by Jackson, is the "belie[f] that a locality – a space or structure or a whole community – derive[s] much of its unique quality from the presence or guardianship of a supernatural spirit" (Jackson, 1995, p. 24). That is, the sense of belonging and spiritual connection is what brings a place value above mere structures and frames. History, story, background, and humanity are all demonstrated vicariously through space. Hence, the details within architectural landscapes are the direct exhibition of a community's formation.

Environmental sustainability and material

As urbanization and industrialization have led to environmental degradation and climate change, environmental concerns have become vital factors in infrastructural decisions, heightening concerns surrounding energy consumption, eco-friendliness, carbon footprint, and the effects of climate change.

By analyzing the varying environmental impact of each case study, this paper aims to reinforce the argument of the extent to which architecture influences the local ecosystem. Sustainability must be a top priority throughout the construction and design of large-scale structures or extensive building projects, as both their short-term and long-term impacts hold global significance. In this case, it is worth noting that "Developments have a much larger environmental impact than is immediately apparent[, which] can



Note. This is a map of Bali. The red mark is the location of the Maya Ubud Resort. From “Location | Maya Ubud Resort & Spa,” n.d., <https://mayaresorts.com/ubud/location>.

The Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, located at the heart of cultural Bali, takes pride in being a luxury tropical retreat at the center city of Ubud. With its proximity to Ubud's center, the resort combines natural and urban features for a memorable travel experience (see Figure 1).

The resort was designed by Budiman Hendropurnomo, an award-winning architect of Denton Corker Marshall. Inspired by the setting of prehistoric Balinese villages, the resort was intentionally placed along the *Kaja-Kelod* sacred axis, connecting the mountains at the center of the island to the surrounding seas; in traditional Balinese terms, this was the linkage between *Kaja*, the realm of the Gods, and *Kelod*, the area of the demons (“Maya Ubud Resort + Spa | Denton Corker Marshall,” 2025). Uniquely, instead of direct incorporations of the local culture, Maya Ubud integrates historical meaning in architectural designs and geographical placement (see Figure 2) (Maya Ubud Resort + Spa | Denton Corker Marshall, 2025).

Figure 2

Aerial view of Maya Ubud Resort & Spa by a Cliff

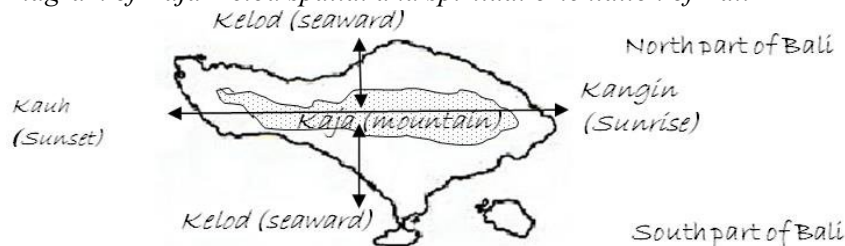


Note. This is a photograph of the Maya Ubud Resort overlooking the Petanu River valley. The resort immerses itself in its natural surroundings. From “Luxury Hotel and Villas in Bali | Maya Ubud Resort & Spa,” 2025, from <https://mayaresorts.com/ubud>.

The resort overlooks the Petanu River, stretches through rice paddy fields, and blends with the valley. The 60 villas and 48 suites are located between two river valleys, scattered along the long peninsula that ends at the small waterfall at the bottom of the Petanu River. The property was purposefully placed as a tie between the mountains and the seas, or the Gods and the demons in Balinese mythology (Sunarya, 2020, p. 47). The Hindu community’s belief of opposition and balance, or *rwa bhineda kriya*, is demonstrated through this emphasis on north-south and good-bad (see Figure 3) (Sunarya, 2020, p. 49).

Figure 3

Diagram of Kaja-Kelod spatial and spiritual orientation of Bali



Note. This is a diagram illustrating the *Kaja-Kelod* (mountain-sea) orientation of the island of Bali. In traditional Balinese mythology, *Kaja* is the land of the gods, whereas *Kelod* is the waters of the demons. From “Spatial orientation and the patterns of the traditional settlement in the Eastern Bali: Investigating new tourism attractions,” by I. D. G. A. D. Putra et al., 2020, *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 29(2), 614–627, <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.29218-493>.

Kriya, the expression of the nation’s soul, is the fundamental ideology of Indonesian art. There are three essential concepts of *kriya* that developed based on human needs: *idiofak*, *teknofak*, and *sosiofak*, or the ideas of God’s protection, physical necessities, and regional characteristics (Sunarya, 2020, p. 50). These elements are intertwined in the daily life of the Indonesian people, constantly shaping the culture and identity of the nation. As I Ketut Sunarya emphasizes, “*Kriya* carries a dual role in the life of society and the nation. As a reflection of traditional culture, *kriya* represents the pattern of people’s lives, which is reflected in their values and beliefs” (Sunarya, 2020, p. 49). Furthermore, “... the existence of *kriya* development in general is inseparable from influencing factors, such as social, political, economic, and technological. Thus, these influence factors will produce new values[, such as materialism, commercialism, and individualism]” (Sunarya, 2020, p. 49).

Figure 4

Maya Ubud Resort architecture



Note. This is an aerial view of several Maya Ubud Resort buildings. The *alang-alang* thatch roofs are a traditional Hindu vernacular architecture element of Bali. Figure from “Maya Ubud Resort & Spa - Luxury Hotel in Ubud, Bali,” by Maya Resorts Bali, 2017, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQcUqNUjxzc>.

In Maya Ubud, the *kriya* concept of a vicarious blend between cultural belief and societal development is displayed in their unforced architectural assimilation of both modern facilities and native traditions. Each villa is designed with a traditional thatched roof, canopied bed, and locally handcrafted furnishings (see Figure 4). The Denton Corker Marshall design firm writes that rather than “intricate Balinese paintings, masks or statues, ... a deeper, ancient Balinese concept is celebrated through its landscape and architecture” (“Maya Ubud Resort + Spa | Denton Corker Marshall,” 2025).

With the ubiquitous Balinese elements, visitors can understand the beauty of the local culture and feel their personal involvement in the ever-evolving traditions. Those associated with the resort’s operation will also view themselves as proud ambassadors of the unique history (Najafi & Shariff, 2011, p. 188). This two-way beneficial relationship between the foreign visitors and the inhabitants not only spreads awareness of Balinese customs but may also consolidate the sense of common identity amongst the native citizens by reminding them of their shared backgrounds (Picard, 1990, p. 43).

The architecture of Maya Ubud demonstrates the resort’s four core focuses: environmental, socio-cultural, quality, and health and safety practices. Sustainability is crucial in the evaluation of a successful resort; resorts themselves are giving tourists access to nature, which the resorts must maintain and contribute to in turn. From a moral, environmental standpoint, resorts need to sustain the very environment that tourists come to see. Despite being merged with local rice paddies, no fields or natural habitats were damaged in the construction of the resort. Furthermore, environmental preservation is expressed architecturally through the use of local and recycled materials and the integration of nature into the resorts so that they blend in with the landscape both in terms of aesthetics and the actual ecosystem (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Maya Ubud Resort River Café nature



Note. This is a photograph of the Maya Ubud Resort River Café. The café is separated into various sections scattered across the luscious landscape, fully integrated into the mountainside above the Petanu River with plenty of natural greenery. Figure from “The River Café | Maya Ubud Resort & Spa,” by Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, n.d., <https://mayaresorts.com/ubud/restaurant/river-cafe>.

Sustainability can be achieved by reducing both operational and embodied energy (Waldron et al., 2013, p. 1270). Operational energy stands for the energy required for the operation of a building, including cooling, heating, and lighting. Embodied energy is the energy used to construct a building, including materials and the construction process. Specifically for embodied energy, rapidly renewable and biobased materials such as bamboo, wood, and rattan are much more eco-friendly than mineral-based materials like steel and concrete (Shadram & Mukkavaara, 2018). As of 2009, the global construction sector is responsible for 23% of the total global economic CO₂ emissions (Huang et al., 2017); specifically, cement, hollow concrete blocks, and reinforcement bars contribute to 94% of the embodied energy and 98% of the CO₂ emissions (Taffese & Abegaz, 2019). The top five building materials (cement, sand, coarse aggregates, hollow concrete blocks, and reinforcement bars) are major sources of waste production with high carbon impacts (Taffese & Abegaz, 2019). Thus, using these materials would largely increase the building’s carbon footprint. Maya Ubud achieves this by primarily basing construction on natural materials, as aforementioned.

The resort has been able to maintain a low carbon footprint by using recyclable and renewable local materials while also referencing traditional tropical architecture ventilation techniques for better energy preservation. The buildings have *alang-alang* thatched roofs, *paras abtu palimanan* cement tiles, bamboo, and recycled timber. Recycled rice plows are converted into beds and sofas, recycled tobacco is used for side table lamp covers and chairs, and railway leftovers are transformed into tables. Recycled woods from unused railways, *ulin* woods from old electricity poles, and rice plows all serve to minimize forest logging. In addition, the resort recycles waste water, uses biodegradable products and cleaning supplies, manipulates energy-efficient light sources (through using LEDs and open structures that allow sunlight penetration), eliminates plastic, separates garbage, and utilizes environmentally friendly pest control. All materials in the resort are sourced from Bali or other Indonesian islands, which directly

minimizes carbon footprint in the transportation process and alleviates local resource surplus concerns through repurposing and reusing (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Maya Ubud Resort River Café; Natural, recycled, and local materials



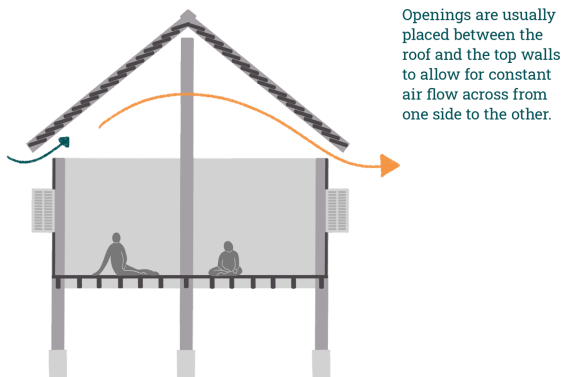
Note. This is an image of the River Café. The thatch roofs are made from Balinese *alang-alang* grass, the columns are made of recycled timber and locally sourced stone, the furniture and railings are made of wood, and the balconies are floored with wooden tiles. Figure from “The River Café | Maya Ubud Resort & Spa,” Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, n.d., <https://mayaresorts.com/ubud/restaurant/river-cafe>.

By utilizing techniques such as cross ventilation with high ceilings and open facades, the buildings efficiently use passive strategies for cooling, an adaptation intrinsic to tropical architecture in hot and humid contexts (see Figure 7). To improve insulation, roofs are covered in plants, flowers, and grass for cooling. With the use of vegetation instead of asphalt, solar radiation on the roof can be reduced as well. These methods help improve thermal comfort. Adopting the traditional Balinese *alang-alang* thatch roof, the *alang-alang* grass can block out sunlight during the day to maintain a cooler indoor temperature, and the space between the roof and the wall ensures airflow without the need for additional artificial ventilation (see Figure 8) (Adhika & Dwijendra, 2020).

Figure 7

Cross-ventilation roof diagram

Cross Ventilation



Note. Figure from “The Roof,” n.d., <https://www.kambujaya.com/insights/the-roof>.

Figure 8

Maya Ubud Resort Architecture airflow



Note. The Maya Ubud Resort Tree Bar utilizes the technique of cross-ventilation for efficient airflow and temperature control with *alang-alang* thatch roofs and open structures. From “Tree Bar | Maya Ubud Resort & Spa,” Maya Ubud Resort & Spa, n.d., <https://mayaresorts.com/ubud/restaurant/tree-bar>.

The incorporation of cultural elements through geographical placement and architectural designs immerses visitors in the true Balinese experience, spreading knowledge of the city’s history and customs. With the use of easily accessible natural materials and energy-efficient traditional techniques, not only does the resort preserve authentic Balinese building methods, but it also minimizes its carbon footprint and serves an important role in the maintenance of the local environment.

CASE STUDY 2: AYANA RESORT

AYANA Bali is one of the largest resorts on the island, with villas, spas, gardens, and even a private beach covering 90 hectares of land. The resort overlooks the Jimbaran Sea and brings the tranquility of the Island of the Gods to visitors while being home to over 200 species of plants and birds.

Figure 9*Aerial view of AYANA Resort*

Note. This is a photograph of the AYANA Resort next to the Kubu beach, overlooking the Indian Ocean. From “Luxury Cliff-Top Villa Resort | AYANA Villas Bali,” by AYANA Bali, n.d., <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-villas/>.

The resort was designed by the well-known, award-winning firm WATG. Originally built in 1996 as the Ritz-Carlton Bali, the hotel rebranded in 2009 to become the AYANA Resort. In Sanskrit, “*ayana*” means “a place of refuge”; aligning with the word’s meaning, the resort strives to offer an experience of tranquility and seclusion (“Ayana Segara, Bali,” 2023). Indeed, located near the Kubu beach and surrounded by the forest, the resort captures and preserves the natural beauty and landscape of Bali (see Figure 9).

Figure 10*AYANA Resort Main Pool thatch roof and Balinese elements*



Note. The AYANA Resort Main Pool is surrounded by small huts with *alang-alang* thatch roofs. The stone dragon statues, or “*Naga*”, represent protection and prosperity in Balinese culture, and resemble the connection between the earth and divine realms. From “Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali,” by AYANA Bali, n.d., <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-resort/>.

Emphasized consistently throughout the resort is the incorporation of nature and tradition. The hotel has plenty of native plants, and the buildings are furnished with natural local materials. There are marbles on the floors and walls, thatch and wood in restaurants and around pools, as well as traditional Balinese decorations (see Figure 10). Such structures directly reference Balinese architecture and reflect adaptations to the climate and customs. Distinctly Balinese *alang-alang* thatch roofs effectively alleviate the heat and humidity through passive cooling. Native animal and plant carvings are also incorporated as an element of generational inheritance, representing the Balinese Hindu culture while serving as a continuation of traditional artistry, techniques, and craftsmanship. These native elements and the resort’s location combine to capture the charms of Bali’s bygone era by exhibiting old Bali in modern Kubu (see Figure 11) (“Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali,” n.d.).

Figure 11

AYANA Resort traditional and natural elements



Note. Traditional statues, plants, and roofs are incorporated throughout the resort. Figure from “Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali,” by AYANA Bali, n.d., <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-resort/>.

The influence of Balinese history and culture flows consistently through the resort. Balinese philosophy and generational wisdom are celebrated in the designs (see Figure 12). AYANA Segara, one of the four resorts in the AYANA Estate, has Balinese-inspired interiors and restaurants designed by Yasuhiro Koichi. The lobby has intricate wood carvings, welcoming guests to a haven of calmness and tranquility (see Figure 13). The ceiling is ornate with a kamasan painting – a traditional painting from the Balinese village Klungkung – that leads the guests into the Balinese wayang story. The identical Kamasan painting is also visible in AYANA Resort, linking the two properties and giving both a mythical connection (Brettell, 2022).

Figure 12

AYANA Resort traditional wood carvings

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Note. AYANA Resort's intricate traditional wood carvings are reflective of traditional Indonesian craftsmanship. From "Luxury Hotel rooms in Bali | AYANA Resort Bali," by AYANA Bali, n.d., <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-resort/rooms/>.

Figure 13*AYANA Segara lobby*

Note. This is a photograph of AYANA Segara's lobby. The intricate wooden carvings around the ceiling and the wooden furniture are reflective of the traditional Balinese style. Figure from "AYANA Segara Bali, Jimbaran, Indonesia," n.d., *Booking.com*, <https://www.booking.com/hotel/id/ayana-segara-bali.html>.

Sustainability is not only defined by environmental considerations; it also includes the conservation of heritage (Jelinčić & Tišma, 2020, p. 79). The incorporation of historically significant artwork demonstrates AYANA's sustenance of Indonesian culture. The kamasan painting, in this case, symbolizes the mythical traditions of Klungkung while also representing the legacy of Balinese literature and craftsmanship as a whole (see Figure 14).

Figure 14*AYANA Segara Kamasan painting*

Note. The Kamasan painting on the AYANA Segara lobby ceiling references the traditional Javanese Majapahit Empire artistic style in the Kamasan, Klungkung village of Bali. The painting's elements are also incorporated in various rooms throughout the resort. From "Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali," by AYANA Bali, n.d., <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-resort/>.

AYANA intentionally employs local Balinese staff, actively supporting the city's economy by providing employment opportunities; similarly, the resort also intentionally uses local products to support small businesses and boost revenues. These staff also add to the cultural experience of the guests by wearing traditional Balinese attire and being able to speak Bahasa Indonesia.

Extending the example of AYANA Segara by the Jimbaran beach, which was also designed by WATG, the sense of place of the resort is formed with materials, textures, landscaping, and ornamentation; locally sourced materials and native plants display the rich Jimbaran natural landscape ("Ayana Segara, Bali," 2023). Architecture plays a crucial role in the creation of this genius loci. Open-air corridors and floor-to-ceiling windows provide natural sources of light and air while simultaneously blending the building and terrain ("Ayana Segara, Bali," 2023). Inspired by the organic fluidity of Indonesia's rice paddy fields, the architectural form resembles three circular courtyards that offer guests a sense of discovery and novelty at each turn to maximize the panoramic views of the Jimbaran Bay and the Indian Ocean (see Figure 15) ("Ayana Segara, Bali," 2023). This sets the resort apart from the typical

rectilinear buildings of modern hospitality architecture. Creativity, uniqueness, and cultural fusion define the achievements of AYANA.

Figure 15
AYANA Segara



Note. The resort is distinctly designed in a crescent shape, providing guests with a panoramic view overlooking the scenery. Locally sourced timber is used to structure the wooden frames and doors. The seamlessly incorporated greenery along the resort's exterior also blends with the surrounding forest while acting as a sustainability component. Figure from "Ayana Segara, Bali | WATG," 2023, WATG, <https://www.watg.com/project/ayana-segara-bali/>.

Environmental sustainability is further achieved in the manipulation of regional climates and local structures. AYANA Villas underwent a renovation to replace windows with sliding doors to better allow airflow through the rooms, which would efficiently reduce the need for artificial cooling ("Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali," n.d.). Utilizing traditional architectural elements, AYANA adopted the Balinese roof to reduce the use of air conditioning further. The *alang-alang* thatch roofs allow air to flow between the roof and the walls, while the *imperata cylindrica* grass itself has natural cooling properties and insulation (see Figure 16).

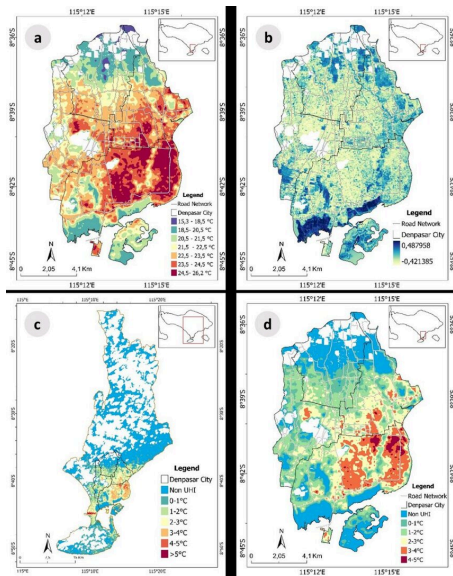
Figure 16
AYANA Villas sustainable and traditional designs



Note. The villas have private pools, which alleviate SUHI concerns through increasing water surface area. The buildings' roofs are *alang-alang* thatch roofs that are environmentally sustainable, energy efficient, and culturally valuable. The sliding doors also allow more air flow and passive ventilation. Based on its location exactly by the pool and slightly hovering over the edge, the tree in the middle of the courtyard seems unmoved, suggesting that the resort strives to minimize destruction of its natural surroundings in its designs, further strengthening its environmental focus. Figure from "One Bedroom Ocean Front Villa | Rooms | AYANA Villas Bali, by AYANA Bali, n.d., <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-villas/rooms/1br-ocean-front-villa/>.

Figure 17

Denpasar City, Bali, Surface Urban Heat Island phenomenon diagram



Note. These four maps show the a) land surface temperature, b) land surface moisture index, c) Surface Urban Heat Island around Denpasar, and c) Surface Urban Heat Island in Denpasar. It can be seen that the phenomenon is especially prominent in the southeast region, and is accompanied by increased temperature and humidity. Figure from “Urban green space analysis and its effect on the surface urban heat island phenomenon in Denpasar City, Bali,” by I. K. A. K. Wirayuda et al., 2023, *Forest and Society*, 7(1), 150–168, <https://doi.org/10.24259/fs.v7i1.24526>.

Furthermore, the abundant vegetation across the vast property reduces the heat island effect. Following the rapid urbanization of numerous Indonesian cities, adverse climate change and land cover change have occurred, which culminate in the heat island effect. This Urban Heat Island phenomenon is defined by a situation in which “Urban climate change causes the warming of urban areas compared to rural areas” (Wirayuda et al., 2023, p. 150-168). A case study of Denpasar City of Bali has shown a correlation between the loss of vegetation and an increase in the surface urban heat island (SUHI) phenomenon (see Figure 17) (Wirayuda et al., 2023, p. 150-168). This discovery can be applied in reverse: an abundance of vegetation in landscaping can effectively reduce the SUHI effect. AYANA uses plantations to reduce this negative environmental trend. With hundreds of plant species on the land, there is not only a beautifully planned landscape and scenery but also an active effort to help alleviate the rise in surface temperature. In addition, AYANA’s integration of water can help lower the temperature through water evaporation as well (see Figure 18).

Figure 18
AYANA Resort greenery and water



Note. The large infinity pools in AYANA not only offer guests leisure enjoyment and cooling, but they also alleviate the SUHI phenomenon by lowering surface temperatures with greater water surface area. The trees and greenery surrounding the pool and within the resort provide shade and cool the surface temperature as well. Figure from “Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali,” by AYANA Bali, n.d.,. <https://www.ayana.com/bali/ayana-resort/>.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Both the Maya Ubud Resort and AYANA hold the mission to provide guests with a memorable, luxurious resort experience, and they achieve that through cultural immersion that is visible from their intentional architectural designs. However, the two resorts have slight variances that display two unique approaches to a similar goal. As Maya Ubud’s design firm Denton Corker Marshall describes, “Maya Ubud Resort & Spa is a combination of new and traditional concepts in design; there are no intricate Balinese paintings, masks or statues; instead a deeper, more ancient concept is celebrated through its landscape and architecture” (“Maya Ubud Resort + Spa | Denton Corker Marshall,” 2025). In other words, Maya Ubud focuses primarily on ways to implicitly rather than deliberately pay homage to Balinese history. This can be confirmed, in one case, from their careful selection of location in relation to *kriya* and Indonesian mythology. On the other hand, AYANA takes pride in explicit demonstrations of the local heritage. AYANA Resorts believes that “What lends dignity and grace to this paradise is a profound respect for traditional culture. Intricate details grounded in Balinese philosophy adorn the grand landscape. The wisdom of our predecessors is embodied in their craftsmanship and continues to be passed down to this day” (“Luxury Beach Resort & Wellness Retreat | AYANA Resort Bali,” n.d.). Balinese wood carvings, ornamentation, and paintings can be seen throughout the resort. Despite the slight

variance in the public statements of the two resorts regarding cultural purposes, both properties succeed in their aim to benefit the spread and preservation of the vernacular culture through sustainable measures.

CONCLUSION

The different architectural practices that are utilized in resort buildings in Bali demonstrate the formation and reflection of culture through architecture. A clear contrast of architecture's cultural impacts is shown when evaluating two Balinese resorts, Maya Ubud Resort & Spa and AYANA Resort, and comparing them to the most common standardized international hotels. The main aspects of evaluation are cultural authenticity and sustainability. Resorts are able to conserve a region's heritage by intentionally referencing local architectural styles to provide guests with a truly immersive experience. Consistently including cultural elements, resorts create a sense of place, or the *genius loci*, of the area by capturing the authenticity of the local culture. Simultaneously, large resorts with a proud mission to spread a region's traditions remind surrounding communities of their city's historical significance. This serves as a way to consolidate a society's identity and sense of community.

In terms of sustainability, incorporating cultural elements in resorts' construction sustains and maintains the local culture. For environmental sustainability, while referencing vernacular architecture for cultural and immersive purposes, traditional buildings also serve as a model for the most suitable structure adapted to the region's climate and conditions. This allows resorts to maximize energy and resource efficiency, thus alleviating environmental concerns such as the surface urban heat island phenomenon and global warming. On the other hand, chain hotels follow a modernized standard model that does not blend with specific regional traditions, which fails to demonstrate both cultural and environmental sensitivity. Hence, despite oftentimes being economically successful due to their convenience and lower price, standard hotels are far less considerate of the development of local communities.

Despite the argument of this paper, it is worth acknowledging the limitations and nuances of culturally sensitive hospitality development. Economic, geographical, and regulatory restrictions greatly impact the freedom of design for various hotels that are deemed "unsustainable" to the surrounding culture and environment. Furthermore, for the resorts that strive to support an authentic cultural heritage, the fine line between respecting the local culture and commercialization is difficult to maintain.

The discussion of the role of architecture stretches beyond resorts and hotels. Architectural projects, especially large-scale constructions, must consider their purpose in the bigger picture: what will they bring to the surrounding society, and what will occur in response? Mindfulness of local cultures and environments is especially important in this urban world of standardization, and without intentional measures to address the need for historical and biospheric preservation, it will be difficult to have proper and balanced global progression.

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