

From Texts to Travel: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Healing through Literature and Tourism

Rosmaria

Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Jambi, Indonesia

Email: rosmarias4@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the intersection of literature and tourism as multidimensional avenues for psychological healing, educational growth, and cultural continuity. Drawing on a multidisciplinary review of studies published between 2010 and 2025, it analyzes bibliotherapy and healing tourism through the lenses of psychology, education, and cultural studies. Literature, particularly in the form of bibliotherapy, fosters catharsis, emotional regulation, and resilience by allowing readers to process trauma and reframe personal experiences. Tourism, especially wellness and cultural tourism, provides embodied experiences of renewal and identity reformation through intercultural encounters, heritage rituals, and narrative journeys. When combined, literature and tourism function as complementary narrative pathways inner journeys through texts and outer journeys through travel that cultivate empathy, reinforce cultural identity, and enhance socio-emotional learning. The study argues for integrating these modalities into interdisciplinary practices that connect mental health, education, and cultural preservation, offering a holistic model of well-being adaptable to diverse global and local contexts.

Keywords: Literature; Bibliotherapy; Healing tourism; Culture; Multidisciplinary

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global context, mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and a sense of alienation have become increasingly widespread across diverse populations and age groups. The World Health Organization (2023) reports that nearly one in eight people globally live with a mental disorder, with depression and anxiety being the most common. These conditions not only affect adults but also significantly impact adolescents and children, who are particularly vulnerable due to factors such as academic pressure, excessive exposure to digital media, and rapidly changing social environments (Twenge, 2019). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these challenges, creating what some scholars describe as a “mental health pandemic” that has exacerbated feelings of isolation, grief, and instability (Holmes et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, the urgency of exploring innovative and holistic approaches to healing has grown, especially those that go beyond conventional biomedical models and address the cultural, educational, and emotional dimensions of well-being.

Conventional medical treatments such as pharmacological therapy and clinical interventions remain crucial in treating severe psychiatric disorders. However, research increasingly demonstrates that these approaches often fall short in addressing the broader psychological, social, and cultural needs of individuals (Patel et al., 2018). For instance, while medication can alleviate symptoms of depression, it does not necessarily

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restore meaning, resilience, or a sense of belonging—factors that are deeply embedded in cultural and narrative contexts. This limitation has prompted scholars and practitioners to seek complementary modalities of care, including bibliotherapy, expressive arts therapy, and healing-oriented tourism, that integrate personal expression, cultural identity, and communal experience into the process of recovery (De Vries et al., 2017; Puchalski, 2022). These alternative approaches are not meant to replace medical treatment but to expand the possibilities of healing by engaging dimensions of human experience that medicine alone cannot address.

Within this expanding landscape of holistic healing, literature has emerged as a particularly powerful medium. Traditionally valued for its aesthetic and imaginative qualities, literature is now recognized as a therapeutic resource that fosters catharsis, resilience, and emotional regulation (Peterkin & Grewal, 2017). The practice of bibliotherapy the deliberate use of reading materials for therapeutic purposes has shown measurable benefits in reducing symptoms of anxiety, grief, and post-traumatic stress, while also enhancing emotional intelligence and coping strategies (Lenzi, 2025; Wu et al., 2025). Narrative therapy frameworks further highlight how engaging with stories allows individuals to reframe personal experiences, identify with characters, and achieve a sense of relief or insight (White & Epston, 1990). In this sense, literature functions not merely as entertainment but as a structured pathway to self-understanding and recovery.

Parallel to the therapeutic turn in literature, tourism has undergone significant transformation. Once primarily associated with leisure, consumption, and recreation, tourism is now increasingly conceptualized as a site of healing and transformation. The rise of wellness and healing tourism reflects a global trend in which travelers actively seek experiences that promote psychological balance, physical rejuvenation, and cultural connection (Smith & Puczkó, 2014; Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011). Destinations such as Bali, Kerala, and Kyoto have positioned themselves as hubs of healing tourism, combining traditional rituals, spiritual practices, and natural environments to attract individuals seeking restorative experiences (Connell, 2006; Laing & Weiler, 2008). These practices highlight the therapeutic potential of travel itself: the act of leaving behind routine, engaging with new environments, and participating in cultural practices often produces a sense of renewal, perspective, and identity reformation (Pernecky, 2012).

Bringing these two domains together literature and tourism reveals striking parallels. Both are forms of “narrative journeys,” offering individuals opportunities for reflection, transformation, and the reconstitution of identity. Literature allows readers to embark on inner journeys through texts, engaging with characters, conflicts, and resolutions that mirror or expand their own lived experiences. Tourism, in turn, provides embodied experiences of place, culture, and community, often accompanied by symbolic narratives of escape, renewal, or pilgrimage. When combined, literature and tourism have the potential to reinforce each other: literary narratives can inspire travel to meaningful destinations (literary tourism), while travel experiences can in turn inspire personal reflection and narrative reconstruction (Robinson & Andersen, 2002; Richards, 2018). This synergy suggests that healing is not confined to clinical spaces but can also emerge through creative engagement with stories and places.

The educational dimension further strengthens this connection. Literature has long been used to cultivate empathy, moral reasoning, and socio-emotional intelligence in educational contexts (Dishari & AlAfnan, 2023; Serafini, 2024). Similarly, tourism is increasingly acknowledged as a site of experiential learning, where intercultural encounters and cultural immersion foster self-awareness, adaptability, and empathy (UNWTO, 2023). Both literature and tourism thus function as pedagogical tools that expand horizons, encourage reflection, and promote personal growth. When aligned, they

create a multidimensional learning environment in which individuals not only acquire knowledge but also develop resilience, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness.

Cultural perspectives add yet another layer. Across diverse societies, literature whether in the form of myths, folklore, or oral traditions has historically functioned as a collective mechanism of healing, enabling communities to process trauma, reinforce identity, and transmit values (Mujiyati, 2022; Syam, 2024). Tourism amplifies this role by transforming cultural narratives into shared experiences that preserve heritage while fostering social solidarity. For example, cultural tourism initiatives in Indonesia and other parts of Asia often emphasize storytelling, rituals, and heritage performance as part of the visitor experience, allowing both local communities and tourists to engage in symbolic practices of healing and continuity (Wahyuni et al., 2024). By situating literature within the embodied practices of cultural tourism, we see how healing becomes not only personal but also communal, bridging the private sphere of reading and the collective sphere of shared cultural practice.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal the potential of integrating literature and tourism as complementary approaches to holistic healing. The psychological relief offered by bibliotherapy, the educational growth fostered through literary engagement and intercultural learning, and the cultural identity reinforced by narrative traditions and tourism all converge to form a comprehensive model of well-being. This article therefore seeks to examine literature and tourism not merely as separate domains but as interconnected modalities of healing. Through a multidisciplinary lens that draws from psychology, education, and cultural studies, it aims to highlight how “texts” and “travel” serve as parallel and intersecting pathways to recovery, resilience, and transformation in the modern era.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative multidisciplinary literature review to synthesize insights from psychology, education, cultural studies, and tourism. The review covered academic books, journal articles, and institutional reports published between 2010 and 2025, with several classical references included for theoretical grounding (e.g., Nussbaum, 2010). Databases such as Scopus, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar were systematically searched using keywords including 'bibliotherapy,' 'literature and healing,' 'healing tourism,' 'cultural tourism and identity,' and 'literature and tourism.' Inclusion criteria required that works explicitly address therapeutic, educational, or cultural impacts of literature or tourism. Exclusion criteria eliminated opinion pieces lacking empirical support. Thematic coding identified three major categories: (1) psychological healing, (2) educational transformation, and (3) cultural identity and tourism. This thematic synthesis provided a comprehensive understanding of literature and tourism as integrative healing mediums.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Literature as Psychological Healing

Research consistently shows that bibliotherapy reduces symptoms of anxiety, grief, PTSD, and depression, particularly among children, adolescents, and trauma-affected populations (Lenzi, 2025; Wu et al., 2025). Its therapeutic potential lies in the way narratives provide readers with a safe psychological space to process difficult experiences. When individuals engage with fictional or biographical characters, they find parallels to their own struggles, which creates a sense of identification and belonging. This identification process not only validates their emotions but also reduces feelings of

isolation, which are common in trauma survivors. Moreover, the act of reading stimulates cognitive reframing allowing readers to reinterpret adverse events through the lens of narrative structure and resolution. Such mechanisms echo the principles of narrative therapy, where personal stories are externalized and re-authored, enabling individuals to regain agency over their emotional lives (White & Epston, 1990; Peterkin & Grewal, 2017).

The healing power of bibliotherapy is further enhanced through catharsis and reflective practices. Emotional catharsis occurs when readers encounter moments of release—whether through a character’s grief, reconciliation, or triumph that resonate with their own suppressed emotions. This vicarious release provides psychological relief and promotes healthier coping strategies. Narrative reflection, on the other hand, encourages critical engagement with themes, characters, and moral dilemmas within texts. Studies reveal that reflective activities, such as journaling or group discussions following reading sessions, strengthen the therapeutic outcomes of bibliotherapy by translating insights into conscious self-awareness (De Vries et al., 2017; Redman et al., 2024). When combined, these processes not only alleviate distress but also cultivate resilience and emotional intelligence, equipping individuals with long-term skills for managing psychological challenges.

Community-based bibliotherapy initiatives in Indonesia illustrate the cultural and social dimensions of this practice. Programs such as *Let’s Read Indonesia* and *Taman Bacaan Pelangi* integrate bibliotherapy into literacy and educational settings, demonstrating that culturally relevant stories can both foster emotional understanding and reduce stigma related to mental health (Asia Foundation, 2025; Taman Bacaan Pelangi, 2025). By incorporating local narratives, myths, and culturally resonant picture books, these initiatives ensure that therapeutic interventions are contextually meaningful, thus amplifying their impact. For children and adolescents, reading stories that reflect familiar social realities enhances relatability and makes therapeutic messages more accessible. At the same time, these programs highlight the collective dimension of bibliotherapy: when stories are shared in reading circles, school libraries, or community gatherings, they become instruments of social bonding, empathy, and collective healing. Such practices align with the notion of literature as an “inner journey” that not only mirrors but also complements the psychological benefits of healing tourism, where cultural immersion and shared narratives create pathways to both personal and communal resilience.

2. Education and Transformative Learning

Beyond psychology, literature is crucial in education for cultivating empathy, socio-emotional skills, and identity formation. Literary engagement exposes learners to diverse characters, moral dilemmas, and cultural contexts, allowing them to “rehearse” emotional and ethical responses in a safe environment. Systematic reviews confirm bibliotherapy’s positive influence on learners’ social and academic development, demonstrating improvements in empathy, hope, mindfulness, and classroom engagement (Serafini, 2024; Dishari & AlAfnan, 2023). In this way, literature functions as a pedagogical tool that extends beyond language acquisition, fostering holistic development that integrates cognitive, emotional, and moral dimensions. Such findings align with humanistic educational paradigms that emphasize the cultivation of the whole person rather than a narrow focus on academic performance (Nussbaum, 2010).

Tourism similarly operates as a powerful site of experiential learning, offering individuals opportunities for intercultural exchange, reflection, and personal growth. According to the UNWTO (2023), cultural and educational tourism has become one of the

fastest-growing segments of the industry, as travelers increasingly seek meaningful encounters that expand their worldview. Richards (2018) argues that tourism provides a “learning space” where participants develop self-awareness and adaptability by confronting difference and diversity in real-world settings. Such experiences are transformative because they combine sensory immersion with cultural narratives, enabling individuals to internalize lessons about empathy, resilience, and identity in embodied ways that classroom settings alone cannot provide. This makes tourism a complementary educational arena where socio-emotional learning occurs through lived experience.

The convergence of literature and tourism is most clearly illustrated in the phenomenon of literary tourism. When individuals visit sites associated with novels, poets, or authors such as Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon in the UK or Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s historical landscapes in Indonesia they participate in a form of learning that is both educational and emotional. Literary tourism combines textual engagement with physical travel, allowing participants to bridge the imaginative world of stories with the tangible reality of places (Robinson & Andersen, 2002). These practices highlight the synergy of textual and experiential narratives: literature provides the symbolic framework, while tourism offers the sensory and social immersion necessary to internalize meaning. Together, they demonstrate that education is not confined to schools or texts but unfolds dynamically across cultural landscapes, fostering identity formation, empathy, and global awareness.

3. Cultural Identity and Collective Healing through Tourism

Cultural narratives such as folklore, myths, and oral traditions have historically functioned as collective mechanisms of healing, enabling communities to process trauma, reinforce social values, and restore solidarity during times of crisis. Folklore transmits moral lessons and cultural wisdom that provide symbolic frameworks for interpreting suffering and resilience (Mujiyati, 2022). Similarly, oral traditions among indigenous groups, such as the Dayak Kanayatn in Indonesia, are deeply embedded in cultural identity and community cohesion, helping members cope with social change and maintain psychological stability (Syam, 2024). These practices illustrate that healing is not merely an individual process but a communal one, deeply rooted in shared narratives that give meaning to adversity and reinforce collective belonging.

Tourism amplifies the healing dimension of these cultural narratives by transforming them into experiences that preserve heritage while simultaneously addressing contemporary wellness needs. Cultural tourism initiatives often showcase rituals, storytelling performances, and heritage practices that provide visitors with immersive encounters and locals with renewed pride in their traditions. In Bali, for example, ritual ceremonies and storytelling traditions attract wellness tourists seeking spiritual and psychological restoration, while also sustaining local cultural practices (Picard, 1996; Cole, 2012). This integration of cultural identity and healing demonstrates how tourism serves as both an economic resource and a therapeutic mechanism, bridging global demand for wellness with the preservation of local spiritual traditions. In this way, cultural tourism not only supports community resilience but also allows visitors to engage in reflective and transformative experiences.

Literature-based tourism further highlights the intersection of cultural identity and psychological healing. Sites associated with authors or literary works such as Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon in the United Kingdom or tours linked to Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer function as spaces where literature and cultural memory converge (Robinson & Andersen, 2002; Wasono et al., 2020). These destinations

enable visitors to connect with stories on a deeper level, experiencing both the cultural context of the text and the emotional resonance of its themes. The educational and therapeutic dimensions of such experiences reinforce identity preservation while fostering psychological reflection. Ultimately, both cultural tourism and bibliotherapy share overlapping roles in healing: they help individuals make sense of personal struggles through symbolic narratives, while simultaneously strengthening collective resilience through the preservation and celebration of cultural identity.

4. Integration: From Texts to Travel

Taken together, literature and tourism represent complementary forms of narrative healing that provide pathways for individuals and communities to navigate psychological, educational, and cultural challenges. Literature offers a symbolic “inner journey” that enables readers to process emotions, achieve catharsis, and reconstruct identity through narrative engagement (White & Epston, 1990; Peterkin & Grewal, 2017). Tourism, by contrast, creates an “outer journey” rooted in embodied experiences of place, culture, and community. When integrated, these two modalities present a holistic healing process: literature frames the symbolic meanings of suffering and recovery, while tourism provides the lived experiences that anchor these meanings in reality. This duality reflects the broader human need for both introspection and external connection in the pursuit of well-being.

The integration of texts and travel also illustrates the potential for interdisciplinary practices that connect psychology, education, cultural studies, and tourism management. For example, bibliotherapy in schools can be complemented by educational excursions to culturally significant sites, enabling students to connect classroom narratives with lived cultural experiences (Serafini, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2024). Similarly, literary tourism can be designed not only as a cultural attraction but also as a therapeutic journey, offering opportunities for self-reflection, intercultural learning, and resilience-building (Robinson & Andersen, 2002; Richards, 2018). These convergences highlight how narrative journeys can cultivate empathy and identity formation across multiple dimensions, reinforcing the idea that healing extends beyond clinical interventions to include education, culture, and community engagement.

Despite these promising intersections, significant limitations remain in the current body of research. Many studies on bibliotherapy and healing tourism are small-scale, heterogeneous in design, and often qualitative, limiting their generalizability (Redman et al., 2024). Moreover, most research has been conducted in Western contexts, with relatively few empirical studies in Southeast Asia and other culturally diverse regions. This gap underscores the need for localized models that account for cultural traditions, community dynamics, and regional narratives. For example, Indonesian contexts that integrate folklore, local spirituality, and community-based tourism provide fertile ground for exploring unique applications of narrative healing (Mujiyati, 2022; Syam, 2024). Expanding research in these areas would strengthen the evidence base and inform sustainable practices that recognize the universal but culturally inflected nature of healing. Ultimately, the concept of “narrative journeys” underscores the shared capacity of texts and travel to inspire resilience, empathy, and identity formation—both individually and collectively.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings underscore that literature and tourism share a profound therapeutic potential grounded in narrative engagement and experiential learning. Bibliotherapy provides psychological relief and emotional growth, while healing tourism offers

opportunities for cultural immersion, perspective-taking, and community bonding. Together, these practices create a comprehensive framework in which personal introspection and external exploration mutually reinforce resilience, empathy, and cultural continuity. By bridging psychology, education, and cultural studies, the integration of texts and travel expands the concept of healing beyond clinical treatment to include creative, social, and cultural dimensions. This multidisciplinary approach invites educators, mental health practitioners, and tourism professionals to collaborate in designing programs that not only alleviate distress but also foster identity formation, intercultural understanding, and sustainable cultural heritage.

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