

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**FREE INDEPENDENT
TRAVELLERS (FIT) OUTBOUND
TRAVEL INTENTION POST-COVID-
19: INTEGRATING THE THEORY
OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR WITH
PERCEIVED RISK**

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ABSTRACT

This study conceptualises the Theory of Planned Behaviour elements (attitude, subjective norms, perceived behaviour control, behavioural intention) with inter-pandemic perceived risk dimension (COVID-19 risk and transmission risk) in an integrated framework. The study examines the impact of COVID-19 perceived risk towards Malaysian free independent travellers (FIT) post-pandemic outbound travel behaviour. The study also investigates whether travel attitudes mediate between tourists' inter-pandemic perceived risk and post-pandemic outbound travel intentions. The study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method, collecting data from 345 respondents via social media platforms. Partial Least-squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyse the data and identify key factors affecting post-pandemic travel intentions. The results indicate an insignificant causal relation between the COVID-19 perceived risk and FITs post-pandemic tourist attitude and travel intentions. Conversely, the study revealed significant relationships between post-pandemic outbound travel attitude and perceived behavioural control on travel intentions. However, subjective norms are not considered a significant factor influence travel intention. Furthermore, the research confirmed the mediating effect of travel attitude on the relationship between COVID-19 perceived risk (inter-pandemic COVID-19 risk and transmission risk perception) and outbound travel intentions. The study's findings reveal an interesting contradiction, as there is an insignificant causal relationship between COVID-19 perceived risk and FITs post-pandemic travel attitude and intentions. This divergence challenges conventional assumptions and warrants further exploration and understanding. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting this discrepancy. It encourages future research to delve deeper into the underlying factors influencing travellers' attitudes and intentions during the post-pandemic period. The study provides insights into the perceptions and intentions of Malaysian free independent travellers (FIT) specifically. Besides, the study comprehensively explains how perceived risk influences post-pandemic outbound travel behaviour. The mediating effect adds depth to understanding the relationship between perceived risk, travel attitude and intentions.

Keywords: *Free Independent Travellers; Perceived Risk; Theory Planned Behaviour; Tourist Behaviour, COVID-19 crisis*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

1.1.1 COVID-19 Pandemic

World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) defined COVID-19 as a fatal and global pandemic brought about by a novel infectious disease, a hitherto unknown strain of virus that primarily affected human respiratory systems. This virus was initially identified in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China (WHO, 2020). Given its highly contagious nature, the outbreak rapidly transcended borders and spread to various nations, eventually being declared a pandemic (Chinazzi et al., 2020). COVID-19 primarily spreads through respiratory droplets released when an infected individual coughs, sneezes, or exhales, causing severe illness and, in many cases, death, particularly among older adults and those with underlying health conditions. The virus has left a profound mark on countries worldwide, resulting in widespread illness and loss of life, while simultaneously placing immense strain on healthcare systems and economies. As of October 25, 2023, WHO reported a staggering 771,549,718 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 6,974,473 recorded deaths (Worldometer, 2023).

This pandemic's repercussions have rippled through various sectors, with the tourism industry taking a severe hit. Travel and tourism have been among the hardest-hit sectors, experiencing a substantial decline in international demand due to the need to curb the virus's spread (UNWTO, 2020). Baum and Hai (2020) highlighted that the approximately 1.5 billion annual international travellers posed a significant risk for virus transmission. Consequently, governments worldwide enforced stringent border controls and travel restrictions in an effort to contain the virus. These limitations, coupled with the general reluctance of tourists to venture into the unknown amidst a global battle against COVID-19, resulted in 2020 becoming the worst year on record for the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2020). In that year alone, international arrivals plummeted by a staggering 72 percent within the first ten months, as per the UNWTO