

Perceived Risks and Evolving Travel Expectations: The Reimagining of Langkawi and Bali Tourism Landscapes after COVID-19

Azrul Abdullah¹ , Azila Azmi^{2*} , Norshamshina Mat Isa³ ,
Putu Sucita Yanthy⁴ , Agoes Tinus Lis Indrianto⁵ 

^{1,3}Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, Malaysia

²Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

⁴Udayana University, Indonesia

⁵Universitas Ciputra, Indonesia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24843/JKB.2025.v15.i02.p08>

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted global tourism, altering travel behaviours and reshaping risk perceptions. This study investigates tourists' perceived risks and travel expectations in the new normal, focusing on Langkawi Island, Malaysia, and Bali, Indonesia, the two prominent Southeast Asian destinations. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews with 60 participants (30 from each destination) revealed three key themes: destination risk, physical equipment risk, and vacation risk. The findings highlight the critical role of health and safety measures, including sanitation practices and digital innovations, in rebuilding tourist confidence. While Langkawi emphasizes family-friendly attractions and local travel bubbles, Bali leverages its cultural heritage and wellness tourism to align with evolving traveller priorities. Recommendations include adopting sustainable tourism practices, enhancing health communication, and integrating contactless technologies to foster resilience in the tourism sector. These insights offer valuable guidance for policymakers and stakeholders in designing adaptive strategies to ensure sustainable growth and competitiveness in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: perceived risk; travel expectation; COVID-19; tourists' behaviours; qualitative approach

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted the global tourism industry, causing unprecedented declines in visitor numbers and reshaping travel behaviours worldwide. Destinations that once thrived on international

* Corresponding author's email: azila.azmi@uitm.edu.my

Submitted: 20 January 2025; Accepted: 12 July 2025; Published: 5 August 2025



Copyright © 2025 by the author (s). This article is published by *Jurnal Kajian Bali (Journal of Bali Studies)*, University of Udayana, Bali, Indonesia, under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

tourism, such as Langkawi Island in Malaysia and Bali in Indonesia, have faced significant challenges due to strict travel restrictions, economic downturns, and heightened health concerns (Gössling et al., 2020). As the pandemic abates and travel resumes, understanding tourists' perceived risks and evolving expectations is crucial for the sustainable recovery of these destinations. This study aims to explore how health, safety, and other concerns influence travel decisions in the new normal and identify strategies for mitigating these concerns to rebuild tourist confidence.

Langkawi, which is known for its pristine beaches, vibrant cultural heritage, and as a UNESCO Global Geopark, holds a special place in Malaysia's tourism landscape. The pandemic, however, exposed the fragility of its tourism sector, with businesses experiencing massive revenue losses and operational shutdowns due to declining tourist arrivals. Due to this reason, the Malaysian government has implemented travel bubbles and stringent health protocols to revive the sector. Despite these efforts, fluctuating COVID-19 cases and persistent health concerns continue to impact the destination's recovery (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2024). Similarly, Bali which is celebrated for its rich cultural offerings and wellness tourism has been significantly affected. The island heavily depends on international tourists that makes it particularly vulnerable, resulting in a 9% contraction in regional economic growth, far surpassing Indonesia's national average (Antara & Sumarniasih, 2022).

The pandemic has also heightened awareness of perceived risks, defined as the subjective evaluation of potential hazards that influences decision-making (Sjöberg, 1998). For tourists, these risks extend beyond health concerns to include financial uncertainties, socio-psychological impacts, and destination-specific challenges such as inadequate healthcare facilities and sudden changes in travel regulations (Zheng et al., 2021). Recent research emphasizes that destinations must address these concerns by ensuring robust sanitation practices, promoting outdoor activities, and adopting digital innovations like contactless technologies (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021; Sigala, 2020). Furthermore, transparent communication about safety measures is critical in fostering trust among travellers (Bae & Chang, 2021).

Given their prominence as Southeast Asian tourism hubs, Langkawi and Bali provide an excellent comparative lens for examining tourists' perceptions in the post-pandemic era. While Langkawi emphasizes family-friendly attractions and local travel bubbles, Bali leverages its cultural and wellness tourism to cater to changing traveller preferences. This study focuses on these destinations to uncover insights into how tourism operators and policymakers can realign their strategies with evolving tourists' priorities. This study addresses the critical question: How tourists perceived risks and expectations, specifically in the

context of post-COVID-19 tourism recovery in Langkawi and Bali shape their travel decisions in the new normal? By exploring this, the study contributes to a growing body of literature on post-pandemic tourism recovery. Its findings aim to guide stakeholders in developing adaptive and sustainable tourism practices that enhance resilience and long-term growth. The following sections review the existing literature on perceived risks in tourism and highlight the gaps that this study seeks to address.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Perceived Risk and Tourists Perceived Risks*

Perceived risk is a concept that reflects how people emotionally and intellectually respond to potential hazards. It is not just about logic or facts; emotions like worry often do not align with rational assessments of risk, making the topic both complex and fascinating (Sjöberg, 1998). What shapes these perceptions? Personal experiences, biases, media coverage, and societal attitudes play a role, though they only scratch the surface. According to Sjöberg (2000) to understand the reasons behind individuals' emotions, one must consider their attitudes, risk sensitivity, and particular anxieties. It is interesting to note that everyday people often see risks differently from experts because of their values, emotions, and the way they think about certain issues (Sjöberg, 1998). In health situations, for example, perceived risks tend to push people toward protective actions. When people believe the risk is high, they often take more precautions, such as avoiding unsafe behaviours (Pligt, 1996). How people measure risk also makes a difference and detailed assessments can sometimes lead to risky behaviour, while gut feelings often encourage caution (Mills et al., 2008). All of these highlight the importance of understanding both the emotional and logical sides of risk perception, especially when designing policies or communicating about safety.

The COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside down, and tourism was one of the hardest-hit industries. People started seeing travelling through a lens of risk and safety, and this is not just important; it's essential for the tourism industry to recover. Health and safety quickly become the main priorities for travellers. The fear of getting sick, worries about the quality of healthcare at destinations, and the possibility of plans being ruined by sudden travel restrictions have made many people think twice before packing their bags (Zheng et al., 2021). As a result, behaviours have changed. Travellers are now more likely to wear masks, sanitize their hands often, and keep a safe distance from others—even when restrictions are lifted (Daveray & Dutta, 2021).

Besides that, tourists are worried about losing their money due to cancellations or unexpected changes in travel rules. They now prefer destinations

that offer flexible policies and clear information about safety measures, which help ease their anxiety (Zenker & Kock, 2020). In addition, security concerns have grown. People are not just worried about crime or political issues anymore; the potential for sudden lockdowns or quarantines adds another layer of stress (Sigala, 2020). Cultural and societal risks, like struggling with language barriers or adapting to unfamiliar COVID-19 protocols, have also become bigger concerns (Bae & Chang, 2021). At the same time, environmental risks, including natural disasters and climate change, are influencing their decisions. The pandemic has made many travellers more conscious about choosing eco-friendly destinations that emphasize sustainability (Gössling et al., 2020).

The tourism industry has its work cut out for it. To regain trust, businesses and destinations need to step up. It is important to have clear communication about safety, strict cleaning standards, and access to healthcare. Outdoor activities and good crowd management can help as well in addressing both health concerns and the growing desire for sustainable tourism (Sigala, 2020). By focusing on what travellers truly care about, the tourism industry can rebuild confidence and help people feel safe while exploring again. Destinations like Langkawi and Bali have an opportunity to use these insights to stand out as safe and appealing choices in the post-COVID-19 world. As the industry moves forward, adapting to these new expectations is not just an option, it is the path to a stronger and more sustainable future for travelling.

2.2 Langkawi's Tourism Landscape Post-Pandemic: Challenges and Risk Perceptions

Langkawi, a popular tourist destination in Malaysia has long been a favoured choice among both domestic and international travellers due to its pristine beaches, rich cultural heritage, and diverse natural attractions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to the tourism sector that has affected the tourist perceptions and travel behaviours significantly. As the global tourism industry gradually recovers, the ability of Langkawi to attract visitors hinges on addressing perceived risks associated with post-pandemic travel. During the height of the pandemic, Langkawi, like many other travel destinations, experienced a sharp decline in the number of visitors due to lockdowns, travel restrictions, and concerns over health safety. Even after restrictions were lifted, residual fears about virus transmission, hygiene standards, and public health measures influenced tourists' willingness to travel. The psychological impact of COVID-19 led to heightened caution among travellers, making health and safety assurances a crucial factor in destination selection. One of the primary concerns for visitors in the post-pandemic era is the risk of infection. Tourists remain wary of crowded

places such as airports, hotels, and popular tourist spots where maintaining social distancing can be challenging. Many travellers prioritize destinations with stringent health protocols, including frequent sanitization, vaccination requirements, and clear COVID-19 response strategies. Langkawi's tourism stakeholders have implemented various safety measures, such as digital health passes, temperature screenings, and enhanced sanitation practices to restore traveller confidence. In addition to health-related risks, financial risks have also shaped tourist decision-making. The economic downturn caused by the pandemic resulted in job losses and financial constraints for many individuals, leading to more cautious spending behaviour. Travellers are now more likely to seek flexible booking policies, travel insurance, and refund guarantees to mitigate potential financial losses in case of sudden disruptions. The hospitality and tourism industry in Langkawi has adapted by offering more flexible travel packages and promotions to attract budget-conscious tourists. Another critical aspect of perceived risk in Langkawi's tourism industry is service reliability. During the pandemic, many tourism-related businesses faced operational challenges, including staffing shortages, fluctuating regulations, and unpredictable closures. Tourists who had negative experiences, such as last-minute cancellations or subpar service due to workforce reductions, remain hesitant to commit to travel plans. Addressing these concerns requires consistent service quality, clear communication, and the ability to quickly adapt to changing health regulations.

Environmental concerns have also emerged as a key consideration for post-pandemic travellers. The pandemic highlighted the importance of sustainable tourism practices, prompting many visitors to favour destinations that emphasize eco-friendly initiatives. Langkawi, known for its UNESCO Global Geopark status and rich biodiversity, has an opportunity to position itself as a responsible tourism destination by implementing green policies, reducing overcrowding in fragile ecosystems, and promoting responsible travel behaviours. Social risks, including concerns about local community acceptance of tourists, also influence travel decisions. Some travellers are worried about how local populations perceive the return of international visitors and whether there may be resentment or fear due to lingering pandemic concerns. Effective communication, community engagement, and inclusive tourism policies can help mitigate these risks and foster positive interactions between tourists and local residents.

Despite these challenges, Langkawi has demonstrated resilience in its tourism recovery efforts. Government initiatives such as travel bubbles, vaccination campaigns, and targeted marketing strategies have played a vital role in rebuilding tourist confidence. The ability of the island to balance health

security with an enjoyable travel experience will be crucial in maintaining its status as a leading tourism destination in Malaysia. As the tourism sector continues to evolve, Langkawi must remain adaptable to changing traveller preferences. By prioritizing health safety, financial security, service reliability, environmental sustainability, and community engagement, the destination can mitigate perceived risks and enhance its appeal to both domestic and international travellers in the post-COVID-19 era.

2.3 Bali Tourism Landscape Post-Pandemic: Challenges and Risk Perceptions

Bali, a globally renowned tourism destination, has long been celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, scenic landscapes, and vibrant hospitality sector. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted its tourism industry, fundamentally altered travel behaviours, and raised perceived risks among visitors. These risks, encompassing physical, financial, and socio-psychological dimensions, have become critical barriers to tourism recovery. Research indicates that while physical and financial risks negatively affect the destination image, socio-psychological risks directly impact travellers' willingness to revisit. The interplay between these factors underscores the importance of strategic interventions to rebuild Bali reputation and traveller confidence (Agustini et al., 2023).

During the pandemic, travellers' concerns about health safety became paramount. The implementation of health protocols and certification programs for tourism operators has played a key role in reducing perceived risks and enhancing safety perceptions. Over 87% of tourism-related businesses in Bali have adopted certified health protocols, reinforcing the destination commitment to visitor safety (Syahrin, 2021). These efforts have been complemented by initiatives to promote sustainable and community-based tourism. The development of eco-tourism villages has aligned with the post-pandemic travel preferences for open, nature-focused experiences, while also empowering local communities to engage as tourism stakeholders (Larasdiputra et al., 2022). The economic impact of the pandemic on Bali was profound, with the region experiencing a contraction of over 9% in 2020, significantly more severe than Indonesian national economic downturn of approximately 2%. This sharp decline reflects Bali's heavy dependence on international tourism. Strategic recovery efforts have since focused on stabilizing the sector through targeted marketing campaigns that emphasize health safety and the unique cultural offerings of Bali. These campaigns aim to attract both domestic and international tourists while addressing lingering concerns about health risks (Antara & Sumarniasih, 2022). Post-pandemic travel behaviour highlights an increasing demand for safety and escapism. Domestic tourists, for instance, have shown

a strong preference for destinations that offer not only safety but also a break from the monotony of pandemic-induced restrictions. Motivations to travel often outweigh health concerns, as tourists seek stress relief and rejuvenation through travel experiences (Cahigas et al., 2022). However, the pandemic has also pushed policymakers and tourism stakeholders to innovate. Collaborative efforts between the government, local communities, and private sectors have been crucial in adapting to the new normal, ensuring that Bali remains a competitive and attractive destination.

Bali's journey toward tourism recovery in the post-COVID-19 era demonstrates resilience and adaptability. By addressing perceived risks through robust health protocols, sustainable tourism practices, and strategic marketing, Bali is gradually regaining its status as a premier global destination. Its ability to balance safety concerns with enriching travel experiences is key to restoring tourist confidence and fostering long-term growth in its tourism sector.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine and compare tourists' perceptions of risk and their expectations when travelling in the post-COVID-19 period. The qualitative method was chosen because it provides a deeper understanding of personal experiences, allowing insights into how travellers assess and respond to perceived risks. A qualitative approach is particularly useful in exploring complex human emotions and behaviours, as it captures in-depth perspectives beyond statistical analysis. According to Rahi (2017), qualitative research helps gather rich and detailed information on a subject, enabling a comprehensive exploration of individual experiences that may not be adequately addressed through quantitative methods. Greening (2019) emphasized that qualitative studies focus on carefully selected cases to interpret personal experiences and perceptions in specific contexts. This approach is especially relevant in tourism research, where travellers' emotions, concerns, and decision-making processes are influenced by situational factors. Creswell (2009) also highlights that phenomenology is an effective method for investigating people's thoughts and emotions, particularly when exploring how they experience and interpret key events. This method allows researchers to answer questions related to what an experience was like and how individuals process and understand it.

The study focuses on two well-known tourism destinations in Southeast Asia, Langkawi Island in Malaysia and Bali in Indonesia, providing a comparative perspective on tourists' evolving concerns and expectations in the post-pandemic era. These locations were chosen due to their popularity among

both local and international travellers, as well as their varied approaches to handling the impact of the pandemic on tourism. This research method enables the identification of psychological, emotional, and behavioural influences that shape travel decisions during and after the global health crisis. By examining these aspects, this study contributes to discussions on tourism recovery by offering insights into how travellers adjust to new risk factors. The findings can help policymakers and tourism industry players develop strategies that are aligned with changing traveller concerns, fostering a more resilient and adaptive tourism sector in the long run.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

To better understand tourists' perspectives and expectations about travelling during the post-COVID-19 era, this study used purposive sampling to select the participants. The focus was on travellers visiting or departing from Langkawi Island in Malaysia and Bali in Indonesia. For Langkawi, there were 30 participants recruited at the main entry points such as Langkawi International Airport, Langkawi Ferry Terminal, Kuala Kedah Jetty, and Kuala Perlis Jetty. In Bali, participants were selected at Ngurah Rai International Airport and other central tourism hotspots. The interviews were conducted between June 1st and November 30th, 2023, allowing sufficient time to capture diverse perspectives. According to Ellis (2016), a sample size of 6 to 20 individuals works well for qualitative studies. This study has expanded the scope to include 60 participants, with 30 from each destination, ensuring a broad and inclusive representation.

The participants' age from 24 to 62 and brought a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and travel motivations to the study. The researcher began by observing tourists at these locations, engaging with them as they arrived or departed, before approaching selected individuals for interviews. After explaining the purpose of the study, participants were provided with the consent forms, and interviews were conducted in English. Each conversation lasted 10 to 15 minutes and was audio-recorded for accuracy. The interview questions were open-ended. Topics included questions such as "What are your expectations regarding travel risks when visiting Langkawi or Bali during the endemic?" and "Why did you choose Langkawi or Bali as your travel destination during the post-COVID-19 period?" The participants involved were volunteers and were not rewarded for their participation. Table 1 displays the profiles of the participants.

Table 1. Profile of Participants (n = 60)

No	Demographic	Category	Langkawi (n = 30)	Bali (n = 30)	Total (n = 60)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	15	15	30	50.0
2		Female	15	15	30	50.0
3	Age	21–30	6	7	13	21.7
4		31–40	5	6	11	18.3
5		41–50	10	8	18	30.0
6		51–60	7	7	14	23.3
7		61–70	2	2	4	6.7
8	Origin	Northern Region	16	-	16	26.7
9		Central Region	9	-	9	15.0
10		Southern Region	5	-	5	8.3
11		Domestic (Bali)	-	20	20	33.3
12		International (Bali)	-	10	10	16.7
13	Occupation	Student	4	3	7	11.7
14		Government Employee	9	6	15	25.0
15		Tourism and Hospitality	5	7	12	20.0
16		Businessperson	7	6	13	21.7
17		Retired	2	3	5	8.3
18		Housewife	3	5	8	13.3

The data collected was handled with strict confidentiality and analysed using thematic analysis, a method designed to uncover patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach helped organize the findings into meaningful categories, reflecting both individual and shared insights from participants. As Vaismoradi et al. (2013) explain, thematic analysis supports in-depth exploration of qualitative data, allowing the study to reveal recurring themes and codes from the responses. To ensure the findings were robust, the analysis included techniques like prolonged engagement and cross-checking evidence.

The study highlighted the unique tourism attributes of both Langkawi, known for its family-friendly experiences, and Bali, celebrated for its cultural and wellness tourism. By comparing these two destinations, the study offered valuable insights into shared concerns and differences in how tourists perceive travel risks and form expectations. This dual focus enriched the understanding of the research questions and added depth to the thematic analysis.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

Langkawi Island in Malaysia and Bali in Indonesia are among Southeast Asia's most iconic tourist destinations. Both have faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including reducing the tourist numbers and heightened perceived risks among travellers. However, their unique characteristics and targeted recovery strategies have positioned them as resilient tourism hubs in the post-pandemic era. The status of Langkawi as a duty-free island and UNESCO Global Geopark has contributed to its early recovery, aided by the Malaysian government introduction of travel bubbles to attract tourists, and stimulate economic recovery. Similarly, the reputation of Bali for cultural richness and wellness tourism has helped it regain tourists' confidence through strategic health measures and sustainable tourism initiatives.

Both destinations represent two contrasting models of island tourism in Southeast Asia. Langkawi offers a more controlled, nature-focused tourism experience with an emphasis on sustainability and regional markets, whereas Bali exemplifies high-volume, culture-driven international tourism with complex sustainability challenges. Langkawi offers the centre of eco-tourism, island-hopping, snorkelling, cable car rides, and geopark tours. The island is also popular for duty-free shopping, and it offers a quieter, more family-friendly environment compared to Bali which has a vibrant social scene. Tourist activities in Bali include surfing, diving, yoga retreats, spiritual tourism, and nightlife, catering to a wide range of visitor interests and spending capacities.

Langkawi strategically foregrounds its natural environment as the cornerstone of its tourism allure. Prominent attractions encompass Cenang Beach, the Langkawi Sky Bridge, Kilim Geoforest Park, and curated island-hopping excursions. Although the elements of Malay culture are discernible, they exert a comparatively subordinate influence in shaping the overarching tourist experience. Upon disembarking at Langkawi Island via ferry, visitors are immediately greeted by the imposing eagle sculpture, depicted in the accompanying image (Picture 1). This emblematic monument, formally known as Dataran Lang or Eagle Square, constitutes one of most iconic landmarks in Langkawi. The Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) inaugurated a

refreshed domestic tourism tagline in 2022 “Best Wey,” aimed at attracting the younger generation. This dynamic and catchy slogan is designed to resonate with the wanderlust spirit of Gen Z and Millennials. Despite these modern branding efforts, the island continues to preserve and highlight its natural attractions.



Picture 1. The Eagle Square at Langkawi Island (Photo: Asri Shafii Photo Gallery)

In contrast, the unique cultural offerings in Bali such as temples, traditional dances, festivals, and rituals are deeply integrated into the tourist experience and complement its natural attractions, including rice terraces, beaches, and volcanoes. These cultural elements are central to Bali's identity as a cultural destination. The photo shows Pura Lempuyang Luhur, one of the oldest and most sacred temples in Bali, which is frequently visited by tourists. Commonly referred to as the “Gates of Heaven.” The temple has become a popular location for honeymoon photography. Most tourists visiting the temple will stand and hold hands at the iconic temple gates (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Pura Lempuyang at Bali Island (Photo: Boy Bali Tour 2022)

Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of the principal characteristics of Langkawi and Bali as tourist destinations within the post-pandemic landscape. This comparison delineates distinctions in demographic compositions, tourism markets, and branding strategies. All these shape tourists' perceptions of risk and their travel expectations. An understanding of these differences elucidates how each destination corresponds with the evolving preferences of post-pandemic travellers.

Table 2. Comparative Overview of Langkawi and Bali as Tourist Destinations

No	Aspect	Langkawi	Bali
1	Population Size	Approx. 99,000	Approx. 4.3 million
2	Total Area	478.5 km ²	5,780 km ²
3	Number of Tourists Visit (2023, Post-COVID)	Approx. 2.5 million	Approx. 5.2 million
4	Destination Characteristics	Nature-based, Eco-tourism, Beaches, Duty-free shopping	Cultural tourism, Wellness, Beaches, Rice terraces, Temples
5	Main Market Segments	Domestic Malaysia, ASEAN, Europe	Australia, Europe, Asia (incl. ASEAN), Domestic Indonesia
6	Slogans/Branding	Langkawi Best Wey	Bali, The Island of Gods
7	Other Relevant Aspects	UNESCO Global Geopark, Geotourism, Family-friendly	Yoga and Wellness hub, Festivals, Creative economy

Sources: Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), 2022; Tourism Malaysia, 2024; Bali Provincial Tourism Office, 2024; Bali Provincial Statistics Office, 2024; Ministry of Tourism Indonesia, 2024.

This study aims to (1) identify tourists’ perceived risks when travelling to Langkawi and Bali during the post-pandemic era and (2) explore tourists’ expectations while travelling within this period. The findings revealed significant shifts in travel behaviours, reflecting a cautious but optimistic approach to leisure travel. While the pandemic introduced new health and safety considerations, these did not deter travellers but instead encouraged a more precautionary attitude. Both Langkawi and Bali were perceived as relatively safe destinations by participants. Generally, it was found that there have been some significant changes in the travelling habits of the tourists in the new normal of the post-pandemic. The findings reveal significant shifts in tourists’ travel behaviours and expectations. While these changes have reflected a more cautious approach, they did not deter travellers entirely. Instead, the emphasis on safety and sanitation has influenced how tourists planned and experienced their journeys. Both Langkawi and Bali were perceived as relatively safe travel destinations, with strong preferences for destinations prioritizing health and safety. These insights are categorized into three (3) main themes: destination risk, physical equipment risk, and vacation risk, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Thematic analysis of the study

No	Objective	Keywords	Coding	Theme
1	Perceived travel risk	Cleanness and safety Sanitation practices Wearing a face mask Applying hand sanitiser Keeping physical distance	Self-protection awareness	Destination risk
		Physical contact with equipment's Online transaction	Prevention	Physical-equipment risk
2	Expectation while travelling	Safe destination Anxiety	Fear	Vacation risk

Three main themes emerged from the results of the thematic analysis describing tourists' behaviours while visiting Langkawi Island and Bali during the new normal of the post-COVID-19 era. These themes are (1) destination risk, (2) physical equipment risk, and (3) vacation risk which reflect the multifaceted concerns of travellers in the wake of the pandemic. These themes are supported by the existing literature, including a seminal study by Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), which identified similar categories of perceived risks in tourism: destination risk, holiday risk, and physical equipment risk. Baker (2014) further expanded on these concepts, examining risk perception across dimensions such as health, functionality, physical safety, psychological impact, social dynamics, satisfaction, time, financial considerations, political instability, and terrorism. Additionally, Bhatt and Suryawanshi (2014) classified seven distinct risk categories within consumer behaviour, encompassing social, physical, psychological, satisfaction, time, functional or performance, and financial hazards.

In the context of Langkawi and Bali, the themes of perceived risk draw parallels with these earlier studies while highlighting unique aspects of post-pandemic travel. For instance, destination risk in both locations was shaped by the concerns over cleanliness, sanitation practices, and compliance with health protocols. Physical equipment risk encompassed apprehensions regarding the shared use of items such as snorkelling gear, dining utensils, or public amenities, with travellers favouring contactless options and personal equipment to mitigate these risks. Lastly, vacation risk was tied to emotional factors such as anxiety over safety, particularly for family groups and vulnerable individuals, and the anticipation of smooth, stress-free travel experiences. These findings emphasize the evolving priorities of tourists as they navigate the challenges of post-pandemic travel. The subsequent subsections explain deeper into these

themes, shedding light on how Langkawi and Bali address these risks while aligning with tourists' expectations for safety, convenience, and reassurance in their travel experiences. This discussion builds on the foundational insights from previous literature, offering a contemporary perspective on the interplay between perceived risks and travel behaviours in prominent Southeast Asian destinations. Direct quotations from participants were employed to illustrate the authentic responses of the travellers.

4.1 *Perceived Travel Risk*

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on global tourism, significantly reducing traveller numbers to destinations like Langkawi Island and Bali. However, as governments worldwide began to ease stringent travel restrictions, tourists gradually resumed exploring their preferred destinations. This resurgence in travel reflects growing confidence and a desire to escape prolonged periods of isolation. Yet, this recovery is accompanied by notable changes in traveller behaviour, shaped by heightened health awareness and self-protection strategies. Such evidence can be seen in the interview verbatim and discussed as follow:

4.1.1 *Evolving Travel Behaviours and Destination Risk*

Tourists increasingly prioritize cleanliness and sanitation in their destination choices. For example, a participant shared, *"In choosing the destination before COVID, it must be the best destination that has a good promotion... But after COVID-19, I will choose based on other tourists' reviews about the destination's cleanliness"* (Participant 3). Similarly, travellers to Bali also highlighted the importance of cleanliness as a determining factor, citing the island's emphasis on clean, safe accommodations and public spaces. This focus on sanitation underscores an acute awareness of destination risk, with visitors seeking assurances that their chosen locations adhere to high hygiene standards.

Both destinations have responded by strengthening their sanitation measures. Langkawi, for instance, sanitized local flights multiple times daily, while Bali implemented rigorous cleaning protocols across its accommodations and attractions. One participant stated, *"I chose to travel to Langkawi because I know most of our local flights to the island were sanitized several times a day"* (Participant 20), mirroring sentiments expressed by Bali travellers regarding the importance of health protocols.

4.1.2 *Physical Equipment Risk and Preventive Measures*

Concerns over shared amenities have influenced tourists to adopt precautionary behaviours, such as using personal equipment or favouring dining

options with reduced contact points. A participant noted, *“Before COVID-19, I always enjoyed snorkelling. But after COVID, I used my own snorkelling gear to avoid sharing with other tourists”* (Participant 6). Similarly, in Bali, tourists preferred using private transportation and dining a la carte rather than attending buffets, minimizing their exposure to shared surfaces. To address these concerns, both destinations have promoted innovations like contactless payments. In Bali, QR-based payments have become common, with one traveller noting, *“After COVID, I prefer to pay by online transfer and QR code because it is easier and safer”* (Participant 5). Langkawi tourists expressed similar preferences, emphasizing the convenience and safety of digital transactions over traditional cash or card payments.

4.1.3 Vacation Risk and Safety Awareness

Safety remains a primary concern, especially for families travelling with children. In Bali, outdoor and wellness-oriented activities such as eco-tourism and yoga were highlighted as safer options, aligning with global preferences for spacious, nature-focused environments. A Langkawi traveller stated, *“There are many tourists on the island, especially during public holidays. I make sure my family avoids being too close to other people and wears masks”* (Participant 17). Such behaviours reflect the broader emphasis on maintaining physical distance and adhering to health guidelines. Tourists in both destinations also demonstrated a continued commitment to hand hygiene. Participants reported frequently sanitizing and washing hands, with one stating, *“I bring a hand sanitizer with me every time I go out”* (Participant 25). These habits and the widespread implementation of safety protocols, illustrate how traveller expectations have shifted to prioritize health and well-being in the post-pandemic era.

Based on these findings, it can be perceived that the pandemic has reshaped travel behaviour, with tourists to Langkawi and Bali emphasizing on self-protection, sanitation, and digital convenience. Both destinations have successfully adapted by aligning their offerings with these evolving expectations, fostering a sense of safety and confidence among visitors. These changes highlight the importance of continued investment in health protocols and innovative solutions to sustain recovery and resilience in the tourism sector.

4.2 Expectation while Travelling

Another critical issue explored in this study revolves around travellers' expectations while vacationing in the post-COVID-19 era is vacation risk. The vacation risk emerged as a central concern, as many tourists expressed heightened caution due to fears for their safety and well-being, particularly the risk of contracting COVID-19-like illnesses. This fear was especially pronounced

among families, where safeguarding children and elderly members influenced the selection of vacation destinations. Both Langkawi Island and Bali were perceived as relatively safe travel locations, owing to their strong health measures and reputations for providing secure environments.

For instance, one Langkawi traveller shared, *“It’s a safety factor because we have children and need to be careful because they are more fragile and get sick easily. I chose to bring my kids to Langkawi because I believed the COVID-19 cases were not that many here and it was safe”* (Participant 8). Similarly, the emphasis on health-certified accommodations and wellness-oriented activities reinforced Bali as a safe destination. Safety concerns also extended beyond health risks, with tourists considering factors such as political stability and crime rates. As one participant noted, *“Our main concern is safety—no terrorism, no bombing. I am still concerned about disease, but I believe that Langkawi and other states in Malaysia are safer to travel to compared to some international destinations”* (Participant 15).

The pandemic-induced anxiety was further highlighted by participants’ fear of reinfection. *“I am worried about getting infected since the virus still exists,”* stated one traveller (Participant 7). Others shared similar concerns, particularly those who had previously contracted COVID-19 or were more vulnerable due to age or health conditions. *“Since I am already old and fragile, I easily get the infection. So, I need to beware of the virus even though we are already in the post-pandemic phase”* (Participant 10). In Bali, these concerns have prompted the adoption of tailored strategies such as promoting eco-tourism and outdoor activities, which offer lower perceived risks compared to crowded indoor settings. The psychological impact of the pandemic, as noted by Madunická (2022), introduced an existential risk that heightened travellers’ anxieties about unexpected dangers. Rosenfeld and Tomiyama (2021) argue that when such risks are intertwined with a fear of mortality, they not only influence individual behaviour but also shape societal norms. These findings are aligned with the observed behaviours of tourists in Langkawi and Bali, where safety has become a paramount consideration in travel planning.

In this regard, it can be observed that travellers’ expectations in the post-pandemic era are heavily shaped by concerns for health and safety, underscoring the importance of proactive measures by destinations. Langkawi and Bali have successfully positioned themselves as safe havens by emphasizing transparent communication, robust health protocols, and activities that align with travellers’ evolving preferences. These efforts have bolstered confidence and made them attractive choices in the new normal of tourism.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the perceived risks and expectations, specifically in the context of post-COVID-19 tourism recovery where tourists travelled to Langkawi Island and Bali during the new normal of the post-COVID-19 era. The findings reveal that while tourists are eager to resume travelling, their behaviours and preferences are significantly shaped by heightened concerns about health and safety. The major risks identified in this study were destination risk, physical-equipment risk, and vacation risk which offer new insights into how tourists approach their travel decisions in light of the pandemic's lasting impact. Tourists in both Langkawi and Bali continue to prioritize destinations with rigorous sanitation practices, reflecting an elevated awareness of cleanliness as a critical determinant of destination choice. This trend aligns with broader findings in the tourism sector, emphasizing the importance of visible health protocols and transparent communication to reassure travellers (Syahrin, 2021).

The study also highlights the role of technology in addressing tourists' concerns. The preference for contactless payments and digital transactions in both destinations underscores the importance of reducing physical contact points to mitigate perceived risks. Digital solutions such as online check-ins and QR-based payment systems have proven effective in enhancing safety and convenience, making them indispensable for modern travel. Additionally, the ongoing importance of physical distancing, even in a period of relaxed restrictions, reflects the enduring influence of the pandemic on tourists' behaviours. These findings suggest that the tourism industry must remain vigilant and adaptable, integrating innovative solutions and reinforcing hygiene standards to meet evolving traveller expectations (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021).

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has certain limitations. First, the sample size of 30 participants per destination, while suitable for qualitative research, limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader tourist population. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples to validate and expand upon these observations. Second, the focus on Langkawi and Bali offers a comparative perspective but may not fully capture the nuances of tourist behaviours in other regions. Expanding research to include additional destinations could yield a more comprehensive understanding of perceived risks across different cultural and geographical contexts.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported data, which is inherently prone to biases such as social desirability and recall inaccuracies. Incorporating observational methodologies or longitudinal studies could provide a more objective and dynamic picture of tourists' behaviours and attitudes over time. Moreover, while the study identified key themes of perceived risk, it did not delve deeply into the psychological mechanisms driving these

perceptions. Future research could explore the cognitive and emotional factors influencing risk assessments and decision-making processes among tourists. This deeper understanding could enhance strategies for managing perceived risks in the tourism industry (Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2021).

The impact of evolving pandemic-related regulations on tourists' perceptions and behaviours is another area which needs further investigation. As travel guidelines continue to change, ongoing research is needed to monitor their effects on travellers' willingness to visit certain destinations and their expectations for safety and hygiene. Such insights could inform policymakers and tourism stakeholders in developing adaptive and responsive strategies to navigate these challenges effectively. Examining the effectiveness of various risk mitigation strategies, such as enhanced cleaning protocols and safety communications, could provide actionable recommendations for reducing anxiety and rebuilding trust among tourists. Furthermore, exploring the role of cultural differences in shaping risk perceptions and behaviors could offer a global perspective on the diverse challenges and opportunities facing the tourism industry (Madunická, 2022).

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered how tourists perceive risks and shape their expectations for travel. This study underscores the urgent need for the tourism industry to prioritize health and safety measures while embracing innovation to meet these new demands. While the findings offer a preliminary understanding of tourists' behaviours in the post-pandemic era, future research with larger, more diverse samples and mixed-method approaches will be essential for advancing knowledge and informing effective recovery strategies. By addressing these limitations and expanding research horizons, the tourism sector can better navigate the complexities of the new normal, fostering a safer and more enjoyable travel experience for tourists worldwide.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by the DPPD Research Grant from Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, Malaysia [100-TNCPI/INT 16/6/2 (006/2023)]. The authors would like to thank Associate Professor Dr Azila Azmi, the corresponding author, for her efforts in managing the manuscript for publication. We also extend our sincere appreciation to all participants for their valuable contributions to this research. Special thanks are also extended to the Asri Shafii Photo Gallery and Boy Bali Tour 2022 for the photographs of Langkawi and Bali.

Bibliography

- Agustini, N. P. D., Paramita, R., & Sukarno, T. H. (2023). The influence of perceived risk COVID-19 on the interest in visiting domestic tourists to DTW Tanah Lot Bali with the image of the destination as a mediating variable. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jths.2023.1.1.4>
- Antara, M., & Sumarniasih, M. S. (2022). Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Bali's and Indonesia's Economic Growth. *SOCA: Jurnal Sosial Ekonomi Pertanian*, 16(2), 187 - 200. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24843/SOCA.2022.v16.i02.p06>
- Bali Provincial Statistics Office. (2024). Bali in figures 2024. Retrieved from <https://bali.bps.go.id>
- Bali Provincial Tourism Office. (2024). Bali tourism statistics 2023. Retrieved from <https://disparda.baliprov.go.id>
- Bae, S. Y., & Chang, P. J. (2021). The effect of coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) risk perception on behavioural intention towards 'untact' tourism in South Korea during the first wave of the pandemic (March 2020). *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(7), 1017-1035. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1798895>
- Bhatt, S., & Suryawanshi, P. (2014). Understanding perceived risks in consumer behaviour: A review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(3), 234-248.
- Cahigas, M. M. L., Prasetyo, Y., Alexander, J., Sutapa, P. L., Wiratama, S., Arvin, V., Nadlifatin, R., & Persada, S. F. (2022). Factors affecting visiting behaviour to Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic: An extended theory of planned behaviour approach. *Sustainability*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141610424>
- Daverey, A., & Dutta, K. (2021). Use of sanitizers and disinfectants during COVID-19 pandemic: Awareness, attitudes, and practices among the public. *Environmental Research*, 195, 110841. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2021.110841>
- Ellis, P. (2016). The language of research (part 8): Phenomenological research. *Wounds UK*, 12(1), 129-130.
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Greening, N. (2019). Phenomenological research methodology. *Scientific Research Journal*, VII(V). <https://doi.org/10.31364/scirj/v7.i5.2019.p0519656>

- Jiang, Y., & Wen, J. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on hotel marketing and management: A perspective article. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(8), 2563-2573. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2020-0237>
- Langkawi Development Authority (LADA). (2024). Langkawi tourism statistics report 2023/2024. Retrieved from <https://www.lada.gov.my>
- Larasdiputra, G. D., Jayawarsa, A. A. K., & Darmawan, N. A. S. (2022). Post-COVID-19 tourism in Bali: The economy and eco-tourism. *Journal of Tourism Economics and Policy*. Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 79-85. <https://doi.org/10.38142/jtep.v2i2.343>
- Madunická, M. (2022). Global tourism in the post-pandemic era: New expectations and emerging risks. *Tourism Management*, 90. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104231>
- Mills, B., Reyna, V., & Estrada, S. (2008). Explaining contradictory relations between risk perception and risk taking. *Psychological Science*, 19, 429-433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02104.x>
- Ministry of Health Malaysia. (2024). COVID-19 dashboard. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from <https://data.moh.gov.my/dashboard/covid-19>
- Nik Hashim, N. A. A., Yusoff, A. M., Awang, Z., Aziz, R. C., Ramlee, S. I. F., Bakar, N. A., & Fatt, B. S. (2019). The effect of domestic tourist perceived risk on revisit intention in Malaysia. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering (IJITEE)*. 10.35940/ijitee.J1085.0881019
- Pligt, J. (1996). Risk perception and self-protective behaviour. *European Psychologist*, 1, 34-43. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040.1.1.34>
- Puriwat, W., & Tripopsakul, S. (2021). Explaining the factors influencing consumer adoption of contactless payment in the post-COVID-19 era. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 26(4), 151-160. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41264-021-00091-2>
- Rahi, S. (2017). Research design and methods: A systematic review of research paradigms, sampling issues and instruments development. *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences*, 06(02). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2162-6359.1000403>
- Roehl, W. S., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (1992). Risk perceptions and pleasure travel: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Travel Research*, 17-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004728759203000403>
- Rosenfeld, D. L., & Tomiyama, A. J. (2021). Can a pandemic make people more socially conservative? Longitudinal evidence from COVID-19. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 110609. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12745>

- Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for advancing and resetting industry and research. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 312-321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.015>
- Sjöberg, L. (2000). *Factors in Risk Perception*. *Risk Analysis*, 20(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0272-4332.00001>
- Sjöberg, L. (1998). Risk perception: Experts and the public. *European Psychologist*, 3, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040.3.1.1>
- Sjöberg, L. (1998). Worry and risk perception. *Risk analysis*, 18(1), 85-93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.1998.tb00918.x>
- Syahrin, A. (2021). Health protocol certification for tourism business due to COVID-19 outbreaks in Bali. *Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.7454/jglitrop.v5i1.97>
- Tourism Malaysia. (2024). Tourism performance report 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.tourism.gov.my>
- Zenker, S., & Kock, F. (2020). The coronavirus pandemic – A critical discussion of a tourism research agenda. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104164>
- Zheng, D., Luo, Q., & Ritchie, B. W. (2021). Afraid to travel after COVID-19? Self-protection, coping and resilience against pandemic ‘travel fear’. *Tourism Management*, 83, 104261. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104261>

Authors' Profile

Dr. Azrul Abdullah is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis Branch. As a certified accountant, he has diverse experience in sectors such as accounting, manufacturing, entrepreneurship and tourism. He has been a visiting research fellow at Universitas Airlangga and Universitas Sumatera Utara. He is an active researcher, writer, and consultant in the areas of financial reporting, corporate governance, information disclosure, accounting education, tourism accounting, capital structure, financial leverage, debt structure, and entrepreneurship. Email: azrul229@uitm.edu.my

Dr. Azila Azmi is an Associate Professor of Tourism Management and currently the Head Centre of Studies at the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang Branch. Over the years, she has worked on research and consultancy projects locally and internationally, all funded by major grant-awarding bodies in the areas of tourism destination management, community-based tourism, tourist behaviour, cross-border, shopping tourism, entrepreneurship, and ubiquitous learning. Much of her

research and contributions to the field have been published in several academic journals. She is also actively engaged in state tourism development programmes and holds visiting scholar roles at several academic institutions. Email: azila.azmi@uitm.edu.my

Dr. Norshamshina Mat Isa is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis Branch, specializing in finance and investment. With over 20 years of teaching experience, she has taught various courses, including Financial Management, Sport Finance, Strategic Management, and other finance-related subjects. Her passion as an educator drives her commitment to innovative delivery and learning development programs for university students and the community. Her research focuses on financial decision-making, SME, tourism finance, and behavioural studies in tourism. Actively involved in state tourism development programs, she has also contributed internationally as a Visiting Scholar and Advisor in countries including Indonesia and Thailand. Email: norshamshina@uitm.edu.my

Dr. Putu Sucita Yanthy is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University. Producing research publications related to women, gastronomy and culinary, including *Developing Ubud as a Gastronomy Tourism Destination* (2017), *Exploring the tourism culinary experiences: an investigation of tourist satisfaction in Ubud* (2018), *Wisata Gastronomi Ubud-Gianyar* (2018) and *Srikandi Kuliner* (2021). She had the opportunity to take part in the staff mobility for teaching program (2018) to the University of Glasgow, Scotland. In 2019-2021, she participated in a postdoctoral program at the University of Angers France with a research project on Tourism Women Education in Bali (TWEB) and published an article in *Annals Tourism Research* entitled *Gender, work, tourism and higher education in Bali*. Email: putusucita@unud.ac.id

Dr. Agoes Tinus Lis Indrianto is a distinguished academic and professional in the field of tourism and hospitality management. Holding a Master's in Tourism from Monash University, Melbourne, and a Ph.D. in Hospitality and Tourism Management from UUM, Malaysia. Currently serving as the Dean of the School of Tourism at Universitas Ciputra Surabaya since 2020, Dr. Indrianto is also a certified lecturer, international qualitative researcher, and hotel auditor, and he actively contributes as a trainer and speaker in numerous tourism and entrepreneurship programs. His specialization is tourism destination branding tourism marketing destination development urban and heritage tourism. Email: agoes.tinus@ciputra.ac.id