Post-COVID-19 travel: Factors influencing Malaysian tourists' travel intention to visit Japan

*Karen Tsunokawa[1], Nabila Mohd Yunus[2] & Muhammad Safuan Abdul Latip [3]

[1,2]School of Tourism, Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism
BERJAYA University College
Berjaya Times Square, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

[3]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu
Sura Hujung, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

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

ABSTRACT

Japan is one of the most popular tourist destinations. In 2019, more than 31 million inbound tourists visited Japan, and over 500,000 were from Malaysia. This number ranks ninth in the world in terms of the number of inbound tourists for Japan. Therefore, Malaysian tourists are an essential segment of the Japanese tourism industry. Additionally, the Japanese government has identified the tourism industry as a pillar of its growth strategy and set a goal of increasing the number of inbound tourists to 40 million by 2020 and 60 million by 2030. To achieve this goal, the factors influencing Malaysian tourists' intention to travel to Japan should be clarified and utilized for the effective and efficient development of the Japanese inbound tourism industry. However, no previous study has researched Malaysian tourists' intentions to visit Japan. Therefore, this research studies this area by examining Malaysian tourists living in Greater KL using the theory of planned behaviour and the push-pull factors theory. The examined factors include personal attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and tourism resources. This research adopts the quantitative research method and collects a total of 359 valid responses, analysing the relationships between the factors and Malaysian tourists' traveling intention to visit Japan based on the collected data. As a result, the researcher finds that all the mentioned factors positively correlate with Malaysian tourists' intention to visit Japan.

Keywords: Travel intention, Japan tourism, COVID-19, Theory of Planned Behaviour

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Culturally, as an island nation, Japan has developed its unique culture over thousands of years with minimal outside influence, making it distinct (Kwok & Leung, n.d.). Shinto religion is an example of this unique culture. Most Japanese follow Shinto, which believes that everything has a specific god, and there are many shrines that worship various gods in Japan (Wonders of Traditional Culture in Japan, 2022). The tea

ceremony is another example of Japanese culture. Although the origin of the tea ceremony is in China, the Japanese have elevated it to an art form. The intricate series of movements while preparing tea showcases the Japanese spirit of welcoming people, known as "Omotenashi." This spirit is evident in many places in Japan, and visitors can experience high levels of hospitality (Omotenashi, 2022).

Despite closing its borders for over two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan was ranked first in the latest Travel and Tourism Development Index by the World Economic Forum out of 117 countries (Imada, 2022). This ranking is based on a comprehensive evaluation of 112 items related to travel and tourism and is published every two years. Japan won first place for the first time in 2021, owing to several reasons. Firstly, for the Tokyo Olympics 2020, Japan placed signboards in multiple languages (English, Chinese, and Korean) and pictograms on the roads. Secondly, the 2021 report has significantly revamped the evaluation criteria and established a new area of evaluation criteria called "Travel and Tourism-Related Sustainability" to emphasize sustainability. Japan has a high rank in this area compared to other Asian countries, which also affected its overall ranking (Japan Ranks First in the World in Tourism Attractiveness Ranking: Why is Japan Highly Rated in the COVID-19 pandemic? 2022).

According to Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) (2022), before the COVID-19 pandemic affected tourism, the number of inbound tourist arrivals in Japan increased from 31,191,856 in 2018 to 31,882,049 in 2019, which is a 2.2% increase in one year. Japan had recorded an increase in inbound tourists for seven consecutive years before the pandemic. It is worth noting that the number of inbound tourists from Malaysia to Japan is high, with 501,592 Malaysian tourists visiting Japan in 2019, ranking ninth in the world in terms of inbound tourists to Japan. Hence, Malaysian inbound tourists are crucial for the Japanese government and stakeholders in the tourism industry (Visitor Arrivals to Japan and Japanese Overseas Travelers, 2022).

However, at the end of 2019, the world was shocked by the COVID-19 attack. COVID-19 is an acute respiratory infection and its first outbreak started in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Latip et al., 2021; May & Latip, 2021). Due to the seriousness of COVID-19 symptoms, the travel industry market immediately shrank all over the world, significantly decreasing the motivation for travellers to travel abroad. Since WHO reported that the virus had affected more than 89,000 people around the world, causing over 3,000 deaths, many travellers decided to reschedule or even cancel their trips to other countries. Japan is no exception, as the spread of COVID-19 hit both the Japanese travel market and the foreign travel market to Japan, forcing travel-related businesses to shrink, temporarily suspend operations, or close down (Coronavirus / COVID-19 Update, 2022). Looking back at the measures taken in Japan during the pandemic, to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, Japan expanded the entry denial list from 24 to 73 countries, including Malaysia, with 49 additional countries and regions added on April 3rd, 2020. Since the restrictions were put in place, Japan has conducted border closures for tourists for more than two and a half years (Coronavirus / COVID-19 Update, 2022).

Despite COVID-19 still being a threat, the Japanese government has decided to reopen its doors to tourists, but with strict rules. In June 2022, the country allowed small groups of inbound tourists, but they had to be part of a package tour, and tour leaders had to accompany travellers from the entry to the departure point. Other requirements for travellers were to buy medical insurance and wear masks in all public places, including outside. Due to the strict travel bans, it had immobilized tourists to freely sightsee (Coronavirus / COVID-19 Update, 2022). However, on 11th October 2022, the Japanese government opened its doors wide open for tourists without any strict conditions. Inbound tourists no longer need to prepare visas and individual travel has been accepted if they are fully vaccinated with three doses or submit a pre-arrival negative result for a COVID-19 test, which was taken 72 hours before departure (Coronavirus / COVID-19 Update, 2022; Visa-waiver resumption plus weaker yen to boost travel and shopping in Japan, 2022).

Looking back before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2018, the value of consumption by inbound tourists in Japan was 4.5 trillion yen. When compared to the value of exports by-product in the same year, the value of consumption by inbound tourists in Japan deserves second place after the 12.3 trillion yen in automobile exports, and it was equivalent to 4.2 trillion yen in semiconductors and other electronic parts, and 4.0 trillion yen in auto parts. Therefore, inbound tourists to Japan have been recognized as a very important sector of the Japanese economy (Yagasaki, 2021). Also, the Japanese government has identified the tourism

industry as a pillar of the Japanese growth strategy and a key to success in regional development projects. To maximize this, they set a goal of increasing the number of inbound tourists to 40 million by 2020 and 60 million by 2030 in the "Tourism Vision Council for Tomorrow's Japan" in March 2016 (Tourism Vision Council for Tomorrow's Japan, 2016).

To achieve this goal, despite the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the economy and the tourism industry, the Japanese government and tourism industry stakeholders need to understand visitors' intentions and effectively conduct inbound tourism marketing for future development. As Yagasaki (2021) pointed out, providing proper elements that tourists value is one of the essential factors in recovering the travel industry from the crisis. Studies by Sibi et al. (2020), have demonstrated that appropriate strategies and joint efforts of tourism stakeholders were crucial in overcoming the crises, gaining confidence among travelers, and rejuvenating the industry over time. Additionally, as discussed by previous scholars, motivational factors change over time in response to changes in situations that influence travel, such as family, economy, interests, health, and experience (Sibi et al., 2020). However, no previous study has emphasized examining Malaysian tourists' travel intentions to visit Japan amidst post-COVID-19. Hence, the research aims to narrow this gap, and the following research objective is crafted:

1)   To examine the factors influencing Malaysian tourists' traveling intention to Japan during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period.

The findings of the study could provide insights for travel industry players, such as travel agencies, airlines, hotels, and destination management organizations. The industry can use this knowledge to tailor their offerings and communication strategies to better serve the needs and preferences of Malaysian tourists, ultimately improving the industry's performance. The study can also help understand how COVID-19 has impacted consumer behaviour and how this behaviour may continue to shift as recovery efforts progress. By gaining insights into the factors that influence Malaysian tourists' travel intentions to Japan, the industry can better respond to the changing demands of tourists in the post-pandemic era. Furthermore, since Japan and Malaysia have cultural differences that may influence the decision-making process of Malaysian tourists, exploring these cultural differences through the study may promote cross-cultural understanding and enhance the relationship between the two countries.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourist Motivation

The concept of tourist motivation is seen as important in most tourism research. According to Sibi et al. (2020), the concept of motivation derives from the word "motives," meaning moving into action. Tourist motivation and behaviour are major factors for competent authorities to define forms of communication with clients or for business support. Without profound knowledge and understanding of tourists, it is impossible to mitigate or prevent damages in destinations as supported by Dann (1977). Studies have classified motivations as internal (psychological drivers) and external (related to the destination), as reiterated by Dann (1977), and Uysal and Jurowski (1993).

Trust motivation can influence an individual's behaviour in a variety of ways, such as increasing their willingness to cooperate with others, reducing their perception of risk in social interactions, and encouraging them to share personal information with others. Trust motivation is thought to be influenced by a variety of factors, including personality traits, past experiences with trust and betrayal, and cultural norms and values (Sibi et al., 2020; Dann, 1977; Uysal & Jurowski, 1933).

In order to facilitate survival in a constantly changing and competitive market, suppliers of tourism products and services need to be updated to anticipate changes in travel motivation (Sibi et al., 2020). Moreover, tourist motivational values are likely to change during the post-COVID period due to many factors.

2.2 Destination Image

Pioneering studies on the image of tourist destinations date back to the 1970s and 1980s. According to Lawson (1977), destination image can be defined as the expression of all objective knowledge, prejudices, imagination, and emotional thoughts of an individual or group about a particular location. Other authors,

such as Crompton (1979) and Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993), define the image as the sum of all beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people associate with a destination.

However, as noted by Lopes (2011), contemporary tourism marketing recognizes that the development of a destination's image is based on the consumer's rational and emotional responses. This image is the result of two primary components or dimensions: perceptual and cognitive, which emphasize the importance and value of each attribute of tourist destinations. Stabler (1995) suggests that the destination image is evaluated by the attributes of its resources and attractions, which motivate tourists to visit that destination. The second dimension is affective, referring to the feelings and emotions raised by tourist destinations, as also noted by Stabler (1995) and Keller (1993). It is important to note that this emotional component is strongly influenced by the motivations of tourists (Beerli & Martín, 2004).

According to Lopes (2011), the overall image of a destination is a combination of cognitive and affective components. The experience of having been on vacation at a tourist destination has a significant impact on the destination image from both cognitive and emotional perspectives (Beerli & Martin, 2004)

2.3 Underpinning Theory

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was developed based on The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Ajzen in 1991 and expanded the theory himself in 2005 (Lin, 2016). According to the theory, behaviour is influenced by intentions. The intentions are determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In other words, the decision to act is based not only on whether the behaviour is good or bad (attitude), but also on whether the behaviour does not violates social norms or not (subjective norms) and whether the behaviour is capable of carrying out by himself/herself (Perceived behavioural control) (Sansom, 2021).

TPB enables us to assume and explain human behaviour by identifying their intentions for the behaviour (Boguszewicz-Kreft et al., 2020). Hence, it is often used to examine the multitude of behavioural domains and it has been utilized in many kinds of industries and businesses such as physical activity, drug use, recycling, choice of travel mode, safer sex, consumer behaviour, technology adoption, protection of privacy, and so on (Ajzen, 2020). The tourism industry also often uses TPB for predicting and understanding the tourists' intention to visit a destination and there are many previous studies about tourism that have utilized TPB so far (Pahrudin et al., 2021). TPB was used to predict tourists' travel intentions to Hong Kong in 2004. The results revealed that attitude, perceived behavioural control, and past behaviour are related to tourists' travel intentions. Moreover, previous study pointed out that subjective norms and perceived behavioural control affected tourists' travel intentions (Lin, 2016). In short, TPB is suitable for investigating self-tourism behaviour and understanding the process of personal values and the factors influencing travel behaviour (Cheunkamon et al., 2020).

2.4 Hypothesis Development

2.4.1 Personal Attitude and Traveling Intention

Attitudes can be defined as a person's feelings, thoughts, and tendencies that are usually permanent for him/ her about some aspect of the objects or subjects (Madded et al., 1992). When people experience, people learn something from the experience. In the process of learning, people evaluate the objects or subjects and the evaluation will be reflected in their attitude. In other words, for the most part, attitudes towards an action represent an individual's evaluation of the action and the attitude will differ depending on the individual's evaluation coming from the process of learning such as good/bad, beneficial/harmful, pleasant/unpleasant, liking/disliking, and others. The process of learning can be obtained through interaction with personal experience, mass media, influences of other important people to him/ her, culture, education and religious influences as well as the influence of emotional factors.

Louis Thurstone, Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen and other leading social psychologists of the 1920s to mid-century noted that attitudes are influenced by evaluative or affective factors toward an object, idea, or issue and they respectively conceptualized attitudes toward action as evaluative responses with a favourable or unfavourable disposition toward performing that action (Pardana et al., 2019). In the tourism context, attitude is an individual reaction or emotion towards tourist destinations (Lam & Hsu, 2006; cited in

Chandra et al., 2022). Applied to this study, the attitude here would be considered to be how favourable/unfavourable or positive/negative a person is about visiting Japan.

Additionally, Lin (2016) mentioned that when using attitude to predict behavioural intention or actual behavior, the attitude tends to simplify as a unidimensional concept which consists only of the affective component. Since this study examines and predicts Malaysian travellers' traveling intentions to Japan by utilizing attitude, this study also follows this and simplifies the attitude as a unidimensional concept which consists only of the affective component. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H$_1$ - Personal attitudes have an influence on Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan.

2.4.2 Subjective Norm and Traveling Intention

Simply put, subjective norms refer to the person's beliefs about whether his or her peers and others who are important to him or her approve or disapprove of performing the behaviour. Also, as Nabila (2017) indicated, subjective norms refers to the perception of social pressure to perform the behaviour or not. Many studies have shown that social pressures such as peers, parents, teachers, and relatives influence his or her behavioural intentions so far.

Subjective norms can be divided into two categories. One is the descriptive norm and the other is the injunctive norm (Han & Cheng, 2020). These subjective norms have a predictive function of people's behaviour intention. A descriptive norm represents other people's behaviour and it works as an exemplary role. Due to individual convergence psychology, most people tend to behave in ways that others consider exemplary (Xu et al., 2022).

In other words, if a particular behaviour is performed by a large number of people, that behaviour will become a "descriptive norm" which means an exemplary act and induce even more people to behave. On the other hand, injunctive norms are one in which appropriateness or inappropriateness has been perceived by many people based on the law as recited by Sato and Osugi (2017). For example, many countries have laws against pedestrians crossing red lights. This law is what is classified as an injunctive norm. Whereas, descriptive norms are indicated by the actual actions taken by many people. Applying this to the same traffic situation, the descriptive norm depends on whether the pedestrians around you are crossing a red light or stopping (Sato & Osugi, 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H$_2$ - Subjective norm have an influence on Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan.

2.4.3 Perceived Behavioural Control and Traveling Intention

According to Brookes (2021), Perceived Behavioural Control is the degree in terms of which the person believes he/she can control their behaviours. Actual behaviour is dependent on and influenced by the individual perception of internal factors such as the degree of ability to control barriers to behaviour and external factors such as presence or absence of adequate resources. In general, the more resources and fewer barriers an individual perceives, the greater the degree of control over the behaviour and the stronger the likelihood of carrying out the behaviour (Latip et al., 2020; Ajzen, 2020).

Madden et al. (1992) state that when people have enough resources such as money, time, chance, or opportunities, perceived behavioural control should be at the utmost. Also, if they perceive that they have a higher level of control, they will tend to work harder and longer to succeed. For example, assuming he or she had a behavioural intention to maintain a healthy diet, environmental resources will have a significant impact on whether he or she can realize that intention. If healthy foods are readily available and affordable within his or her living area, the behavioural intention to maintain a healthy diet is more likely to be realized, and vice versa (Hardin-Fanning & Ricks, 2017).

Whereas attitudes and subjective norms are components of volitional processes, perceived behavioural control is a major component of non-volitional processes (Aschwanden et al., 2021). Past studies have confirmed the association between perceived behavioural control and behavioural intention in tourist behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chandra et al., 2022). Thus, now that Japan has opened its borders to inbound tourists, it is important to investigate the perceived behavioural control of potential Malaysian tourists. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H[3] - Perceived behavioural control has an influence on Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan.

2.4.4 *Tourism Resources and Traveling Intention*

Tourism resources are the basis for tourism activities and are an essential element for the growth and development of the tourism aspect in each destination (Xie & Ma, 2021). In the study of Tsai & Wang (2017), they claimed that tourism resources can stimulate the tourists' intention to visit and experience a certain destination. Tourism resources can be divided into two categories. One is primary tourist resources, and the other is secondary tourist resources. Primary tourist resources refer to something that originally existed for other purposes, not for the tourism purposes. The typical examples of primary tourist resources include natural landscapes such as mountains, rainforests, coral reefs and others; religious buildings such as mosques, temples, and others; and defence facilities such as castles, walls, and others. On the other hand, secondary tourist resources refer to something that is intentionally created to meet the needs of tourism purposes. Examples of secondary tourist resources include hotels, restaurants, and theme parks (Burdett, 2017).

Japan has abundant tourism resources. The tourism resources in Japan are varied from natural tourism resources such as Mt. Fuji, beautiful sea sceneries in Okinawa, and snowy sceneries in Hokkaido to cultural tourism resources such as Himeji Castle, the temple of the golden pavilion (Kinkaku-ji), Shirakawago (Chen, 2017). Also, there are a variety of secondary tourism resources as well in Japan. For instance, there are world-famous theme parks such as Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo Disney Sea in Chiba prefecture, and Universal Studio Japan in Osaka prefecture. In addition, on 1st November 2022, Ghibli-park was officially opened in Aichi prefecture. This theme park recreates the scenery that appeared in Studio Ghibli's works and has exhibits related to Ghibli's works (Ghibli-park, 2022). Studio Ghibli is one of the most famous and acclaimed animation studios with a more than 35-year history. The studio has released a lot of Japanese most iconic animated films so far and recorded record-breaking at the box office. In 2003, "Spirited Away" grossed $300 million worldwide and won the Academy Award for Best. Animated Feature. It means that Studio Ghibli is popular not only in Japan but also all over the world. Ghibli Park expects more than 1.8 million visitors per year including inbound tourists' visitors and it is the most attention secondary tourism resource in Japan now (Greenwood & George, 2022). The important relationship between tourism resources and tourism activity has led to the following hypothesis of the study:

H[4] - Tourism resources have an influence on Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan.
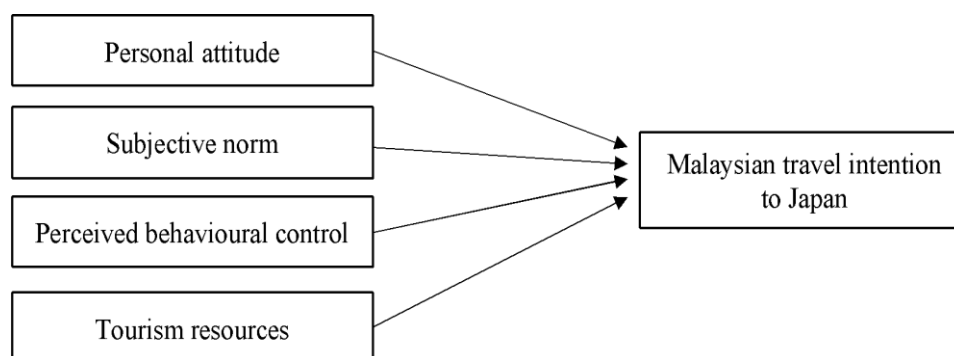

Figure 1: The research framework

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study collected primary data through an administered questionnaire to examine the factors influencing Malaysian tourists' traveling intention to Japan during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. A non-contrived correlational study design was applied using a cross-sectional method. The study population included consumers aged 18 years and above living in Klang Valley, Malaysia. All respondents voluntarily participated in the survey, which used a five-point Likert scale for measurement to ensure respondents could easily define their responses. The research instrument was made available in English and adopted and adapted from previous empirical studies. Before collecting the full-scale data, a pilot study

was done with a small group of 35 respondents to test if the research questions were reliable. The results showed that the research questions were reliable, with scores ranging from 0.755 to 0.881 including personal attitude, subjective norm, personal behavioural control, and tourism resources.

Data collection was conducted via convenience sampling mainly through an online approach. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram were used as platforms to disseminate the survey link. Additionally, the data were also collected directly in shopping malls around Klang Valley including Pavilion shopping malls, Lalaport shopping malls, and Mytown shopping malls.

Due to the inaccessible sampling frame of the study population, the researchers followed the 10 times rule when determining the sample size for this survey (Hair et al. 2017). This rule states that the sample size should be at least 10 times the largest number of questions used to measure a single variable. In this case, the researcher used a total of 25 questions to measure the various variables. Thus, based on the 10 times rule, the minimum sample size required for this study would be 250 respondents.

The data was screened and cleaned through minimal and maximum analysis and missing completely at random (MCAR) through Expectation Maximization (EM) was conducted to verify that none of the data was missing in the data set. Outliers were removed through box plot analysis. The study managed to obtain a total of 469 responses. However, only 359 responses are valid to be used in hypothesis testing after data had been cleaned statistically. It is deemed sufficient as the study required a minimum sample size of 250.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

The study used SPSS and SmartPLS for data analysis, with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) mainly used for hypothesis testing. The coefficient of determination of the research model reported a score value of 0.482. It means, about 48% of the variance can be explained by the research model. Meanwhile, another 52% of the variance is not explained by the research model.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Respondent Profile

Based on the data presented in Table 1, there were more female respondents (61.3%) than male (38.7%). The age group that participated the most was 19-29 years old (81.6%), followed by 30-39 years old (12.5%), 40-49 years old (5.0%), and 50-59 years old and above (0.6% and 0.3% respectively). Most respondents were single (86.4%), while others were married (11.4%) or had other relationship statuses (2.2%). The highest number of respondents had no income (25.3%), which could be due to most participants being students. The educational background with the highest number of respondents was bachelor's degree (66.0%), followed by Diploma (18.4%), High School (6.1%), Postgraduate (8.9%), and no formal education" (0.6%).

Table 1: Respondent profile

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	139	38.7
	Female	220	61.3
	Female		
Age	18 - 29	293	81.6
	30 - 39	45	12.5
	40 - 49	18	5.0
	50 – 59	2	0.6
Average monthly income	No income	91	25.3
	Below RM1,500	87	24.2
	RM1,501 – RM3,000	77	21.4

	RM3,001 – RM4,500	50	13.9	
	RM4,501 – RM6,000	17	4.7	
	RM 6,001 and above	37	10.3	
Marital status	Single	310	86.4	
	Married	41	11.4	
	Others	8	2.2	
Education level	High school	22	6.1	
	Diploma or equivalent	66	18.4	
	Bachelor degree or equivalent	237	66.0	
	Postgraduate or equivalent	32	8.9	
	No formal education	3	0.6	

4.1.2 Research Items and Mean Score

Table 2 reported the research instrument and mean score of each item. Based on the analysis, the personal attitude of tourists towards visiting Japan after the COVID-19 pandemic was positively high with a mean score was 4.251 out of 5.0. Similarly, the subjective norm and tourism resources factor of tourists' travel intention to visit Japan were positively high with a mean score of 4.018 and 4.224 out of 5.0 respectively. However, a moderate average mean score was reported for perceived behavioural control with a mean score of 3.298 out of 5.0.

Table 2: Items and mean score

Variable		Adapten and adopted items	Source of questions	Mean	Average mean
Personal attitude	AT1	I can reduce psychological stress if I visit Japan	Pereira et al. (2022)	4.013	4.251
	AT2	I can explore myself if I visit Japan	Pereira et al. (2022)	4.036	
	AT3	I can refresh myself emotionally and physically if I visit Japan	Pereira et al. (2022)	4.265	
	AT4	I can learn new things if I visit Japan	Pereira et al. (2022)	4.564	
	AT5	I can spend good time with my family if I visit Japan	Pereira et al. (2022)	4.376	
Subjective norm	SN1	My family and friends think it is okay for me to visit Japan now	Pratiwi & Novani & Arinta (2022)	3.771	4.018
	SN2	My family and friends would support me if I visit Japan now	Pratiwi & Novani & Arinta (2022)	3.936	
	SN3	My family and friends understand me if I visit Japan now	Pratiwi & Novani & Arinta (2022)	3.987	
	SN4	My family and friends recommend me to visit Japan	Abbasi et al. (2021)	4.008	
	SN5	Most of my friends like to travel	Salsabila & Alversia (2020)	4.389	
Perceived behavioural control	PBC1	If I want to visit Japan, I have the guts to go to Japan now	Salsabila & Alversia (2020)	3.985	3.298
	PBC2	I have enough money for visiting Japan now	Pratiwi & Novani & Arinta (2022)	2.763	

	PBC3	I have enough time for visiting Japan now	Pratiwi & Novani & Arinta (2022)	2.972	
	PBC4	I am fully in control of my decision to travel to Japan	Salsabila & Alversia (2020)	3.639	
	PBC5	I feel there would be nothing that prevents me from visiting Japan now	Abbasi et al. (2021)	3.129	
Tourism Resources	PL1	Beautiful natural landscape is important factor when you consider to visit to Japan (e.g. Fujiyama)	Chen (2017)	4.492	4.224
	PL2	Unique historical heritages is important factor when you consider to visit to Japan (e.g. the temple of the golden pavilion)	Chen (2017)	4.294	
	PL3	Animation culture is important factor when you consider to visit to Japan	Chen (2017)	3.982	
	PL4	Delicious local food is important factor when you consider to visit to Japan	Chen (2017)	4.415	
	PL5	Hot spas is important factor when you consider to visit to Japan (e.g. Kusatsu hot spa)	Chen (2017)	3.938	
Travel intention	TI1	I'd love to visit Japan	Mohammad (2019)	4.601	4.229
	TI2	Japan would be my first choice over other destinations	Abbasi et al. (2021)	3.830	
	TI3	I would like to visit Japan in the near future	Abbasi et al. (2021)	4.459	
	TI4	I intend to travel as soon as I can under post-COVID-19 pandemic period	Zulkefli et al. (2022)	3.987	
	TI5	After this pandemic COVID-19 is over, I am planning to visit Japan in the future	Pahrudin et al. (2021)	4.268	

4.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

This research utilized confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the reliability and validity of the construct. The composite reliability analysis was used to determine the reliability of the variables tested in the study. Table 3 reported the composite reliability score of more than 0.70 for all of the involved variables which represents a good internal consistency of the constructs. Moreover, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of all constructs were above 0.5, thus confirming the convergent validity of the instrument (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3: Composite reliability and convergent validity

Variables	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Personal attitude	0.813	0.568
Perceived behavioural control	0.866	0.585
Subjective norm	0.847	0.610
Tourism resources	0.772	0.506
Travel intention	0.864	0.646

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is a ratio of the average correlations between a construct and its measures to the average correlations between the construct and other constructs in the model. The HTMT ratio ranges from 0 to 1, with values below 0.85 indicating good discriminant validity, and values above 0.85 suggesting potential problems with discriminant validity. Thus, the data presented in Table 4

confirmed the discriminant validity of the constructs because all of the values scored below 0.85 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) analysis

Variables	PAT	PCB	SNO	TOR	TIN
Personal attitude (PAT)					
Perceived behavioural control (PCB)	0.306				
Subjective norm (SNO)	0.598	0.698			
Tourism resources (TOR)	0.692	0.344	0.463		
Travel intention (TIN)	0.682	0.457	0.571	0.735	

4.3 Hypothesis Testing
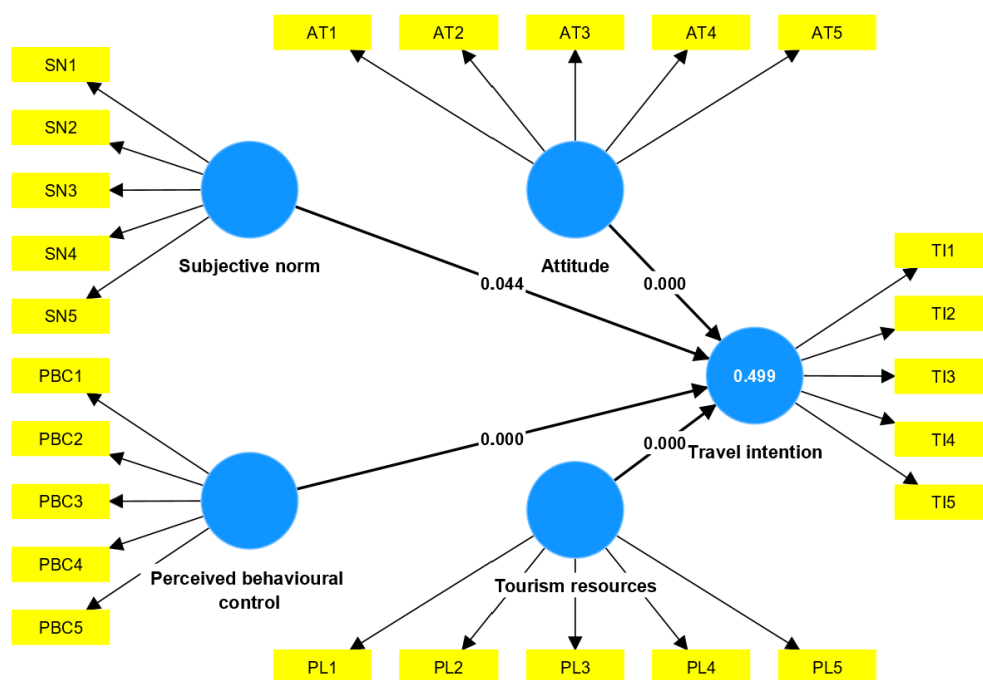
Figure 2: Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) for hypothesis testing

Figure 2 and Table 5 contain an overview of the findings from this research. The 5000 bootstrapped samples were utilised in data analysis. The significant relationship of hypothesis testing are proven statistically to be significant when the p-value score is less than 0.05. The attitude was shown to be statistically significant with the travel intention to Japan ($\beta = 0.260$; $p = 0.000$), rendering H1 is supported as the p-value scored less than 0.05. When attitude increase by 1 standard deviation, travel intention will be increased by 0.260. Similarly, the subjective norm found to be statistically significant toward travel intention to Japan. When the subjective norm increased by 1 standard deviation, the travel intention increased by 0.119 ($\beta = 0.119$; $p = 0.044$) and supported H2. Next, perceived behavioural control was shown to be statistically significant with the travel intention to Japan ($\beta = 0.180$; $p = 0.000$), rendering H3 supported as the p-value scored less than 0.05. When perceived behavioural control increases by 1 standard deviation, travel intention will be increased by 0.180. Lastly, tourism resources were found to be statistically significant toward travel intention to Japan. When tourism resources increase by 1 standard deviation, travel intention will be increased by 0.359. Indeed, tourism resources were found to be the trongest factor influencing travel intention to Japan as the coefficient beta scored was the highest ($\beta = 0.359$; $p = 0.000$).

Table 5: Result of hypothesis testing

H	Relationship tested	Coefficient (β)	Standard deviation	T-values	P-values
H1	Attitude ☐ Travel intention	0.260	0.061	4.225	0.000
H2	Subjective norm ☐ Travel intention	0.119	0.059	2.019	0.044
H3	Perceived behavioural control ☐ Travel intention	0.180	0.046	3.903	0.000
H4	Tourism resources ☐ Travel intention	0.359	0.053	6.836	0.000

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, all of the proposed hypotheses were found to be statistically significant, indicating that attitude plays a crucial role in determining travel intention to Japan. Specifically, the results suggest that a positive attitude towards Japan can significantly influence an individual's intention to travel to the country (H1). This finding aligns with previous research, which has consistently shown that attitude is a strong predictor of intention and behaviour (Ajzen, 2020; Latip et al., 2021). Attitudes are shaped by a variety of factors, including personal beliefs, values, and experiences. In the context of travel, an individual's attitude towards a particular destination can be influenced by a range of factors, such as the destination's cultural heritage, natural beauty, entertainment options, safety and security, and economic opportunities. One possible explanation for the strong influence of attitude on travel intention to Japan found in this study is the fact that the majority of respondents (81.6%) were between the ages of 19 to 29, which is classified as heavy users of social media. This demographic is well-exposed to promotions in digital platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, and others, which could have contributed to their positive attitude towards traveling to Japan. Social media platforms provide an effective way for tourism organizations and businesses to promote their destinations and offerings to a wide audience, particularly among younger generations who are more likely to use these platforms to plan and research their travel experiences.

Secondly, the subjective norm was found to be statistically significant towards travel intention (H2). This finding is consistent with previous studies on the influence of subjective norms on travel intention (Nabila, 2017; Xu et al., 2022). One possible explanation for this finding could be attributed to the digital era and the increasing role of e-word-of-mouth recommendations, which are important factors in travel decision-making. Many features on social media platforms allow users to share pictures, videos, and memories of their travel experiences, which are then shared within their communities. Japan is renowned for its hospitality and unique cultural experiences, which may have been shared among respondents through family, friends, or online communities. Positive recommendations from trusted sources can greatly influence an individual's attitude towards a destination and increase their likelihood of intending to visit.

In addition to the findings on the subjective norms, the study also found that perceived behavioural control was a significant predictor of travel intention to Japan (H3). This finding is in line with previous research that has highlighted the importance of perceived behavioural control in shaping individuals' behavioural intentions. Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of their ability to perform a particular behaviour and has been identified as the second strongest predictor after attitude in predicting behaviour intention (Latip et al., 2020; Azjen, 2020). The significance of perceived behavioural control in shaping travel intentions to Japan can be attributed to several factors. For example, individuals may perceive that they have greater control over their ability to travel to Japan due to factors such as the availability of travel information, the ease of booking travel arrangements, and the affordability of travel options. In addition, individuals may also feel more confident in their ability to navigate cultural differences and language barriers and to access resources and support during their travels.

Finally, the study found that tourism resources were a significant predictor of travel intention to Japan (H4). This finding underscores the importance of tourism resources in shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards a destination and highlights the need for tourism providers and organizations to invest in the development and promotion of such resources. Tourism resources can take many forms, including cultural attractions, natural landmarks, historical sites, and recreational activities. In the context of Japan, examples of tourism resources might include iconic landmarks such as the Tokyo Tower or Mount Fuji,

traditional festivals such as the Cherry Blossom Festival, or cultural experiences such as tea ceremonies or sushi-making classes. The significance of tourism resources in shaping travel intention to Japan can be attributed to several factors. For example, the availability and accessibility of tourism resources may play a role in shaping individuals' perceptions of Japan as a desirable travel destination as supported by previous studies (Xie & Ma, 2021; Tsai & Wang, 2017). Additionally, the quality and uniqueness of tourism resources may help to differentiate Japan from other destinations and increase its appeal to travellers. Overall, the finding that tourism resources are a significant predictor of travel intention to Japan highlights the importance of investing in the development and promotion of these resources. By highlighting the unique cultural and natural attractions of Japan and making them more accessible to travellers, tourism providers and organizations can help to increase individuals' intentions to travel to this destination.

5.1 Limitation of Study

Firstly, the survey was conducted only among Malaysians living in Greater Kuala Lumpur, which may not be representative of the entire Malaysian population. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to other regions of Malaysia or to other countries. Secondly, the study only examined the factors influencing Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan but did not investigate actual travel behaviours. The study did not account for factors that may prevent Malaysian tourists from traveling to Japan, such as financial constraints or travel restrictions.

Thirdly, the study used a quantitative research method, which may not capture the nuances of individual experiences and perceptions. The study did not include qualitative data that could provide a more in-depth understanding of Malaysian tourists' attitudes towards traveling to Japan. Fourthly, the study only included four independent variables to explain the dependent variable of Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan. There may be other factors, such as cultural differences or previous travel experiences, that were not considered in this study. Finally, the study was completed within a relatively short period time, which may not have allowed for a comprehensive investigation of all factors that influence Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan. A longer research period and a more comprehensive research design may have yielded more detailed and accurate results.

5.2 Future Research Direction

Based on the limitations of the current study, there are several potential directions for future research. Firstly, future studies could expand the sample size and geographic scope of the study to include a wider range of Malaysians from different regions and demographics. This would provide a more representative understanding of Malaysian tourists' attitudes and behaviours towards traveling to Japan. Secondly, future studies could employ a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. This would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan and provide more in-depth insights into the reasons behind these attitudes and behaviours.

Thirdly, future studies could investigate the actual travel behaviours of Malaysian tourists to Japan, in addition to their traveling intentions. This would provide a more complete understanding of the factors that impact Malaysian tourists' travel decisions and could help identify opportunities for the Japanese tourism industry to increase its appeal to this market. Fourthly, future studies could expand the number of independent variables to include other factors that may impact Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan. This could include variables such as cultural differences, previous travel experiences, or the influence of social media and online reviews.

Finally, future studies could investigate the effectiveness of different marketing strategies and campaigns aimed at attracting Malaysian tourists to Japan. This could help Japanese tourism industry stakeholders to develop more targeted and effective marketing strategies to increase the number of inbound tourists from Malaysia.

5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implication

Based on the findings of this study and its limitations, several theoretical and practical recommendations can be made for both researchers and stakeholders in the Japanese tourism industry.

From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the existing literature on the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by providing evidence of its applicability to the context of Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan. The study confirms the importance of personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping tourists' intentions to travel, and also highlights the role of tourism resources as an additional factor that influences travel intentions. Future studies could build on these findings by exploring the TPB in other contexts and cultures, or by investigating the role of other psychological theories in shaping travel behaviour.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study have several implications for stakeholders in the Japanese tourism industry. Firstly, the industry should focus on improving its tourism resources, such as by providing more information on local attractions, cultural experiences, and cuisine, to increase its appeal to Malaysian tourists. Secondly, the industry should work to improve its marketing strategies by targeting the specific attitudes and behaviours identified in this study, such as the importance of cost and convenience for Malaysian tourists. This could include strategies such as offering discounts or promotions for Malaysian tourists or increasing the availability of affordable and convenient travel packages. Thirdly, the industry should consider expanding its efforts to promote travel to Japan to a wider range of Malaysians, including those from different regions and demographics. This could involve working with travel agencies or organizations that cater to specific segments of the market, such as families or young adults.

Overall, the findings of this study provide important insights into the factors that shape Malaysian tourists' traveling intentions to Japan and highlight the need for continued research and collaboration between researchers and stakeholders in the tourism industry to improve the appeal of Japan as a travel destination for Malaysians.

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