

# PROPOSING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS' PREFERENCES OF HOLIDAY DESTINATION TO MAINTAIN SUSTAINABILITY OF TRAVEL-RELATED BUSINESS DURING COVID-19 ENDEMIC

Muhamad Nasyat Muhamad Nasir  
Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)  
Email: nasyat.mn@umk.edu.my

Muhammad Firdaus Bidin  
Faculty of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)  
Email: mfirdaus.b@umk.edu.my

## ABSTRACT

*The prevalence of the COVID-19 outbreak has caused significant challenges to all industries around the globe, particularly in the tourism sector. The spread of the Covid-19 hinders to achieve 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nation. Following the recovery from the COVID-19, the governments have set various initiative to assist the country's development. The present study emphasizes on the tourism sector whereby the new model has been proposed in order to revitalize the tourism sector particularly in Malaysia. A new model consisting of affordability, health and safety compliance as well as access to facilities and amenities have been integrated in one model in order to test on their effects toward tourist preference of holiday destination. This model is important because the travel trends have changed during the post Covid-19. Hence, by knowing the factors that affect tourist preference of holiday destination, it will guarantee the continuity of the tourists (particularly domestic tourists) to travel from time to time without hesitation. Hence, it will generate continuous income to the travel-related businesses (tour guide, event management, hoteliers and more) from the visiting tourists. This will provide more job opportunities to the local people. Eventually, it will help to achieve several goals set by United Nation such as no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, decent work and economic growth as well as reduced in equalities.*

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Tourist Preference, Covid-19, Holiday Destination

## INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 virus has spread around the world for more than two years. The virus is highly contagious and it has killed millions of people around the globe. During this phase, many people lost their jobs since most of the industries have ceased their business operations. One of the most affected industries is tourism. However, in the last two years when most of the people around the world have received the Covid-19 vaccine, the businesses start to grow again including the tourism-related businesses. Nevertheless, the travel trend among the people has changed due to the Covid-19. Thus, it is important to understand the factors that affect the domestic tourist preference of holiday destination during the Covid-19 endemic in order to help the travel-related businesses to grow steadily. Most importantly, it could help to achieve at least several goals from 17 sustainable development goals set by United Nations. Hence, the main objective of the study is to determine the factors that influences on the domestic tourist preference of holiday destination during the Covid-19 endemic to achieve the sustainable development goals. This study will emphasize on tourism destination in Malaysia because this country is considered one of the popular tourism spots in the Asia Pacific and Asia (Muhamad Nasir, Mohamad, & Ab Ghani, 2021; Nasir, Mohamad, & Izzati Ab, 2021)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Domestic Tourists Preference of Holiday Destination

In 2021, the domestic tourist arrivals in Malaysia have recorded around 66.0 million visitors and spent around RM 18.4 billion during their visit (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). As supported by Ab Ghani et al. (2021), domestic tourists have generally proven important to the survival of many nations' tourism sectors including Malaysia. Moreover, domestic tourists are imperative towards the tourism industry's recovery, especially in countries, since foreign travel possibilities have been limited due to the ongoing pandemic (OECD, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to determine the tourists' preference to travel during the COVID-19 endemic situation as recovery strategies for the tourism sector in Malaysia.

### Access to Facilities and Amenities

Truchet et al. (2010) claimed that the tourists who spend time away from their home require to access to a suitable level of services and amenities at that particular holiday destination. Food and beverage in restaurants, financial transactions (ATM and digital payments), and communication (telephone and internet) are the among the examples of tourist destination amenities. Sukmawati et al (2018) added that expectations for tourism services and facilities may differ among the tourists depending to their income level. Hence, it is important to develop the linkage between the access to facilities and amenities and domestic tourist preference of holiday destinations.

### Health And Safety Compliance

Health and safety compliance has become pivotal among visitors because lack of attention on this matter will cause them to be infected. WHO (2020) suggested that hotel facilities and travel and tour operators are required to adhere strictly to specific prevention protocol and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to cease the spread of COVID-19 among the visitors such as cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation of hotel facilities as well as physical distancing, avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth, put on the medical or fabric masks by staff when interacting and communicating with customers. Thus, it is crucial to establish the linkage health and safety compliance and tourist preference of holiday destinations.

### Affordability

Camilleri (2019) pointed out that many travellers travel according to their budget and hence, they may only consider accommodation, food/beverages and entertainment that are affordable to them or within their price range. This issue is getting more serious especially during the post pandemic Covid-19, when a lot of the people lost their jobs and the living cost has increased. Thus, it is important to determine the relationship between affordability and domestic tourist preference of holiday destinations.

### Proposed Model and Hypotheses

Figure 1 indicates the proposed model of the study consisting of three independent variables and one dependent variable.

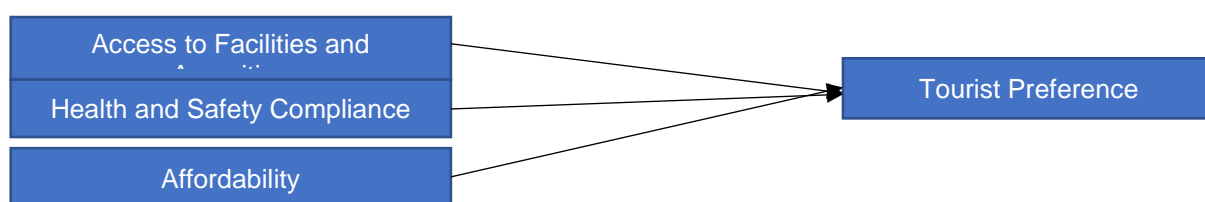


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

The proposed hypotheses are as follow:

H1: There is a positive relationship between access to facilities and amenities and domestic tourist preference of holiday destinations in Malaysia.

H2: There is a positive relationship between health and safety compliance and domestic tourist preference of holiday destinations in Malaysia.

H3: There is a positive relationship between affordability and domestic tourist preference of holiday destinations in Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

A new conceptual model (affordability, health and safety compliance, access to facilities and amenities and tourist preference of holiday destination) has been proposed in this study which, in turn, contributes significantly to the existing literature. Most importantly, by knowing the factors that affect tourist preference of holiday destination, it will guarantee the continuity of the tourists (particularly domestic tourists) to travel from time to time without hesitation during the post Covid-19. This could help the prosperity of travel-related business particularly in Malaysia and provides more direct and indirect job opportunities from this sector. This recovery process is crucial because a lot of people have lost their jobs especially during the two years of Covid-19 pandemic. When people securing jobs and have a stable income, it could help to achieve several sustainable goals set by the United Nation. Based on the Figure 2, among the goals that will be achieve from the outcome of this study are (1) no poverty (2) zero hunger (3) good health and well-being (8) decent works and economic growth (10) reduced in equalities.



Figure 2: Sustainable Development Goals

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