

Tourist Perception Towards Travel Experience During Pandemic COVID-19 in Terengganu, Malaysia

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Abstract:

The aim of the study was to determine the tourist perception of travel experience during pandemic Covid-19 in safety issues. This study was conducted in Terengganu, Malaysia. A study sample of 324 respondents was randomly selected among the tourists. A survey was conducted through online questionnaire using QR Code instrument. The survey was analysed using Microsoft Excel. Majority of the respondents agreed that outbreak of COVID-19 had a shocking effect on Malaysia's economy, particularly the travel and tourism sector and change travel perception among them. Hence, the tourism operator is required to prepare the new normal after experiencing restricted living during an unprecedented pandemic. As a conclusion, tourist travel experience was slightly affected during pandemic Covid-19. Travel is a basic universal need for modern individuals. Thus, even the outbreak is not over but people still travelling by practicing the Standard Operation Procedure (SOP). In the other hands, the government also had done several awareness campaigns to educate people in minimizing the infection risk. This data collection during the pandemic is meaningful as it offers a reference point for a series of follow-up research to observe long-term behavioural changes from a perspective.

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1. Introduction

The decade 2020 started with a much unsettling and unfortunate occurrence of new disease in the line of over 30 novel infections that the world has experienced in past 30 years (Nkengasong, 2020). In December 2019, China reported an outbreak of a form of pneumonia with unknown causes. Epidemiological evidences point at the outbreak to have association with a seafood market in Wuhan a city in Hubei province in China. The first case was reported in China (on 12 December 2019), but by the month end in January 2020, the virus had infected around two thousand people in the country. From the probable place of origin, the virus transmission began and spread in countries all over the world. This became possible due to the virus's higher tendency of getting transmitted among human population.

COVID-19 outbreak has presented unprecedented circumstances before the fragile tourism and hospitality industry. The highly infectious novel coronavirus continues to thwart the sector and raises serious questions about the present and future survival of the sector. The COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia has been critically evaluated by Malaysian government as the World Health Organization set the procedure which has to be followed in order to prevent the spread from spreading widely. The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on Malaysia's economy, particularly the travel and tourism sector. The government of Malaysia has recorded losses of as much as RM 3.37 billion within first two month of the year of 2020 (Dzulkifly, 2020). It is also reported that travel and tour packages are cancelled which affects mostly the hotels and airlines (Aldaihani & Ali, 2018). The most obvious effect of the outbreak is the decline of inbound international tourists to the most frequented destinations in Malaysia.

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture has cancelled the ongoing Visit Malaysia Year 2020 (VMY2020) campaign. In order to fully contain the virus, The Prime Minister of Malaysia announced the 4 phases of Movement Control Order (MCO) as they expected the number of COVID-19 cases would continue to increase (Prime Minister's

Office, 2020). As movement control order (MCO) has been imposed from 18th March, 2020, all the activities of tourism licensing division are announced to remain freeze during the period of MCO (Rahim, 2020).

The prohibitions during the MCO will further contract Malaysia's tourism industry and therefore effective policies to assist the industry players are imperative. In order to promote the Malaysian tourism sector government will be give out 30 million Ringgit to its countries tourism board (Medina, 2020). Based on above discussion is to explore the movement control order for COVID-19 outbreak towards tourism and hospitality sector in Malaysia. The following sections is highlighted the Malaysian tourism, tourist perception and experience, methodology and finally conclusion and implications.

2. Literature Review

The tourism and hospitality industry in Malaysia are one of the important contributors to the economy of the country. Tourism has an important economic role to play in generating income for the country. The tourism industry has seen tremendous growth in Malaysia and is one of the fast-growing sectors (Ahmad, et al., 2019). Tourism and hospitality industry thrive on the patterns of visitations and a considerable effort are placed by decision makers to attract visitors to support the sector and enhance the multiplier effect from the industry. But due to the ongoing situation travel restrictions are being observed at national and international levels. These travel bans, border closures, events cancellations, quarantine requirements and fear of spread, have placed extreme challenges on tourism and hospitality sectors (Gössling et al., 2020).

Travel is a basic universal need for modern individuals. Graburn (1983) defined tourism as 'one of those necessary structured breaks from ordinary life which characterises all human societies' (p. 11). However, risk factors such as serious diseases that can cause physical harm may greatly influence travel decision making (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Facing the conflicting needs of travelling and safety, individuals engage in self-protection behaviours as coping strategies to reduce their perceived risk while satisfying their desire to travel (Brewer et al., 2004). For travellers, safety is one of the crucial properties for a tourist (Maslow, 1943). The tourist anticipates a number of disadvantages that arise from the choice of products, so his/her consumption process will consist of developing a strategy to choose a low-risk alternative.

In tourism, risk has been examined as a primary concern for international travellers (Kozak et al., 2007). Since an individual inherently pursues the need for safety, he or she can be heavily influenced by safety and security issues when making travel decisions under circumstances of uncertain risks (Beirman, 2002). Risk perception in tourism is defined as individuals' perception of 'the probability that an action may expose them to danger that can influence travel decisions if the perceived danger is deemed to be beyond an acceptable level' (Chew & Jahari, 2014). The risks may include physical, psychological, financial, and health risks from injuries, accidents, terrorism, natural disasters, political instability, and epidemics.

3. Methodology

The population of this study was composed respondent between aged below 20 years until 41 and above living in Terengganu, Malaysia. An online questionnaire using QR Code instrument was distributed during pandemic Covid-19 from September 20 to September 23, 2020. A quantitative study approach was used by a total of 324 respondents were chosen through random sampling among tourist in Terengganu, Malaysia. The survey was analysed using Microsoft Excel. The analysis is to find out the tourist perception towards travel experience during pandemic covid-19 in Terengganu. This data collection during the pandemic is meaningful in that it offers a reference point for a series of follow-up research to observe long-term behavioural changes from a perspective.

4. Findings

This section is the data analysis and research findings that have been made in the study area. The table below is a detail of the demographic of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic of respondents

NO.	DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE
a.	Gender	Male	31.0
		Female	69.0
		Below 20 years	40.9
b.	Age	21-30 years	46.7
		31-40 years	7.0
		41 and above years	5.4
c.	Status	Single	84.7
		Married	14.5
		Others	1.8
d.	Travel with	Individuals	15.3
		Couple	14.9
		Group	69.8
e.	Nationality	Malaysians	99.6
		Non-Malaysians	0.4
		Certificate	20.2
f.	Education	Diploma	47.9
		Master/Bachelor	20.7
		Doctor of Philosophy (PHD)	2.5
		Others	8.7

This analysis of the demographics of respondents namely gender, age, status, travel with, nationality and level of education as shown on Table 1. 31% of the respondent were male while 69% were female. Concerning age, 40.9% of respondents were aged below 20 years, 46.7% were between 21-30 years, 7.0% were aged between 31-40 years, and 5.4% were aged more than 41 years old. This meant that a majority of the respondents were between 21-30 years old more contribute in tourism activities.

For the status category, the respondents who answered the questionnaire were 84.7% consisting of single respondents and 14.5% of respondents who were married. While there are 1.8% who choose others because they may have the status of divorce. The majority of respondents are in the single category which is 84.7%. This is because most of the married respondents did not go to travel during this Covid-19 crisis. It is possible to think about the safety of family members.

Other than that, the majority of respondents travel in groups were 69.8% compared to respondents who travel individually by 15.3% and couples by 14.9%. This is because the majority of respondents are single and they prefer to travel in groups to gain many contacts and be able to exchange views. With regard to nationality, the majority of respondents are Malaysians by 99.6%, while non-Malaysians are only 0.4%. This is because during this Covid-19 crisis, tourists from abroad are not allowed to travel to Malaysia unless they have business matters only. The national border gates have been closed by the Malaysian government during the Movement Control Order (MCO) for foreign tourists. Besides that, the level of education of respondents consists of certificate 20.2%, while Diploma 47.9, followed by master/bachelor 20.7%, then Doctor of Philosophy (PHD) 2.5% and others 8.7%.

Tourist perception during pandemic Covid-19 towards holidays activities

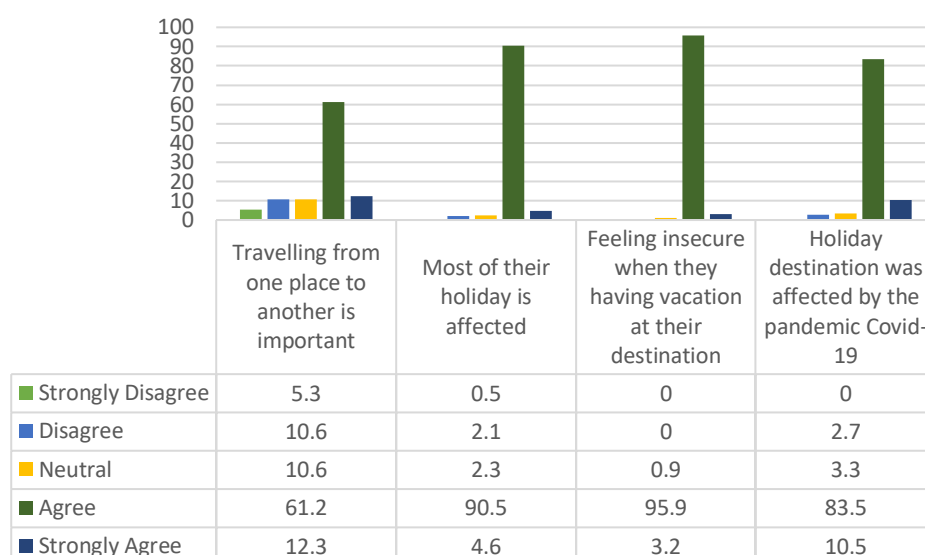


Figure 1: Tourist perception during pandemic Covid-19 towards holidays activities

As shown in Figure 1, the result showed that majority of the respondents comprise of 61.2% agreed that travelling from one place to another places is important. Travelling is a very crucial part of life as it is the best way to get out of the busy schedule. It is also to experience life in different ways. Traveling is actually a good remedy for stress, anxiety and depression. It also improves the mental and physical health.

The result also shows that 90.5% of the respondents agreed that most of their holiday planning is affected for this year. One of the effects of pandemic COVID-19 has been the impact on everyone's ability to travel, and many people have seen their holiday plans cancelled or postponed. Besides that, majority of the respondent comprises of 95.9% still feeling insecure when they having vacation at their destination during the pandemic covid-19 crisis. People feel insecure because most of the travel destinations have not tightened the security features that have been issued and set by the National Security Council (MKN). Tourism industry players must fully comply with the SOP and must always ensure that travellers observe physical distancing as well as having the MySejahtera application at their premises. Tourism Malaysia has urged the industry players to boost tourist confidence through good hygiene practices in an effort to draw visitors to tourist destinations in the country.

Another tourist perception during pandemic Covid-19 towards holidays activities is the tourist attractions destination. A total of 83.5% of respondents agreed that their tourist attraction was affected by the pandemic Covid-19 because many tourists had cancelled their vacation immediately. Most tourists decide to cancel and postpone their vacation due to security reasons. The outbreak of COVID-19 has exposed a major risk to Visit Malaysia 2020 (VM2020) campaign as 50% of Malaysia's tourists are originate from Singapore and China. The increasing cases of COVID-19 in both countries has led to the cancellation of many tours, which has already led to a large drop in the number of tourists to Malaysia. In order to fully contain the virus, The Prime Minister of Malaysia announced the 4 phases of Movement Control Order (MCO) as they expected the number of COVID-19 cases would continue to increase. The prohibitions during the MCO will further contract Malaysia's tourism industry and therefore effective policies to assist the industry players are imperative.

Tourist perception during pandemic Covid-19 towards travel experience in safety issues

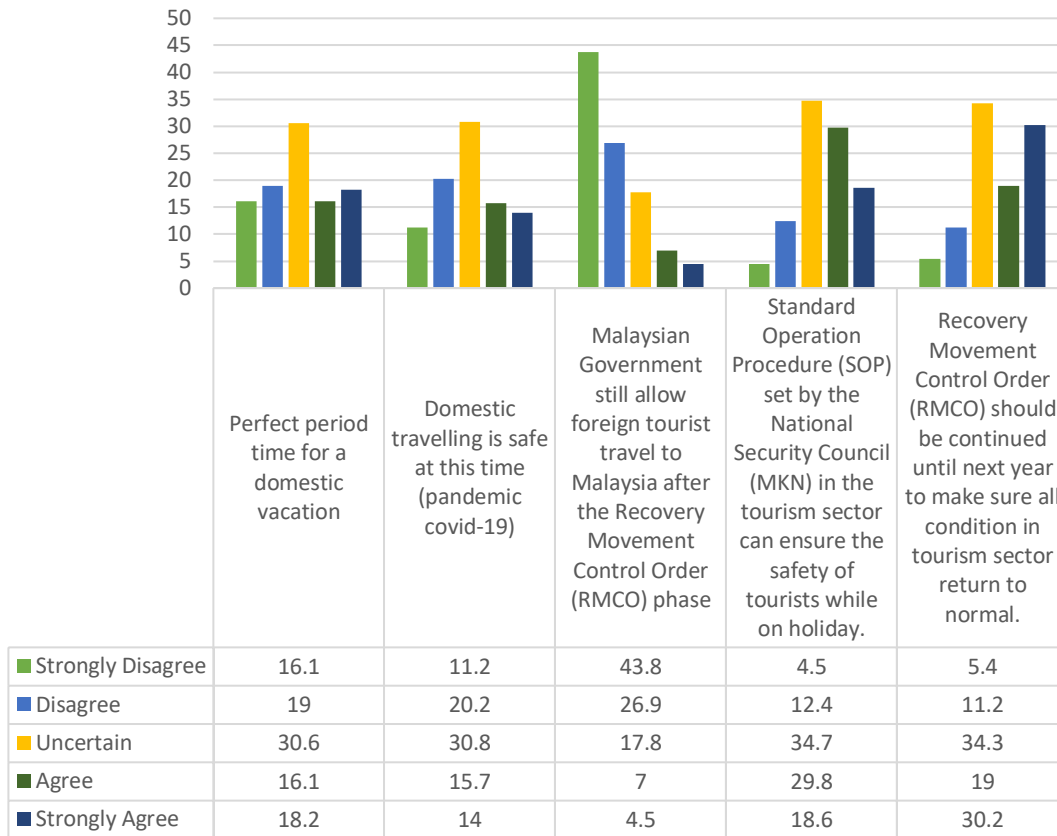


Figure 2: Tourist perception during pandemic Covid-19 towards travel experience in safety issues

As shown in Figure 2, the result showed that 30.6% respondents stated Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) is the perfect period time for a domestic vacation because of people are allowed to travel across states while domestic tourism is very much encouraged. This is the time take your family to travel in the country while practicing the new norms after close to three months of not going anywhere. For those who desire to travel overseas, do wait as our country's borders are still closed.

The result also shows that 30.8% of the respondents stated domestic travelling is safe at this time (pandemic covid-19). It is because of the prices offered by the tour operator are very reasonable. At the same time, many tourists choose a less popular destination as a vacation place. They can indirectly relieve stress in a less risky place. Besides that, 43.8% of the respondents did not agreed if Malaysian Government still allow foreign tourist travel to Malaysia after the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) phase. This is because World Health Organization also predicted that this pandemic will last at least 2 years. Thus, allowing foreigners travelling in Malaysia may increase Covid-19 infection risk. Another tourist perception during pandemic Covid-19 towards travel experience in safety issues is uncertainty of the Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) set by the National Security Council (MKN). It was supported by 34.7% of the respondents uncertain with the statement.

Furthermore, 34.3% of the respondents uncertain regarding Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) should be continued until next year to make sure all condition in tourism sector back to normal. While, 5.4% respondents strongly disagree for RMCO to be continued because their income will be affected especially for private sector.

Faced with this willingness to continue travelling, despite the concern, industry officials should consolidate the confidence of tourists, by increasing the level of sanitation and strengthening disinfection procedures (means of transport, tourist attractions). They should also encourage them to travel more, such as by making it more convenient to access for temporary tourism, taking advantage of more digital processing to avoid delays and interaction with groups of people. This condition can also be interpreted as a desire on the part of tourists to break with the practices of mass tourism, and thus as a precursor to the beginning of the end of mass tourism. Cities affected by over-tourism should therefore adapt to the new requirements by putting an end to mass tourism, considering measures such as a maximum quota of daily visitors. Managers could take this opportunity to give themselves a new vocation and move towards more responsible tourism.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a timely and meaningful discussion of the influence of pandemic COVID-19 on the perception changes among tourists in this unprecedented pandemic and come up with a few managerial implications for the Malaysian tourism industry. The results highlighted in this study would help the authority of the tourism board to better understand about the best policy to be implemented on tourism activities. Tourism industry may need to consider that new norm tourism as a new paradigm that accommodates individuals need to minimize their perceived risks as well as satisfy their need to travel. They would be able to their efforts regarding in practicing new norm as a safeguard for tourists' safe travel experiences.

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