



MONASH University

Adapting to New Realities:

Tourist Behaviour Evolution in Post-Pandemic Context

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ABSTRACT

Tourists have undergone a profound learning journey during the pandemic lockdown, where they prioritised safeguarding themselves from the COVID-19 virus. The subsequent reopening of international travel has sparked a transformative learning journey, requiring them to meticulously balance personal desires for leisure travel with safety concerns. This research seeks to understand the intricate learning process and identify the factors that contribute to this learning process undertaken by tourists when planning international leisure trips, particularly considering the protective measures learnt during the lockdown. Subsequently, we aim to validate the significance of these learning factors and examine how they interact with each other during the planning phase of international leisure travel.

This study investigated the post-COVID-19 travel behaviour of Malaysian tourists using an exploratory sequential mixed-method approach. This methodological approach was chosen as it allows an in-depth exploration of behavioural and perceptual changes following the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a quantitative phase to validate the findings, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the research context. It began with six focus group discussions (FGDs) involving Malaysians who had travelled internationally after the pandemic and those who had not. These discussions explored evolving travel behaviours, concerns, and decision-making processes. A subsequent quantitative survey with 439 Malaysian tourists validated and substantiate the findings from qualitative phase. This study is grounded in Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and incorporating Resilience Theory (RT), the research sought to understand how post-pandemic travel experiences influence decision-making and behavioural outcomes.

The findings of the research confirm that, Malaysian tourists who have previously travelled internationally have successfully embarked on and completed the transformative learning journey, while those who have yet to travel internationally are graded as 'drop-outs' in the later stages of TLT. The research has also illuminated that resilience is cultivated and enhanced through three phases of learning process: the planning phase, while travelling and post-travel period. The quantitative findings reveal significant relationships between risk perceptions related to infectious disease, coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, and destination image. The survey results highlight that higher resilience and effective coping mechanisms significantly influence destination image, while risk perception plays a dual role, both challenging and enhancing decision-making processes depending on tourists' resilience levels. Furthermore, nostalgia was found to moderate the relationship between resilience and destination image, highlighting their importance in shaping post-pandemic travel decision-making.

Overall, this research extends TLT by examining how individuals learn and adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a mixed-method approach to validate key traits. By applying TLT to leisure tourism in an Asian context, it addresses gaps identified in the latent literature and contributes to the field's maturation. The findings offer practical insights for tourism stakeholders, helping to balance safety measures and build resilience against future health crises. Stakeholders, including health ministries, migration offices, tourism authorities, and travel agencies, can use these insights to enhance safety, stimulate recovery, and improve the overall tourism experience.

Additionally, this research highlights the need to expand the cultural and geographical scope of future research by incorporating tourists from diverse regions and backgrounds. This research also identifies the necessity for further refinement of measurement constructs, particularly optimism bias and risk perception, to ensure their accuracy and applicability in the current landscape. Lastly, this research emphasized the roles of nostalgia and optimism bias in shaping destination image, presenting an avenue for future studies to explore these psychological factors in greater depth.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, or any use of generative artificial intelligence technologies, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

Average Variation Extracted	AVE
Composite Reliability	CR
Coronavirus Disease	COVID-19
Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling	CB-SEM
Cronbach's Alpha	CA
Destination Image	DI
Destination Marketing Organisation	DMO
Focus Group Discussion	FGD
Future Travel Plan and Interested Destination	FT
Generic Risk Perception	GRP
Hemagglutinin type 1 and Neuraminidase type 1	H1N1
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio	HTMT
Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism	IDCM
Information Communications and Technology	ICT
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	KMO
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee	MUHREC
Monthly Household Income	MHHI
Monthly Personal Income	MPI
Movement Control Order	MCO
Non-Government Organisation	NGO
Nostalgia	N
Optimism Bias	OB
Ordinary Least Square	OLS
Past Travel Behaviour	PTB
Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling	PLS-SEM
Psychological Resilience	PR
Research Objective	RO
Research Question	RQ
Resilience Theory	RT
Respondents Who Travelled Internationally Since Reopening	T1

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

Respondents Who Have Yet To Travel Internationally Since Reopening	T2
Risk Perception related to Infectious Diseases	RPID
Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome	SARS
Social-Ecological System	SES
Standard Operating Procedures	SOP
Structural Equation Modelling	SEM
Transformative Learning Theory	TLT
United Kingdom	UK
United States	U.S.
Variance Inflation Factor	VIF
World Health Organization	WHO

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research context background and reason to conduct this research. Additionally, it familiarises the reader with the research aim and objectives, followed by the thesis structure.

1.1. Research Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) officially labelled the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak as a global pandemic in early 2020 due to its lethal airborne transmission, which rapidly spread worldwide. Since then, countries worldwide have been engaged in a prolonged struggle against it. The recurring waves of COVID-19 outbreaks observed in many nations underscore the persistent and changing health (both physical and mental) and economic hurdles governments face in their efforts to control the spread of the virus (Abbass et al., 2022; Banna et al, 2022; Dutta, 2022).

During the initial phases of the pandemic, many governments implemented stringent domestic and international measures, such as travel restrictions, quarantine protocols, and social distancing mandates, aimed at curtailing population mobility and mitigating transmission (Zheng et al., 2022). The border closure and lockdowns were enforced even at the district level. The enforcement of such stringent social measures forced individuals into a new reality, which required them to learn and adapt new practices, such as social distancing and adherence to quarantine protocols, and seek information from diverse sources, including local health ministry directives, WHO guidelines, social media platforms, and peer experiences. These efforts were undertaken with the overarching goal of safeguarding not only personal well-being but also that of their loved ones. Unlike previous outbreaks that were regionally limited, such as H1N1 and SARS, which led to only temporary changes in tourist behaviour, the continuous mutation and global spread of COVID-19 have suggested the potential for more permanent behavioural changes (Gössling et al., 2020).

The profound impact of COVID-19 have catalysed an unprecedented surge in research spanning multiple disciplines, with scholars across various fields probing its multifaceted ramifications, from the intricacies of medical intervention to the intricacies of human behaviour in response to the crisis. Researchers have approached the study of human behaviour from diverse vantage points; for instance, Xie et al. (2022) conducted an experiment exploring the efficacy of different messaging strategies in inducing behavioural change among the populace. Similarly, Hwang et al. (2023) explored the underlying factors driving the steadfast resistance of anti-vaccination proponents towards vaccination efforts.

Moreover, the realm of tourism has emerged as a focal point of inquiry, as scholars seek to unravel the complexities of tourists' intentions in the aftermath of the shockwaves unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This area of study is crucial because it has significant implications for the global tourism industry and related sectors. Echoing previous sentiments, Gössling et al. (2020) suggest that the pandemic will lead to lasting changes in how people travel, including ongoing travel restrictions and shifts in risk perception.

1.2. Problem Statement

The pandemic has necessitated substantial adjustments in daily life, requiring individuals to navigate various challenges, including protecting themselves and their families from infection, managing the implications of a positive diagnosis within their social circles, and adhering to evolving standard operating procedures (SOPs) imposed by governments. These adaptations have demanded heightened awareness, behavioural changes, and resilience, as individuals have had to balance personal safety with compliance to public health regulations.

Even as the world gradually transitions to the endemic phase of COVID-19, marked by the reopening of international borders after two years of lockdowns, individuals continue to navigate significant adjustments. The evolving circumstances have necessitated an adaptation to new social, economic, and health-related realities, forcing individuals to confront unfamiliar situations and environments. While the easing of restrictions has facilitated greater mobility and a gradual return to pre-pandemic activities, it has also introduced new challenges, including the need to reassess risk perceptions, comply with various types of health regulations, and adjust to the transformed landscape of daily life and international travel. Beyond individuals, businesses and governments are also undergoing significant adaptation in response to the evolving post-pandemic environment. Businesses must comply with changing domestic and international SOPs while also understanding shifting consumer behaviours to develop effective marketing strategies that stimulate economic activity. Governments face the challenge of balancing public health with economic recovery, implementing policies that support businesses, sustain employment, and foster international collaboration.

Regardless of the business strategies adopted or the policies formulated, both businesses and governments must base their decisions on a thorough analysis of individual behaviour. Understanding how individuals have adapted post-pandemic is crucial for shaping effective strategies that drive economic revitalisation, ensure public confidence, and facilitate sustainable growth in the new global landscape.

The reopening of international leisure travel for Malaysian tourists in April 2022 presents a valuable opportunity to examine their behavioural responses to the evolving risks associated with infectious diseases. As tourists navigate uncertainties regarding personal safety and varying travel restrictions across different countries, they embark on a renewed learning journey, adapting to new health and safety considerations. This learning process is particularly significant in understanding how tourists assess risks, modify their behaviours, make travel decisions, and implement precautionary measures to safeguard themselves in an increasingly dynamic infectious disease landscape. Investigating this adaptation provides crucial insights into how tourists respond to evolving risks, offering valuable contributions to the development of more effective risk management strategies in international travel.

In addition, Malaysia's strong global mobility, which reflected in its diplomatic ties with approximately 85 countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2023) and 12th strongest passport in the world (FMT, 2024); has positioned itself as a strategic country for examining shifts in tourist behaviour. The diverse international travel patterns of Malaysian tourists provide a rich context for understanding broader behavioural changes in response to global

travel risks, with implications that extend beyond the Malaysian market to the international tourism sector.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

Therefore, this research aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do tourists learn to ensure they can have safe and enjoyable overseas trips after a 2-years lockdown period?
2. What do tourists learn and do when planning their international travel trips, especially after having acquired certain levels of protective measures during the lockdown period?
3. What is the relationship between the key learnings from the tourists' leisure travel journey that may affect their future travel planning?

These RQs eventually translate into the following research objectives (ROs):

1. To assess the shifts in travel risk perception among individuals following a 2-years lockdown period, investigating the factors that contribute to changes in perceived risks associated with international travel.
2. To investigate and understand the learning processes adopted by tourists to ensure safety and enjoyment during overseas trips following the reopening of international borders.
3. To examine the significance of the key learnings from their recent leisure travel planning experience and the relationships between these learning outcomes.

This research reports the findings of both qualitative and quantitative studies, both of which explore tourists' perspectives. The first study adopts qualitative research approach to uncover the underlying psychological and learning processes involved in tourist planning during the post-pandemic period. Valuable insights can be gained by examining tourists' journeys in information gathering, decision-making, motivation, and behaviours as they navigate travel in a rapidly evolving landscape.

During the data analysis stage of the qualitative phase, it became evident that tourists' learning experiences closely aligned with the principles of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). This realisation led to the adoption of TLT as the theoretical framework, providing a structured and systematic approach to analysing the data and offering deeper insights into how tourists reassess risks, adapt their behaviours, and modify their travel decision-making processes.

Following the first phase of qualitative research, a subsequent quantitative study was conducted to examine the significance of the key variables identified in the qualitative phase in shaping tourists' risk perception and decision-making processes during the post-pandemic period. This phase also aimed to investigate the relationships and interactions between these variables within the context of international leisure tourism, offering a more

comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing travel behaviour in an era of heightened uncertainty.

1.4. Significance of the Study

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global tourism industry faced unprecedented challenges as it strived to ensure the safety of tourists while revitalising international leisure trips. This research aims to shed light on how tourists learn to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, managing their safety while resuming travel for leisure. By employing a mixed-method approach encompassing qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study aims to delve deep into the nuanced behaviours and experiences of tourists as they navigate this unprecedented landscape.

At the heart of this research lies an ambition to push the boundaries of existing theoretical frameworks, particularly TLT, in understanding how individuals learn and evolve amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. TLT generally focuses on the learning process without understanding the underlying behaviour leading to transformation. In this study, a key trait has been uncovered and further investigated to validate its significance through a mixed method approach. In addition, this research also addresses several research gaps identified by Zhao and Agyeiwaah (2023). As TLT is primarily used in an educational context with a formal learning environment (Xu et al., 2021), it is less applied to other research disciplines. Hence applying TLT in leisure tourism in an Asian context is a novel application. Lastly, this research will contribute to the maturation of leisure tourism which is still in its infancy. By examining tourists' learning processes within the context of COVID-19, this research seeks to enrich our understanding of transformative learning experiences, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on individual adaptation and personal development in the face of adversity.

The findings of this research hold profound practical implications for a variety of stakeholders across the tourism ecosystem. As emphasised by Benton and Huang (2024), stakeholders are tasked not only with addressing immediate challenges but also with finding a delicate balance between overly relaxed and overly restrictive measures. They must seek long-term solutions to build resilience against future public health crises, enabling better coordination and response strategies, all while prioritising the restoration of tourist mobility and safeguarding public safety. For instance, the Ministry of Health could gain insights into the evolving behaviours of tourists' post-pandemic, which then inform the formulation of regulations and communication strategies aimed at promoting public safety. Similarly, the Migration Office stands to benefit from understanding tourists' preferences and concerns, enabling more effective strategizing of travel measures for future public health crises. Moreover, tourism authorities and destinations can leverage these insights to implement targeted protective measures that enhance tourist safety, thereby stimulating tourism recovery. By tailoring offerings and communication strategies in alignment with tourists' evolving needs, travel agencies can rebuild trust and confidence in travel, fostering a sustainable recovery of the tourism industry. Meanwhile, ensuring safety practices within retail and hospitality sectors are essential for maintaining a conducive environment for tourists, thus contributing to the overall tourism experience. Even the general public stands

to benefit indirectly from the collective efforts of authorities and businesses, as a safer and more enjoyable travel environment is created through collaborative endeavours.

In summary, this research represents a concerted effort to unravel the complexities of tourists' behaviours and experiences in the post-pandemic era. By bridging theoretical insights with practical implications, this study aims to inform policies and practices that promote safety and enhance the overall tourist travel experience. Through collaborative efforts across various stakeholders, we aspire to cultivate a resilient and thriving tourism industry capable of navigating the challenges posed by COVID-19 and future crises, while simultaneously fostering a renewed sense of confidence and enjoyment in leisure travel.

1.5. Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis follows a logical progression, beginning with a comprehensive examination of the theoretical foundation and literature review in Chapter 2, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative perspectives to establish the basis for hypothesis development and conceptual framework formulation. Following this, Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing the philosophical approach and mixed-method research design adopted in the study. This chapter also elaborates on the qualitative and quantitative research methods employed, including sampling strategies, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques, while providing justifications for each methodological choice.

Chapter 4 presents the results and discussions from each phase of the study, beginning with the qualitative findings, followed by the quantitative analysis. Each set of results is critically examined in relation to existing theories and previous empirical studies, identifying both consistencies and deviations. Subsequently, Chapter 5 offers a comprehensive discussion that synthesises the findings from both phases, connecting qualitative insights with quantitative outcomes. This integrative discussion highlights how the findings complement and inform each other, offering a nuanced understanding of transformative learning and resilience in post-pandemic tourism. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the key insights and contributions of the study, reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications, and proposing avenues for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents the foundational theoretical framework developed across various disciplines and the application to understand how people learn and adapt new perspectives. The chapter begins by discussing tourism behaviour in a post-pandemic world, setting the context for examining how travel behaviour and perceptions have evolved. Subsequently, it explores the evolution of Transformative Learning theory (TLT), tracing its transition from the realm of education to its application within the domain of tourism.

Following this theoretical overview, the chapter provides a comprehensive literature review and develops hypotheses based on qualitative findings from FGDs on key constructs relevant to post-pandemic tourism. These constructs include resilience, destination image, risk perception, travel motivation, re-travel intention, optimism bias, and nostalgia (past-oriented cognition). Each construct will be analysed in depth, focusing on its definition, theoretical background, and application within the tourism context. Additionally, connections will be drawn to broader theoretical frameworks, such as TLT, to establish a robust foundation for understanding tourist behaviours in the post-pandemic era.

By systematically reviewing these constructs and developing hypotheses, this chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourist behaviours in the current context. The insights gained will contribute to academic knowledge and offer practical implications for tourism practitioners navigating the challenges of the post-pandemic landscape.

2.1. Contextualising Tourism Behaviour in a Post-Pandemic World

The global COVID-19 pandemic has left a lasting impact on numerous aspects of human life, including the tourism industry. Due to the pandemic, global tourist arrivals in 2020 plummeted to 399 million, compared to 1.47 billion in 2019, marking a staggering reduction of 74% within just one year. Focusing on Malaysia, the situation was even more severe, with tourist arrivals decreasing by 83.4% from 26.1 million in 2019 to just 4.3 million in 2020 (Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). This unprecedented decline, the worst in Malaysia's tourism history, led to the cancellation of the "Visit Malaysia 2020" (VM2020) campaign to prioritise public safety (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). During this period, where the COVID-19 virus was highly contagious and severe, people were forced to stay isolated, focusing on managing their health and safety within confined environments.

While isolation measures were essential in the short term, sustaining such restrictions indefinitely was not feasible due to their social, economic, and mental health implications. Prolonged isolation led to heightened stress and anxiety, economic hardships from halted business activities, and social fragmentation as people were cut off from their communities (Chen, et al., 2021; Dos Santos et al., 2020). As the world aimed to gradually return to normalcy, widespread vaccination efforts played a critical role in controlling the virus, allowing countries to recover at varying paces. However, there is a noticeable lack of uniformity in standard operating procedures (SOP) across countries, as each nation

independently determined its own protective measures based on its specific circumstances. For example, the United States (U.S.) took bold steps to relax measures such as removing masks and social distancing guidelines, and opening international borders (Lovelace & Edwards, 2022), driven by pressure on the government to ease restrictions (Brown, 2020; Reuters, 2021; Hermansen & Benzabat, 2021). However, countries like Japan (Japan-Guide, 2023) and China (China Embassy, 2023) have been slower to adopt similar measures. In Japan, despite the government downgrading COVID-19 to be on par with seasonal influenza, Japanese society still practice certain protective measures such as wearing masks and using sanitisers (Japan-Guide, 2023), as a sense of responsibility to safeguard themselves and others. Malaysia, being a nation with active political relations with approximately 85 countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2023) and holding 12th world's strongest passports (FMT, 2024), faced challenges in determining optimal reopening policies that balanced public safety with the need to maintain positive diplomatic relations.

Adding to the complexity, the prolonged nature of the COVID-19 virus, with its variants and mutations in different regions, has made the transition to a post-pandemic environment increasingly challenging. Notably, the recent surge in COVID-19 cases in Malaysia (FMT, 2023) and Singapore (CNA, 2023), along with the concurrent outbreaks of other infectious diseases that have been observed in China (Conroy, 2023), underscore the ongoing challenges. The persistent presence of the COVID-19 virus, characterised by numerous variants and mutations in different regions, has intensified the uncertainty surrounding the delicate balance between safeguarding public health and sustaining economic activities. Furthermore, WHO has recently declared another infectious disease, Monkeypox, as a public health emergency due to its increasing infection rates, particularly in Africa, with rising cases also reported in Sweden and Singapore (WHO, 2024). There are also global cases of human metapneumovirus (hMPV), with over 300 reported infections in Malaysia in 2024 (Yasmine, 2025). Additionally, the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1) has been increasingly reported in the Australian region (Reidy et al., 2025). These developments highlight the continued threat posed by infectious diseases, whether COVID-19 or emerging threats like Monkeypox, as individuals and organisations continue to grapple with their impacts.

Considering the profound impact of infectious diseases, one crucial aspect worthy of examination is the behavioural shifts associated with the perceived risk of COVID-19 or infectious diseases in general. The current dynamics of the COVID-19 virus, marked by mutations and the simultaneous presence of other infectious diseases, differ markedly from the preceding three years. It is essential to acknowledge that future risks may manifest differently from historical patterns (Prayag, 2023). Distinguishing itself from previous infectious disease outbreaks, such as the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, the COVID-19 pandemic exhibits notable variations in symptoms, severity levels, impact scale, duration, and recommended protective measures. For example, one of the symptoms of COVID-19 is loss of taste and smell, which was not part of H1N1 symptoms. The global mutation of the COVID-19 virus into multiple variants and the impact magnitude to the world have prompted its classification as a pandemic in 2020, and its ongoing evolution into new variants continue to be a significant concern. Projections indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to instigate lasting changes, such as enduring travel restrictions and alterations in tourists' risk perceptions (Gössling et al., 2020). The convergence of multiple infectious diseases

concurrently with the ongoing COVID-19 situation may introduce further modifications in future travel behaviours.

This complex change in the environment not only affected governments at the macro level but also trickled down to businesses. Businesses needed to align operations with health guidelines while fostering consumer confidence through transparent communication and innovative service adaptations. Even as restrictions eased to boost the economy, certain protective practices continue to be observed in societies where there is a strong sense of responsibility to safeguard themselves and others (Lai, 2023; Hassan, 2024). For instance, aviation guidelines continue to include COVID-19 protocols and declarations (AirAsia, 2024), even if not strictly enforced, indicating a shift towards more enduring safety practices. The Malaysian Retailers Association have urged retailers and patrons to continue mask-wearing practices as a precautionary measure to reduce the risks of contracting COVID-19. Leading by example, a major hypermarket retailer, Mydin, has implemented cleaning protocols like sanitising public areas and high-contact points, while also encouraging staffers to wear masks (Lai, 2023). Similarly, the president of the Association of Specialists in Private Medical Practice Malaysia has encouraged the public to continue wearing medical masks to protect others and prevent the ongoing spread of COVID-19 (Hilmy & Aziz, 2023).

At the individual level, the prolonged pandemic and its evolving risks became increasingly personal and complex. Tourists must learn to navigate these new circumstances to ensure safe and enjoyable travel experiences. As government regulations fluctuated and the tourism and hospitality sectors reopened, tourists faced the challenge of balancing their desire for normalcy, including international travel reminiscent of pre-pandemic times, with a persistent awareness of risk. This dynamic shift highlights the need to understand how tourists cope in this post-pandemic environment, particularly in terms of their decision-making regarding international travel and the behavioural changes that have emerged as a result.

Although it may appear that changes and decisions flow from governments to businesses and then to individuals, the reality is more nuanced. The adaptive capacity of businesses and the effectiveness of policies ultimately depend on how individuals perceive and respond to these changes. During the Movement Control Order (MCO), government directives were distinctly top-down, prioritising public safety above all else. However, as societies entered the recovery phase, a bottom-up approach emerged as increasingly relevant, reflecting the crucial role of individuals' evolving attitudes, preferences, and behaviours in economic revitalisation. This dynamic prompted businesses and governments to continuously adapt their strategies. Hence, understanding individual behaviour in the post-pandemic context becomes essential, as it informs more adaptive and sustainable approaches to tourism recovery. This research aims to investigate individual-level perspectives and behavioural adaptations within the evolving tourism landscape, contributing valuable insights to the field.

2.2. Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is a theory that seeks to understand the journey of adult education and how the learning process changes their core beliefs and their personal identity, introduced by Mezirow (1991). TLT was originally used in the education field, to describe the journey of adult learning when there are choices to be made or critical events which occur, through a 10-step journey. They are:

Step No.	Step Name	Description / Definition
1	Disorienting Dilemma	An incident or experience that draws an individual's awareness and shifts one's understanding (Mezirow, 2012).
2	Self-Examination	Critical self-reflection with emotion (Mezirow, 2012).
3	Critical Assessment of Assumption	An assessment of the surrounding and environment.
4	Recognition of Others' Perspectives	Informal sharing of experiences, understanding others' opinion about the context.
5	Exploration of New Perspectives	Explore options for new roles, and actions.
6	Plan Actions	Strategize a course of actions.
7	Knowledge and Skill Acquisition	Acquire knowledge and skills to implement the plan.
8	Provisional Trial	Try out a new role and receive feedback.
9	Build Competence and Self-Confidence	Build competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
10	Reintegration	The new perspectives are incorporated into one's life and lifestyles are adjusted accordingly.

Table 2.1: 10-steps of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) model by Mezirow (1991, 2012).

TLT was initially used to understand women's education re-entering journey after they started their families, including their learning progress (Mezirow, 1978). TLT is then also used to evaluate teaching techniques (e.g. Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Reige et al., 2014), the significance of experiential learning (e.g. Taylor et al., 2016), and the recent focus is sustainability learning (e.g. Singer-Brodowski, 2023). These studies stated the importance of *self-examination* (step 2) and *critical assessment of assumptions* (step 3) in promoting personal and professional development among students and instructors. Teaching methods, such as dialogue, feedback and collaborative learning, urge both students and instructors to reflect and assess themselves critically for personal and professional improvement. The adoption of TLT shows that this theory is anchored on the topic of adult learning or tertiary education, to understand the effectiveness of various teaching techniques and the ability to learn and apply the knowledge in their lives.

2.3. TLT Conceptualisation

There are multiple approaches to conceptualising the steps of TLT, with the conventional method that consists of ten steps. In this traditional conceptualisation, all ten steps were considered necessary for a transformative learning journey (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Mezirow, 1991). Each step represents a distinct role in the learning process. For example, *self-examination* (step 2) involves assessing oneself, while *critical assessment of assumptions* (step 3) involves evaluating one's surroundings. However, some scholars have revised the psychological process of transformative learning, as certain steps can occur concurrently rather than in a strict sequential order. For instance, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) reconceptualised volunteer tourism using the TLT framework and argued that some steps can be condensed as the steps occur at the same time. They found that recognition of others' perspectives (step 4) and exploration of new perspectives (step 5) can be combined since recognizing different perspectives is an inherent component of exploring new ones. Similarly, step 6 (Plan actions) and step 8 (Provisional trial) can be combined, given that self-development entails a continual endeavour to enhance oneself based on experiential insights. Other scholars have proposed rearranging the sequence of transformative learning journeys. Bueddefeld and Duerden (2022), in their study on the disparity between TLT and tourism, suggested that *knowledge and skill acquisition* (step 7) may occur at different learning process points in the research context. It can be viewed as a product of *action planning* (after step 6) or knowledge acquisition before action planning (before step 6). Regardless of how scholars may approach the sequencing or condensing of the steps in TLT, there are four essential dimensions that must be present in order to characterise the process as transformative learning:

1. Disorienting dilemma
2. Self-reflection
3. Exploring new actions
4. Development of new skills, attitudes, and beliefs (Wolf et al., 2017)

These four dimensions collectively shape the foundation of TLT, revealing individuals' transformative learning journey towards personal growth and cognitive development. While these scholars have advanced our understanding of TLT, this study aims to adopt the modern conceptualisation of TLT, by customising the journey to the specific context of leisure travel in the post-pandemic period. This approach allows for a better understanding of the actual behaviours and learning processes of tourists, particularly in relation to resilience building. It acknowledges the need for flexibility in exploring the learning process and adapting TLT to the unique challenges and circumstances faced by tourists in the current dynamic environment.

An alternative approach to comprehending the transformation process involves the "rites of passage" framework, initially introduced by Van Gennep (1960) and subsequently developed by Turner (1967). They conceptualised the transition process as "liminal," characterized by distinct phases that individuals invariably encounter during transformation:

1. Pre-liminal phase: Marked by a "triggering event" that jolts an individual, prompting a re-evaluation of beliefs.
2. Liminal phase: Constitutes the transformative process that demarcates the 'before' and 'after' states of an individual.
3. Post-liminal phase: Represents the final step in which the individual assimilates the new belief into their life.

Liminality, viewed as ambiguous, proves adaptable for assessing diverse transition processes. Indeed, scholars have applied this framework to analyse the transitions of temporary workers (Bamber et al., 2017), backpacking experiences (Cohen, 2011), volunteer tourism (Magrizos et al., 2020), and various other subjects. This framework has evolved to encompass two distinct forms: (1) perpetual liminality, characterized by continuous identity switching without a time constraint, and (2) transitional liminality, wherein a time or phase limit exists, concluding once an individual integrates the "new identity" into their social life (Ybema et al., 2011).

In the course of this research, incorporating the "rites of passage" framework into data analysis emerges as a valuable approach. By pinpointing the specific phases of transition, this framework offers a nuanced perspective that can empower authorities and policymakers. Utilising these insights, strategic measures can be devised to enhance various aspects that contribute to an enriched tourist experience. This, in turn, holds the potential to promote international leisure tourism and, importantly, ensures that future trips are not only safe but also thoroughly enjoyable.

2.4. Transformative Learning in Tourism

Several scholars began to integrate TLT, a theory that is predominantly used in education field, into tourism literature over the last decade (e.g. Bamber, 2008; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Walter & Reimer, 2012; Magrizos et al., 2021; Altinay & Arici, 2022). As of now, TLT is more often applied in volunteer tourism and educational tourism as compared to other tourism types (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). Volunteer tourism is international travel with the purpose of participating in volunteer activities (e.g. community works) that benefit both host and destination countries (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Magrizos et al, 2021); while educational tourism is known as international travel with the purpose of participating in educational programs (e.g. short-term twinning program) (Cavender, Swanson & Wright, 2020; Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of the integration of TLT in tourism, as it offers insightful information by explaining tourist behaviour in a travel journey. For instance, in a study of volunteer tourism, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) found that allowing volunteers to develop action for their future, try out new roles and gain feedback during the journey would assist them to reaffirm their new roles, and then change their beliefs and behaviour when they return to their host countries. Cavender, Swanson and Wright (2020) discovered that students who embarked on a 10-day education abroad program have learnt and transformed their values and beliefs upon their returns.

While there are valuable knowledge and insights derived from understanding tourists' transformative learning experience in various tourism domains, knowledge regarding leisure tourism is limited. This is because different types of tourism possess unique characteristics and nature that distinguish them from one another. For example, alternative tourism like volunteer and educational tourism has specific goals, such as helping the needy or receiving education, that is often unrelated to fun and relaxation. In other words, tourists who choose these types of tourism may face more challenges that force them to change their values and behaviour (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023), as compared to leisure tourism, that focusses more on fun and relaxation. Transformative learning experience among tourists who chose leisure tourism is likely to differ from other tourism types. As such, when considering the application of TLT in tourism, it is necessary to recognise the notable distinctions that exist between leisure tourism and other specific forms of tourism. Two prominent tourism types, volunteer and educational tourisms will be delved into to uncover the contrasting aspects that influence the utilisation of TLT within these contexts.

The first contrasting aspect is the time horizon of 'disorienting dilemma'. Disorienting dilemma is typically characterised as an immediate trigger from an external factor, often referred to as a "triggering event". This event immediately initiates one's transformative learning journey. For instance, Magrizos et al. (2021) conducted mixed-methods research to explore the transformative learning process and its boundary conditions among volunteer tourists. One of the respondents experienced a disorienting dilemma when he perceived himself to be the least compassionate person among his peers due to his lack of involvement in volunteer activities. This realisation prompted him to engage in self-reflection and ultimately participate in a volunteer tourism trip. In this scenario, the transformative learning journey is triggered by a moment of self-awareness and recognition. In educational tourism, the students were caught in a disorientating dilemma when they were notified of the cultural and lifestyle differences between Greece and America during pre-departure meetings, leading them to consider whether they should go outside of their comfort zone (Cavender, Swanson & Wright, 2020). Extending a similar argument to our study's context of leisure tourism, especially during the post-pandemic period, the disorienting dilemma manifests as a prolonged trigger resulting from an external factor. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed tourists to a unique and prolonged experience over the past two years, during which they have been subjected to lockdown measures and stringent safety protocols. Throughout this period, tourists have had to adapt to living with the constant presence of COVID-19 and incorporate various protective measures into their daily lives. When international borders reopen, there is a possibility for tourists to find themselves facing a disorienting dilemma characterised by conflicting emotions. On one hand, there is a strong desire to travel and explore new destinations. On the other hand, there is a psychological tension stemming from the need to navigate the complexities of risk and the continued presence of infectious diseases. This disorienting dilemma is significantly different in terms of its time horizon and nature compared to more conventional dilemmas. The prolonged exposure to lockdown measures and the impact of the pandemic have influenced tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes, adding a unique dimension to their travel considerations.

The second distinction is the nature of the self-reflection phase, especially between volunteer and leisure tourism. In volunteer tourism, the self-reflection phase denotes the volunteers' realisation of their lack of compassion as compared to their social network or a sudden recognition of the need to do more for society (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Magrizos et al., 2021). However, in the specific context of leisure tourism examined in this study, the self-reflection process among tourists may differ. For instance, given the prevailing circumstances characterised by the pervasive presence of infectious diseases, particularly COVID-19, the tourists' self-reflection may be shaped by their encounters with managing COVID-19 throughout the past two years of lockdown. This perspective aligns with Sharpe's (2016) argument that reflection is a vital building block to mitigate risk and seek suitable solutions to solve issues. With the knowledge and experience of managing COVID-19 acquired over lockdown period, it is arguable that self-reflection is a vital pillar in triggering transformative learning, and also building resilience, thereby enabling individuals to generate novel travel experiences.

Third, the underlying intent in volunteer and educational tourism is different from that of leisure tourism. Participating in volunteer tourism trips ultimately yields societal benefits for both the destination country and the volunteers themselves (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Magrizos, 2020). Volunteers undergo personal growth and behaviour development through their involvement in volunteer tourism trips, transforming themselves into more compassionate and engaged individuals. In education tourism, the students transformed themselves into more inclusive persons, having greater respect for different cultures and gained different skills after returning from an educational program abroad (Cavender, Swanson & Wright., 2020). On the contrary, leisure tourism trips primarily serve the purpose of fulfilling personal desires to travel, seek self-entertainment, and visit family and friends in different countries. The focus of leisure tourism is primarily on individual enjoyment and leisure activities, rather than direct societal impact or active engagement in community-based initiatives. Therefore, the transformative learning journey in volunteer tourism and leisure tourism differ from the aspect of the underlying objectives and outcomes.

Fourth, the scope of learning in volunteer and educational tourism varies from the leisure tourism of this research. The transformative learning journey in volunteer and educational tourism primarily focusses on individual transformation and development from the assigned activities. In volunteer tourism, volunteers learn and transform their values and behaviour through specific volunteer activities from non-government organisations (NGOs). For example, volunteers who participated in beach cleaning learnt how to clean the beach effectively and become more conscious about beach cleanliness when they return to host countries. Students who chose educational tourism, learnt and changed their values and behaviour through institute-designed educational programs. Students may become less discriminative towards people from other cultural backgrounds after a student-exchange program to another country. However, the transformative learning journey for tourists encompasses a broader scope. Tourists need to plan their travel destinations and itineraries by themselves; at the same time, they also need to do other preparations, like engaging in extensive research regarding the COVID-19 SOP in the destination country to adopt necessary protective measures and adapt in the country upon arrival. This means that tourists need to simultaneously focus on multiple aspects, organising their itineraries and

acquiring knowledge related to health and safety protocols to ensure a safe and enjoyable travel experience. Besides, tourists are exposed to a wider environment at a destination country as compared to students and volunteers. This is because leisure tourists have more decision-making power on the activities and destinations, and various decisions would lead to a different tourist experience. Tourists may experience different transformative learning journeys from each decision they have made. As such, the learning process among tourists may go beyond the traditional aspect of the transformative learning journey through the need to heighten their resilience against health risk resulting from COVID-19 and the freedom to decide the activities. Below is summary table, stating the main differences between leisure tourism with other forms of tourism that have adopted the TLT model:

	Volunteer Tourism	Education Tourism	Leisure Tourism
Disorienting Dilemma	Instant trigger from an external factor.	Instant trigger from an external factor	Exposed to prolonged crisis that reshape one's lifestyle and beliefs. Another layer of event triggers the dilemma
Nature of Self-Reflection Phase	Realisation of lack of compassion in one's own self compared to their peers		Dependent on their resilience against COVID-19 during lockdown period
Underlying intention	Has societal benefits for both destination country and individuals	Individual transformation and development	Fulfil personal desire to travel and other travel purpose
Scope of Learning	Volunteer activities specific knowledge	Personal development from specific educational program	Freedom to plan itinerary and strategize safety protocols

Table 2.2: Summary table of main differences between leisure tourism with other forms of tourism that have adopted the TLT model.

In summary, this research recognises the complexities and nuances of transformative learning across different tourism types. By contrasting volunteer, educational, and leisure tourism, it becomes evident that the motivations, triggers, and learning outcomes differ significantly. Besides, adapting TLT in data analysis enabled an in-depth exploration of underlying constructs and variables, uncovering themes and insights that shaped the research direction. Subsequently, the theoretical framework guided the quantitative phase to validate and generalise the findings, reinforcing the robustness of the study's methodology. Such an integrated approach offers a comprehensive understanding of how transformative learning manifests uniquely within leisure tourism, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape.

2.5. Transition from Qualitative to Quantitative

This research adopts a qualitative-first approach followed by quantitative research to address the complexity of post-pandemic tourism behaviour. The primary reason for conducting qualitative research first is to explore nuanced insights into tourists' transformative learning journeys and resilience-building, which are challenging to capture through quantitative methods alone. The qualitative phase, grounded in TLT, serves as the theoretical foundation for understanding how tourist behaviours have evolved in post-pandemic environments. Through focus group discussions (FGDs) and thematic analysis, key themes and constructs emerged, providing a comprehensive contextual understanding of post-pandemic travel behaviour.

The transition from the qualitative to the quantitative phase marks a crucial step in the research process. After establishing the theoretical groundwork and identifying critical themes through qualitative exploration, the study moves on to quantitative research to validate and generalise these findings. While qualitative data offers depth and contextual richness, quantitative analysis ensures that the insights hold statistical significance across a larger population. This sequential design, known as exploratory sequential mixed-methods, allows for the integration of rich, context-specific insights with empirical testing, ensuring both depth and breadth in understanding tourist behaviour.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods is essential for this research because it leverages the strengths of each approach to achieve a holistic perspective. The qualitative phase captures emerging themes and insights, while the quantitative phase tests their prevalence and significance. This combination bridges exploratory understanding with empirical validation, offering a comprehensive and reliable analysis of post-pandemic tourism behaviour, grounded in real-world experiences and statistically supported findings.

2.6. Risk Perception

Risk perception is a subjective assessment of the possibility of having a negative experience and thus acting as a key determinant that influences human behaviour and decision-making (Slovic, 1987). This concept is initially introduced to evaluate the possible outcome after the calculation of cost and benefits, through objective and rational assessment (Paek & Hove, 2017). The calculation of cost and benefits is influenced by individual differences (e.g. demographics, cultural background, experience), affective factors (i.e. positive and negative emotion level) and cognitive factors (e.g. perceived severity of a hazard) (Slovic et al., 1987). Risk perception was often used by health experts to evaluate the recovery possibilities in the earlier days, then eventually incorporated into media and communication, to evaluate media and communication play roles in affecting risk perception. This concept is crucial in examining and forecasting the possibility of bad experience or consequence during a crisis event, the result would be useful to plan protective measures, identify countermeasures or build resilience to minimise such risk.

Risk perception was then introduced to tourism literature as it influences travel decision-making among tourists (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Some empirical studies showed that tourists may choose not to travel at all to avoid risk (McKercher & Hui, 2004) or implement protective measures to reduce the risk (Reichel et al., 2007; Lo et al., 2011). Scholars have operationalised risk perception in several ways to assist in managing risk. Traditionally, it is

measured by evaluating different types of risk: physical risk, psychological risk, financial risk, environmental risk, political risk, economic risk, and health risk (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Zhan et al., 2020). These risks may arise from perceived potential loss as a result of terrorism (9/11), natural disasters (Bae & Chang, 2020), infectious diseases outbreak, such as SARS, H1N1 (Lee et al., 2012) and is currently investigated for COVID-19 (Zhan et al., 2020, Bae & Chang, 2020, 2022; Gerhold, 2020). Fuchs and Reichel (2006) conducted mixed-method research about Israel, with multiple items to measure each risk type, and found that identifying significant risk categories may help authorities pinpoint improvement strategies more effectively than the overall risk perception index. For example, a high level of physical risk caused by the fear of crime can enable legal authorities to draft an improvement plan, it is less of a concern for financial authorities. On the other hand, Lee et al. (2012) discovered that individual resilience against H1N1 (health risk) may affect their perception towards the disease, and resilience building can be done through higher knowledge exposure to the public and protective measures by the government. Segmentation of risk may offer specialised insights for multiple risk categories, so that related authorities may design specific and relevant solutions to address the risk.

While existing studies have advanced our understanding of risk perception, the traditional approach fails to define the affected party of the risk. Does the risk affect certain individuals only or society as a whole? Using the context from Lee et al. (2012), would the environment with high health risk - H1N1, affect only the individual (i.e. tourist alone) or the community (i.e. everyone in that area)? Some scholars (Gerhold, 2020; Han et al., 2022) evaluated risk perception at the individual and/or societal level and found that tourists' attitude towards risk differs based on whether they perceive risk at an individual or societal level. If the perceived risk is at individual level, they will engage in direct preventive behaviour (e.g. social distancing) to minimise the risk. If it is perceived at societal level, it is argued that no action will be taken. Although this approach may determine the magnitude of the perceived risk among tourists, such finding is challenging for authorities to use to identify countermeasures. This approach is less relevant in this study as COVID-19 has global impact with the official label 'pandemic' by WHO in January 2020.

2.6.1. Risk Perception in Post-Pandemic Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill, with lockdowns imposed globally to mitigate the spread of the virus. During this period, it was risky to go out, socialise, or engage in travel, and as a result, leisure tourism, especially international travel, came to a complete halt. Although the world has since moved past the strictest lockdowns, the ongoing presence of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases continue to pose significant health risks. Different countries maintain various standard operating procedures (SOPs) that add complexity to international travel. Consequently, risk perception related to leisure travel has evolved alongside this prolonged crisis. This global health event aligns with the concept of a "disorienting dilemma," a disruptive experience that prompts individuals to reassess and potentially change their behaviours and beliefs. The scale of COVID-19 offers a strategic research environment to understand the tourists' travel planning journey and their resilience building process, with potential to build a model that may offer constructive input to strengthen resilience.

The pandemic has intensified health and safety concerns, making perceived risk a critical factor in tourists' travel decision-making. The fear of contracting the virus, concerns about health and safety measures, and uncertainties regarding travel restrictions have significantly influenced tourists' travel intentions (Ahmad et al., 2022). Studies have shown that higher perceived risks associated with health crises can lead to travel avoidance and a decline in travel intentions (Jahari et al., 2021). For instance, Han et al. (2022) found that tourists who perceived higher risks during the COVID-19 pandemic were less inclined to travel, illustrating the strong influence of health-related perceived risks on travel behaviour.

Moreover, perceived risk is not a static construct but evolves over time based on various factors such as media reports, personal experiences, and information from trusted sources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid dissemination of information through social media and news outlets have played a crucial role in shaping tourists' risk perceptions (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Consequently, destinations that effectively communicate their safety measures and manage their public image were able to reduce perceived risks and attract tourists (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Furthermore, it can be argued that risk perception is not solely shaped by external information but also by individuals' personal experiences in managing risks. For instance, respondents in Study 1 shared that their experiences during the lockdown period, particularly in managing the risks associated with COVID-19 virus, helped them evaluate whether the post-border reopening situation was riskier than what they had encountered during lockdowns.

To enhance the relevance and specificity of this research, perceived risk on infectious diseases (Lee et al., 2012) is included to supplement the generic perceived risk measurements. This approach also addresses the nuances of health-related concerns. Lee et al. (2012) emphasised the role of non-pharmaceutical interventions for Influenza A (H1N1) outbreak, highlighting the importance of perceived health risks in shaping travel behaviour. Integrating these insights allows the research to uncover how health-related perceived risks influence resilience and decision-making processes in the current post-pandemic environment.

2.7. Resilience

Resilience refers to the actions taken in response to crises and disasters (Brown et al., 2018; Cartier & Taylor, 2020). Initially theorised by Holling (1973) in the fields of ecology and engineering, resilience described an entity's ability to resist and recover from a disturbance. This concept, originally used to understand ecosystem sustainability, has since been adopted in numerous disciplines, such as engineering, ecology, and psychology. When applied to understanding human behaviour, researchers have observed that individual traits and background experiences play a significant role in shaping resilience. For instance, Werner (1995) conducted research on children born in Hawaii who experienced significant adversity, such as parental neglect and poverty. The study found that factors like competence, social support (including good relationships with parents), positive self-image, and personalities played a role in determining their resilience in the face of adversity. This finding highlights the importance of personal characteristics and social support in building resilience.

Recently, Prayag (2023) identified several common characteristics about resilience, which are:

1. *Robustness*: Defined as a subject's ability to restore its function shortly after a disturbance
2. *Vulnerability*: The opposite of resilience, pinpointing areas of weakness or risk within an entity
3. *Risk perceptions and management*: Key factors that provide insights to understand the relationship between vulnerability and resilience. Without knowing the risk, evaluation to determine the vulnerability could not take place, it will be useless to build resilience
4. *Adaptability*: The ability to modify or adjust an entity's behaviour in disruptive times (Hilman, 2021)
5. *Change absorption*: it is related to adaptive capacity, the flexibility in modifying the ability to adapt and absorb shock from disruption

These characteristics are interconnected and interdependent without specific priority among them, working together to enable effective restoration and recovery. Restoration cannot occur if the subject fails to absorb and adapt from the shock due to the disturbance (Prayag, 2023). This emphasises the importance of these characteristics in the process. Exploring the nuances of robustness, vulnerability, risk perceptions, adaptability and change absorption is crucial for the subject to learn individually, to develop a deeper understanding of how they interact and contribute to resilience building for an entity.

The concept of resilience has subsequently expanded into resilience theory, with the contribution from social-ecological systems (SES). SES shows a complex and intertwined relationship between social and ecological systems (Folke, 2006). Humans (social system) and nature (ecological system) may have capacity to resist, adapt and recover from disruptions, by constantly improving the structures, abilities and learning from past experiences (Hall et al., 2018). Learning from previous disruptions is essential to improve their ability to withstand, adapt and recover from future disruptions (Kuntz et al., 2017). This process requires collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders to learn from each other to build resilience collectively in the face of disruptions (Cartier & Taylors, 2020; Folke, 2006). In the context of the tourism industry, which faces a range of disruptions, such as disease outbreaks, political instability, economic shocks, and natural disasters, these disruptions highlight the need for the tourism system to learn from past experiences and consistently improve strategies (Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021). This enhancement will enable the tourism industry to navigate and thrive in an ever-changing environment.

2.7.1. Resilience in Tourism

Resilience theory has been extended to tourism over the past decades. The general consensus among scholars is that individuals, institutions, and communities possess unique capacities to resist, adapt, and restore through consistent learning from various disruptions over time. Cartier & Taylor (2020) focused on the relationship between crisis management procedures and local community resilience in response to wildfires at a tourism-based destination. They found that collaboration between local residents could improve resilience in managing wildfire incidents. Han et al. (2022) conducted research among the local community in South Korea to understand the interventions of psychological resilience in tourists' personal perceptions of travel risk during the pandemic period. They found a positive relationship between psychological resilience and travel intention. Tourists who believe that they have the ability to respond to danger (psychological resilience) are more confident in travelling again (travel intention). These findings demonstrate that an individual's resilience level can influence their willingness and ability to manage danger, further emphasising its significance in recovering from disruptions.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant attention to resilience in tourism (e.g., Zhan et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2022). Past studies have examined resilience from an organisational perspective. Bhaskara and Filimonau (2021) investigated the significance of past disruption management experiences in tourism businesses in Bali, Indonesia. They found that learning from past experiences is crucial in strengthening organisational resilience, reducing vulnerability to future disruptions, and enhancing the attractiveness of Bali as a tourist destination. Quan et al. (2022) also emphasised the importance of resilience in the hospitality industry. Their study explored the relationship between resilience, represented by the implementation of protective measures, and visit intent in the hospitality industry. They found that implementing resilience strategies encouraged tourists' visit intent and even led to repeat visitations. However, there is limited research on how individuals respond to changing environments in the face of disruptions (Prayag et al., 2020, Han et al., 2022), particularly regarding psychological resilience in the face of many adversities in tourism.

There are two concepts of resilience built at the individual level: psychological resilience and its more recent subset, tourist resilience. The well-established psychological resilience serves as the foundational understanding of how individuals adapt to stress and adversity. It is defined as an individual's capacity to respond effectively to challenging situations (Luther et al., 2000), emphasising the psychological and emotional resources, such as self-confidence, needed to manage and overcome stress (Prayag et al., 2020). This well-established concept is highly relevant to the current study and could be used to measure resilience identified from Study 1. However, tourist resilience, having been recently developed with limited validation, but seemingly more specialised, could potentially lend greater relevance to the context of this study. Hence, it is explored first. Tourist resilience is introduced by Gottschalk et al. (2022), focusing specifically on the tourism context, encompassing four key dimensions: preparedness, adaptiveness, social support, and risk reduction (Gottschalk et al., 2022; Prayag, 2023). This concept is developed by extracting theoretical and practical value of psychological resilience, and the dimensions provide

insights into the specific behaviours and actions that contribute to building resilience among tourists in the face of challenges and disruptions.

1. *Preparedness* is defined as how tourists gather information and resources to manage risk, actions that often take place during the travel planning stage. Tourists gather resources (e.g. travel insurance) before their trips to make sure they are ready to manage potential risk in a foreign country.
2. *Adaptiveness* is a tourist's ability to take the most advantage out of a disturbance to enhance their travel experience (Hall et al., 2018). For example, when a tourist is visiting a country that has an active anti-medical mask movement, they will adapt to the environment by removing the habit of wearing a medical mask. Simply put, it is about how well a tourist blends into society to maximise the travel experience.
3. *Social support* is about social interaction with destination communities, tourism operators and other tourists, it is believed to have a positive relationship with travel experience. When a tourist has pleasant interaction with destination communities or feels a sense of belonging, they will feel safe at that destination and eventually improve the overall travel experience (Dickinson et al., 2017; Kose et al., 2021).
4. Lastly, *risk reduction* is a series of actions taken to reduce travel risk, where the tourists may take protective measures to reduce the risk (Lo et al., 2011; Reichel et al., 2007), avoid specific destinations (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011) or even not travel at all to prevent risk (McKercher & Hui, 2004).

The conceptualisation of these dimensions appears to contribute both theoretically and practically to the understanding and enhancement of tourist resilience, as compared to psychological resilience that solely focusses on the emotional aspect of self-belief in managing risk. The framework offers insights into the underlying mechanisms and processes that shape tourists' ability to cope with disruptions. Moreover, it provides practical implications for destination management authorities, helping them develop strategies and support systems that foster resilience among tourists and creating safer, more enjoyable travel experiences.

However, upon examining the measurement items and dimensions included in tourist resilience, questions arise regarding its validity. Firstly, the measurement items in the risk reduction dimension appear highly correlated with those in other dimensions, such as preparedness, posing a risk of multicollinearity in the model. For example, the risk reduction item "*I typically plan my trips well in advance*" is very similar to the preparedness item "*I gather information prior to my travel on the risks associated with travelling to a certain place.*" Secondly, there is a lack of concept adoption in non-Western contexts, calling into question its theorisation. One of the key dimensions of tourist resilience is social support, defined as a tourist's tendency to form relationships with residents at the destination (Gottschalk et al., 2022). While it may be significant among Western tourists, this dimension could be insignificant in an Asian context. In Study 1, almost all respondents emphasised the importance of being prepared prior to the trip. Preparation is vital in their planning process as they are expected to solve issues independently and refrain from seeking help from residents or other tourists. This self-sufficiency, ingrained in Asian culture, suggests that

social support might be inappropriate to include. Lastly, the concept of tourist resilience was created and tested during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when tourists' attitudes towards travel, travel behaviour, and risk perception were markedly different than today. Its suitability in the post-pandemic era is questionable, especially as it has yet to be validated by other scholars. Conversely, psychological resilience, although more generic, has been tested and verified across various disciplines. This is because positive relationship has established between psychological resilience and travel intention, suggesting that resilient individuals are more confident to travel again post-pandemic (Han et al., 2022). Given the appropriateness, this research will adopt psychological resilience as it is contextually more appropriate.

When examining psychological resilience in detail, in comparison with the common characteristics of resilience identified by Prayag (2023), it becomes evident that psychological resilience is a more individualised and nuanced construct. Prayag (2023) outlines generic traits of resilience such as robustness, adaptability, risk management, and the ability to absorb change. Instead, psychological resilience specifically refers to the internal capacity of an individual to manage stress and adversity effectively, placing a greater emphasis on personal attributes and coping mechanisms. One of the distinguishing traits of psychological resilience is emotional regulation, which involves the ability to remain composed and think clearly in the face of stress (Crane, Searle, Kangas, & Nwiran, 2019). This trait is crucial for tourists when navigating sudden disruptions, as it enables them to maintain focus and make rational decisions, a behaviour that is less emphasised in broader discussions of resilience. Additionally, self-efficacy, or an individual's confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles, plays a significant role in psychological resilience. Tourists who possess high self-efficacy are more likely to feel in control and take proactive measures, such as preparing for potential risks, which enhance their ability to manage travel-related stress.

Another critical trait of psychological resilience is adaptability, which, although present in general resilience, is more intricately expressed at the individual level (Prayag, 2023). Psychological resilience requires cognitive flexibility and a willingness to modify behaviours based on evolving circumstances, such as adhering to new health guidelines or adjusting travel itineraries. This personalised adaptability ensures that tourists can effectively respond to changing conditions, distinguishing it from the broader, systemic adaptability described in Prayag's (2023) framework. Furthermore, psychological resilience incorporates the concept of growth through adversity, where individuals interpret challenges as opportunities for learning and self-improvement. This aligns with TLT, as tourists who frame difficulties positively are more likely to experience personal development and enhanced coping abilities. Finally, social support in the context of psychological resilience refers to the emotional and practical assistance provided by personal relationships. Unlike the community level support systems highlighted in general resilience, psychological resilience focusses on the quality of close connections that offer comfort and guidance. For tourists, these personal networks serve as crucial resources, helping to bolster their resilience and provide reassurance during uncertain travel experiences. Together, these traits illustrate how psychological resilience operates at a more granular, individual level, offering a refined understanding of how tourists manage and adapt to the stressors encountered in post-pandemic travel scenarios.

2.7.2. Connecting TLT with Resilience

Aside from COVID-19, previous infectious diseases (e.g. H1N1 in 2009, SARS in 2002) have significantly impacted global travel, forcing people to build resilience through learning (Xie et al., 2022). The World Tourism Organisation's guideline to restart tourism (2020) emphasises the extreme risk associated with travelling during the infectious disease outbreaks without taking cautious or protective measures. Infectious diseases like COVID-19 can spread rapidly through travel and tourism activities, posing risks at individual, organisational, and global levels. From pre-travel contact in the home country to travel within the destination country and upon return, the potential for disease transmission is significant.

As safety is a fundamental need for tourists (Xie et al., 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the tourism industry, with a 43% year-on-year decline in tourism activities from January to July 2022 compared to 2019 (UNWTO, 2022). This decline underscores the urgent need for various stakeholders, including authorities and individuals, to enhance the resilience of tourism systems by prioritising safety during travel experiences. Individuals and governments have learnt to adopt protective measures throughout the lockdown period over the past two years, such as practising social distancing and wearing masks, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Governments have also implemented travel restrictions (Seyfi et al., 2020-a) and established new travel standard operating procedures (SOPs) based on health and safety measures (Villace-Molinero et al., 2021). These collective efforts can be categorised as resilience-building actions through learning of the experience of combating infectious diseases. These actions are undertaken to resist the impact of COVID-19, adapt to the evolving landscape of infectious diseases, and recover from the pandemic's effects.

By utilising TLT, the transformative learning process of tourists living with COVID-19 can be uncovered, providing valuable insights for government agencies, travel operators, and other tourism-related authorities. TLT allows for a deeper understanding of the tourists' journey in planning their leisure travel and the potential changes in their travel behaviour. The steps in TLT seem to align well with resilience theory, particularly the traits of psychological resilience. These traits can be integrated into TLT framework, as follows:

Traits	Definition	Associated steps in TLT	Reason
Emotional regulation	The ability to remain composed and think clearly in the face of stress	(Step 2) Self-Examination (Step 3) Critical Assessment	Tourists regulate their emotion to evaluate their personal readiness and surrounding assessment, allowing them to decide whether they should travel internationally for leisure
Self-efficacy	An individual's confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles	(Step 6) Planning (Step 7) Knowledge and Skill Acquisition (Step 9) Building	Tourists build self-efficacy as they plan their travels and acquire knowledge.

Traits	Definition	Associated steps in TLT	Reason
		Competence and Confidence	This self-efficacy is then solidified in Step 9, when they successfully apply what they have learned and gain confidence in their ability to handle challenges
Adaptability	Cognitive flexibility and a willingness to modify behaviours based on evolving circumstances	(Step 8) Provisional Trail	Tourists demonstrate adaptability by adjusting their behaviours and travel plans when realities differ from expectations, such as altering safety practices to blend with local norms
Concept of growth through adversity	Individuals interpret challenges as opportunities for learning and self-improvement	(Step 3) Critical Assessment (Step 10) Reintegration	Tourists view travel challenges as experiences to learn from, reflecting on difficulties and incorporating lessons learned into future planning, contributing to personal growth
Social support	Emotional and practical assistance provided by personal relationships	(Step 4) Recognition	Tourists acknowledge the value of social support from friends and family, which helps them feel secure and informed, aiding in decision-making and enhancing their resilience in unfamiliar settings

Table 2.3. Integration of TLT with Psychological resilience

Table 2.3 illustrates how the psychological resilience traits are connected to various steps in TLT. **Emotional regulation** plays a crucial role during *Self-Examination* (Step 2) and *Critical Assessment* (Step 3). During these steps, tourists regulate their emotions to evaluate their own readiness and assess the risks associated with travelling internationally. For example, Glen (T2) described the initial excitement he felt when international travel was once again permitted. However, he had to consciously manage his emotions and rationally assess both his own and his family's readiness to travel. This emotional regulation enabled him to

balance the excitement of travelling with the uncertainty and potential risks of exposure, ultimately allowing him to make a reasoned decision for himself and his family.

Self-efficacy spans multiple steps, including *Planning* (Step 6), *Knowledge and Skill Acquisition* (Step 7), and *Building Competence and Confidence* (Step 9). As tourists engage in planning and acquire information, they gradually build confidence. Sam provides a convincing example of this trait. Before her trip to South Korea, she diligently planned and prepared all necessary documents, anticipating potential challenges based on what she had learned about the heightened scrutiny faced by Southeast Asian tourists. Despite her extensive preparation, Sam was brought into an interrogation room by immigration officers, who sought to determine whether she intended to seek employment illegally as a tourist while in South Korea. However, Sam confidently presented her financial statements, travel itinerary, and other supporting documents she had prepared. This situation demonstrated her self-efficacy, as her proactive planning (Step 6) and the knowledge she had acquired (Step 7) empowered her to handle the stressful encounter effectively. Her ability to remain composed from thorough preparation and successfully navigate the interrogation highlighted the confidence and competence she had built throughout her transformative learning journey.

Adaptability is reflected in *Provisional Trial* (Step 8), where tourists put their plans into action and demonstrate flexibility in response to changing circumstances. During Step 8, tourists apply their preparations and adapt to the realities they encounter at their travel destinations, modifying their actions as needed. For instance, Hillary (T1), who prepared rigorously by bringing hand sanitisers, medical face mask, COVID-19 test kit and vaccination documents to Thailand and India, had to adapt when she found that local practices were far more relaxed than expected. She had to shift from her initial cautious behaviour to blending in with the local norms. Charlene (T1) and her parents faced a comparable situation in Australia. In their initial arrival to Australia, they insisted to wear medical face mask in public, but the unfriendly stares from locals and the overall relaxed attitude towards mask-wearing led her to adapt and eventually abandon the masks to feel more accepted. These instances highlight how adaptability enables tourists to modify their actions and mindset, making necessary adjustments to navigate and integrate into new environments effectively.

Concept of **Growth through Adversity** is connected to Critical Assessment (Step 3) and Reintegration (Step 10) in the TLT framework. This trait involves interpreting challenges as opportunities for learning and self-improvement. During Critical Assessment, tourists assess their surrounding and external environment. Reintegration occurs as they return home, reflecting on how their experiences have influenced their perspectives and behaviours. For example, Sara (T1) initially doubted travelling to the UK was a good idea, given the need to assess the COVID-19 situation, research local practices, and understand local sentiment towards Asian tourists. Upon arrival, she faced various challenges, such as navigating crowded public spaces and adapting to local norms that did not always align with her expectations. These experiences tested her sense of security and required her to reassess her strategies for staying safe. By the end of her journey, Sara realised she had developed a better understanding of risk management and had grown more adaptable and resilient. This newfound confidence inspired her to start planning another trip, this time to Australia for a music festival, demonstrating her willingness to embrace future challenges.

Lastly, **social support** plays a crucial role in *Recognition* (Step 4), where tourists acknowledge the value of advice and information from their social networks. This support is crucial for helping tourists navigate the complexities of post-pandemic travel. During *Recognition*, tourists value the insights and advice shared by family and friends, which often guide their travel decisions and preparations. An example from the qualitative findings is Kelly (T1), who sought guidance from her relatives in Australia. Their detailed descriptions of local norms and the relaxed safety practices helped Kelly mentally prepare for her visit. This support not only provided her with practical information but also offered reassurance, making her feel more secure and ready to face the travel experience. Social support, therefore, plays a central role in shaping tourists' confidence and overall resilience.

In summary, Table 6.1 demonstrates how the integration of TLT and psychological resilience provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the transformative learning experiences of tourists in a post-pandemic world. These traits collectively illustrate how tourists navigate the uncertainties and challenges of post-pandemic leisure travel, applying learnt strategies to enhance their well-being and decision-making processes. Emotional regulation helps tourists evaluate their readiness and manage risks thoughtfully, while self-efficacy empowers them to confront unexpected challenges with confidence built through planning and knowledge acquisition. Adaptability allows tourists to adjust to the realities of their travel destinations, ensuring a flexible and responsive approach to unanticipated changes. The concept of growth through adversity highlights how overcoming difficulties promotes personal development and prepares tourists for future experiences. Finally, social support highlights the importance of community and shared knowledge, reinforcing tourists' confidence and shaping their resilience. The inclusion of qualitative examples accentuates the practical implications of these traits, offering insights into how tourists make informed decisions and adapt to challenges, ultimately enhancing their travel experiences.

2.8. Coping

Coping is a process by which individuals actively change their thoughts and actions to minimise or overcome stress caused by internal or external stressors, often associated with (perceived) risks (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Brough et al., 2005). When people are exposed to risk, they tend to seek strategies to manage both the risk itself and the psychological stress it generates. The concept of coping is widely used in psychology to understand psychological well-being, self-care, and quality of life (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory expand on this idea, suggesting that individuals continuously assess environmental stimuli and activate coping mechanisms when these stimuli are perceived as stressors, whether they are viewed as threatening, challenging, or harmful. In other words, coping is a dynamic and ongoing process triggered by exposure to stressors, prompting individuals to adjust their cognitive and behavioural responses to manage stress. This makes coping a purposeful, conscious, and adaptable effort aimed at achieving psychological stability (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Brough et al., 2005).

Scholars have categorised coping into two main types: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Han et al., 2022). problem-focused encompasses thoughts and actions aimed at reducing or eliminating the risk, such as researching preventive measures or adhering to strict safety guidelines. For example, an individual who might think, "*I need to learn about how to avoid contracting this virus,*" would engage in behaviours like carrying hand sanitiser, wearing medical masks, and adhering to social distancing practices. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, is geared towards managing emotional distress by focusing on positive aspects of oneself and the situation or through avoidance strategies. Strategies under this type of coping include denial, avoidance, and positive re-framing. For instance, "*I tell myself this is not real,*" which while providing temporary relief from stress, does not directly mitigate the threat (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007; Han et al., 2022). Research indicates that individuals' risk perceptions significantly influence whether they adopt problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies (Han et al., 2022). High levels of perceived personal risk led to the adoption of both types of coping, while societal risk perceptions predominantly trigger problem-focused strategies aimed at collective action.

Scholars also compared the effectiveness of these two types of coping mechanisms and generally suggest that problem-focused coping strategies tend to be more effective than emotion-focused coping strategies. Research indicates that problem-focused coping is associated with enhanced psychological well-being, self-care, and health-related quality of life (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). This is expected, as problem-focused strategies directly address and mitigate the underlying risk, whereas emotion-focused strategies primarily provide temporary relief from stress. Interestingly, some researchers have argued that emotion-focused coping can have an indirect, short-term adaptive effect, particularly when individuals perceive stressors as uncontrollable or lack sufficient resources to implement problem-focused strategies effectively (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Ben-Zur, 2009). In such cases, the emotional stress experienced may be redirected, enhancing an individual's adaptability to cope with the situation in the short term.

2.8.1. Coping in the Post-Pandemic Landscape

The pervasive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has entered many facets of public life, from nationwide daily reports on infection rates to the personal experiences of individuals who have either contracted the virus or know someone who has been infected. The situation escalated to a point where governments are forced to enforce stringent measures to cope with this health risk. These measures, including self-quarantine, social distancing, and community or border lockdowns, have aimed to curb the virus's spread and safeguard public health. The omnipresent reality of the pandemic has left little room for emotion-focused coping strategies, such as denial or avoidance. Instead, individuals have been pushed towards adopting problem-focused coping strategies that involve concrete actions and active risk management. By complying with measures and with a deeper understanding of the virus, societies have taken collective action to reduce and mitigate the associated risks, leading to the reopening of international borders in 2022 and the revival of tourism activities.

Han et al. (2022) investigated the factors shaping tourist behaviour during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on South Korean tourists. The study drew a clear distinction between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms. While strategies like denial and avoidance, characteristic of emotion-focused coping, were still prevalent at the individual level, the research highlighted the greater effectiveness of problem-focused coping in managing pandemic-related risks. This emphasis on proactive, concrete actions aligns with existing literature, which has shown that problem-focused coping strategies contribute significantly to psychological well-being and effective risk management (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). Furthermore, problem-focused strategies demonstrated their effectiveness not only on a personal level but also collectively, promoting safer tourism practices. Han et al. (2022)'s findings are consistent with earlier research on health crises, such as Lee et al. (2012), which illustrated the efficacy of non-pharmaceutical interventions during the H1N1 pandemic. Although the measurement items for assessing problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Gerhold, 2020; Zheng et al., 2021a) may differ across studies like Lee et al. (2012), the core principles emphasising the importance of proactive, problem-focused strategies remain evident.

Before we decide on which measurement items of coping should be implemented in this research, we reflect on the study's research objective in this Study 2: To examine the significance of the key learnings from recent leisure travel planning experiences and the relationships of these learning outcomes. Coping is one of the key learning outcomes from Study 1, as it encompasses the strategies tourists use to handle stress and uncertainty when planning and undertaking travel in a world that is still affected by the pandemic. Given the specific nature of the risks associated with infectious diseases, understanding tourists' coping mechanisms require an approach that is directly applicable to this context. The Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism, derived from Lee et al. (2012), is particularly appropriate for this research because it addresses the concrete actions and preparations tourists take to minimise health risks. Measurement items in this parameter (see table 2.4) includes behaviours such as checking information from health authorities, preparing first aid kits, and learning about local medical facilities; actions that are crucial for tourists who need to be well-informed and well-prepared for any health-related contingencies. These items directly align with the research objectives, as they provide a comprehensive picture of how tourists have adapted their coping strategies in response to ongoing health concerns. In contrast, the conventional problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, as described by Gerhold (2020) and Zheng et al. (2021a), offer a more general perspective that may not fully capture the specific and practical aspects of dealing with infectious diseases during travel. While these traditional parameters are valuable for understanding general coping behaviours, they lack the specificity required to assess the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. Statements such as "*I make efforts to do something about the COVID-19 situation*" or "*I tell myself this situation is not real*" do not address the proactive and health-specific measures that are now critical for tourists.

In addition, the parameters provided by the Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism are not only more relevant but also bring better practical implications for stakeholders in the tourism industry. The measurement items within this framework are actionable and granular, offering specific insights into the behaviours tourists adopt to mitigate health risks. For instance, actions such as preparing a first aid kit, learning about local medical facilities, and frequently

checking for updated health advisories are concrete measures that can inform more targeted strategies for public health messaging, travel service enhancements, and policy development. Conversely, the problem-focused and emotion-focused coping measurement items (Gerhold, 2020; Zheng et al., 2021a) are too generic to be actionable. Statements like *"I think carefully about what to do to respond to COVID-19 virus and try to stick with it"* leave a considerable gap in understanding, as they do not specify the exact strategies or actions being considered. For stakeholders, this lack of detail poses a challenge: without knowing precisely what actions tourists are contemplating or implementing, it becomes difficult to offer tailored interventions or resources that could improve tourists' preparedness and safety.

The use of the Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism provides a more comprehensive and practical framework for understanding how tourists actively manage the risks associated with infectious diseases. By specifying actions such as seeking up-to-date health information and preparing medical supplies, this approach captures the concrete, problem-focused strategies that have become essential in post-pandemic travel planning. This specificity not only enhances the depth of the research but also delivers clearer and more actionable insights for stakeholders, including tourism authorities, public health agencies, and travel service providers. With these parameters, stakeholders can develop targeted, evidence-based interventions that support safe and resilient travel practices. Ultimately, this approach ensures that the findings have direct applicability, fostering a tourism ecosystem that is better equipped to respond to health-related challenges and promote tourists' well-being.

Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism (Lee et al., 2012)	Problem-focused Coping (PC) and Emotion-focused Coping (EC) (Gerhold, 2020; Zheng et al., 2021a)
I will check the information on infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) by visiting the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or WTO before travelling internationally.	PC1: I think hard about what I can do to prevent the COVID-19 virus.
I will read and check precautions about infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) through doctors or health centers before travelling internationally.	PC2: I think carefully about what to do to respond to the COVID-19 virus and try to stick with it.
I will prepare a first aid kit for infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) before travelling internationally.	PC 3: I make efforts to do something about the COVID-19 situation.
I will get the information about local medical facilities and country Embassy to prepare for an emergency because of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) before travelling internationally.	PC4: I take actions to try to make the COVID-19 situation better.
I will frequently wash my hands while travelling internationally.	EC1: I gave up trying to deal with COVID-19 prevention.
I will restrain from touching my eyes, nose, and mouth while travelling.	EC2: I gave up attempting to cope with COVID-19 prevention.
I will cover my mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing while travelling internationally.	EC3: I tell myself, "This (the COVID-19 situation) is not real."
I will keep away from those who have the symptoms of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) while travelling internationally.	EC4: I refuse to believe that the COVID-19 has happened.
I will restrain from meet people for a while after travelling internationally.	
I will carefully keep an eye on my health condition after travelling internationally.	

Table 2.4. Measurement items comparison between Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism and Problem-focused and Emotion-focused Coping.

2.9. Nostalgia

Nostalgia, described as a sentimental longing for past positive experiences (Holbrook, 1993), can be evoked by various triggers, such as personal memories, cultural elements, or media representations. It is a pervasive element of daily life, often surfacing in reflective expressions like, "Oh, how I miss those days..." Interestingly, nostalgia does not necessarily depend on direct personal experiences; it can also be inspired vicariously through stories or information gained from social interactions, media, or other sources (Holbrook & Schindler, 1991). For instance, someone might feel nostalgic after hearing a friend recount a memorable trip to Taiwan, vividly described as safe and enjoyable, complete with photos of specific tourist spots. This second-hand account can evoke a nostalgic yearning, leading the listener to think, "I wish I could travel to Taiwan like they did." Thus, nostalgia captures a sentimental longing that can stem from one's own real-life experiences or be triggered by the experiences shared by others.

Fairley and Gammon (2005) categorised nostalgia into two main types: object-based nostalgia and social experience-based nostalgia. Object-based nostalgia refers to a sentimental longing for past positive experiences related to specific objects, which can include places. For example, Matthew (T1) reminisced about the food in Bangkok and the vibrant atmosphere of Chatuchak Market during the pandemic lockdown. His nostalgia for Thailand was so intense that it motivated him to learn the Thai language and, once international travel resumed, he quickly planned a trip to Bangkok. Matthew's case illustrates how nostalgia for a specific place (Thailand) can inspire engagement in activities linked to that location, whether it be language learning or travelling. On the other hand, social experience-based nostalgia focuses on the intangible social experiences rather than physical objects or places. This type of nostalgia is centred around the emotional connections and memories formed through shared experiences. For instance, someone who fondly remembers cooking with their children at home is not necessarily nostalgic about the physical kitchen itself but about the experience of bonding and cooking together with their children.

Other scholars have categorised nostalgia in various ways, often dividing it into more specific types tailored to their research contexts (Christou, 2020; Cho et al., 2021; Shin & Jeong, 2022). Common types identified in these studies include nostalgia for destinations, past lives, and social activities. Each type is defined distinctly. For instance, destination nostalgia is not limited to longing for a place but encompasses any previous travel experiences and the emotional and mental states associated with those places (Cho et al., 2021). Nostalgia for past lives refers to the yearning to relive moments from one's past, often associated with significant life experiences (Christou, 2020). Social activities nostalgia focuses on the emotional longing tied to memories of shared travel experiences with companions (Cho et al., 2021). To distinguish between destination nostalgia and social activities nostalgia, consider the example of an individual reminiscing about a trip to Taiwan. When he reflects on the pleasant weather, memorable conversations with locals, or the emotional state he felt while being in Taiwan, this falls under destination nostalgia. However, when he nostalgically recalls the fun experiences, he had with his travel companions and expresses a desire to recreate those moments with the same group, it represents social activities nostalgia.

There are also classifications based on psychological impact: pathological nostalgia and healthy nostalgia (Martin, 1954). Pathological nostalgia can be seen as a psychological disorder, characterised by an excessive longing for the past that interferes with present life and mental well-being (Martin, 1954). This type often involves being emotionally stuck in past experiences and struggling to adapt to current realities. Healthy nostalgia, on the other hand, is associated with positive reflection on the past without it becoming destructive or hindering daily life (Martin, 1954). This categorisation is relevant in clinical settings but less applicable to this study, which focuses on leisure travel memories that are unlikely to evoke severe psychological distress.

Another important typology is restorative and reflective nostalgia, introduced by Boym (2011). Restorative nostalgia involves an active desire to recreate or return to the past, often driven by dissatisfaction with the present. People with restorative nostalgia might try to bring back lost traditions or organise events that replicate past experiences, like a school reunion or organise traditional festive events to reminisce the good old days. Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, is more contemplative, focusing on the meaning and emotions tied to past experiences. It involves reminiscing without the desire to relive or reconstruct those memories, such as looking at old photo albums or listening to songs from one's youth. These different typologies of nostalgia provide a comprehensive understanding of how longing for the past influences individuals' thoughts and behaviours.

The presence of various typologies indicates that nostalgia can be assessed through different sets of measurement items tailored to each type. For example, when measuring Nostalgia for Destination, a typical item might state, "XXX evoked positive memories about my last trip to YYY." Conversely, Nostalgia for Social Activity could be measured with an item like, "XXX evoked positive memories about travelling with someone." Both are actually referring to the same thing, which is positive memories evoked by a specific event or destination, the way of writing differs slightly to cater for nostalgia type. Furthermore, the specificity of these measurement items often depends on the context and the method used in the survey. Existing measurement scales are designed with the expectation of using a stimulus to refer to a particular location, often presented through formats like videos (Chi & Chi, 2020) or more immersive experiences such as virtual reality (VR) (Shin & Jeong, 2022). In such cases, the location reference within the measurement item is adjusted to match the specific setting or event being shown. For example, an item might read, "*The video of Central Park evokes memories about my travel experience to New York,*" tailored to evoke memories of a particular place.

Despite the differences, a review and analysis of the measurement items across various types of nostalgia reveal several shared characteristics: an emotional connection to the past, anchoring to past experiences, and triggers for nostalgic feelings. All the measurement items (referenced in Table 2.5) consistently highlight emotional recall, employing phrases such as "evoked positive memories," "revived good times," and "pleasant reminders." These phrases aim to quantify how specific stimuli resurrect feelings or longings associated with past experiences, underscoring the emotional core of nostalgia. The second characteristic, anchoring to the past, involves language that specifically references past experiences, like "my last trip" and "the good old days." This highlights the critical temporal dimension of nostalgia, focusing on the connection between past and present emotions, and reinforcing the measurement of a longing or sentimentality for past experiences. Lastly, the triggers for nostalgia, always included in the measurement items, help gauge the intensity of longing for the past, whether it is linked to tangible elements like specific places or travel companions, or intangible aspects such as specific time period or moods.

Nostalgia for Destination	Nostalgia for Past Life	Nostalgia for Social Activity	Generic Nostalgia
XXX evoked positive memories about my last trip to XXX	XXX revived good times from my past	XXX evoked positive memories of travelling with someone	After seeing XXX, I imagine I was travelling in the simple and pure time
XXX evoked memories about my travel experience to XXX	XXX revived memories of my past life when I could travel	XXX evoked positive memories of sharing my travel experience with someone	After seeing XXX, I imagine I was living in the past period
XXX evoked memories about the landscape and scenery of XXX	XXX revived my memories of being a traveller in the past	XXX revived memories of travelling with someone	After seeing XXX, I fantasize about my past travel experience
XXX evoked memories about the local culture of XXX	Through XXX, I experienced positive feelings about when I had enough time to travel	XXX revived good times with someone during my previous trip to XXX	After seeing XXX, I felt like I am back in time
XXX evoked memories about the mood of XXX	Through XXX, I experienced pleasant reminders of my past	XXX was a pleasant reminder of my past trip with someone.	After seeing XXX, I was nostalgic for the time period(s) shown
	Through XXX, I experienced the good old days when I travelled.		After seeing XXX, I felt my imagination was like an avalanche and I thought of all different things about the past

Table 2.5. Measurement items comparison between various types of Nostalgia.

In this research, the nature of nostalgia differs from conventional forms that typically focus on tangible triggers like specific locations or events. Instead, the form of nostalgia observed here is triggered by a broader event, which is the reopening of international borders announced after prolonged COVID-19 restrictions. This announcement served as a critical timestamp trigger, intensifying the nostalgic emotions that had been simmering during the lockdown. This type of nostalgia, which emerged as an unexpected theme during Study 1, offers profound insights into the emotional landscape of tourists post-pandemic, and should be included in the research as one of the parameters.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, the severe restrictions on movement created a unique environment where nostalgia could thrive. Advances in technology, particularly the pervasive presence of social media, played a crucial role. Platforms filled with images, stories, and updates became a digital conduit to past experiences, especially those involving travel. These reminders of pre-pandemic freedoms kept the desire for travel alive in the minds of individuals, brewing a latent nostalgia that was only fully realised when the prospect of international travel resumed. The announcement of reopened borders acted as a significant catalyst, transforming latent nostalgic feelings into a potentially potent motivator for travel. This nostalgia was no longer just a background emotion but became a driving force, pushing tourists to relive or recreate their past international travel experiences. As such, the nostalgia stimulated by the pandemic differs in its triggers and effects from the nostalgia evoked by personal milestones or familiar locations.

Given these unique conditions, it is appropriate to employ generic measurement items for nostalgia in this study. Such items are designed to capture broad emotional longings and are particularly appropriate for assessing the diffuse form of nostalgia experienced by participants. Phrases like "*I miss the feeling of exploring new places*" and "*I long for the sense of adventure and discovery I once had*" are not only suitable but necessary to encapsulate the widespread emotional sentiment prevalent among participants. An illustrative example from Study 1 of the study sheds light on this dynamic. Jene, who longed for her past travel experiences in the United States, was willing to take on the risk of visiting a distant destination with uncertain adherence to COVID-19 preventive measures. This nostalgia seemed to diminish her risk perception, simultaneously enhancing her psychological resilience by providing a sense of familiarity and confidence in managing potential challenges during travel. This case suggests that nostalgia could play a role in diminishing perceived risks or in enhancing psychological resilience by instilling a sense of familiarity and confidence in navigating the destination. In conclusion, nostalgia in this study serves as a moderating variable rather than a primary research focus. Its role is to interpret how emotional connections to past travel experiences shape current travel behaviours in a post-pandemic context. This approach ensures that the research remains anchored to core constructs such as resilience and risk perception, while still recognising the significant influence of nostalgia in the decision-making processes of tourists.

2.10. Optimism Bias

Optimism bias refers to the cognitive phenomenon where individuals overestimate the likelihood of positive outcomes and underestimate the likelihood of negative events happening to them (Gouveia & Clarke, 2001; Sharot, 2011). This bias can significantly influence individuals' assessment and response to risks, often expecting more favourable outcomes than statistics would justify and underestimating the likelihood of adverse events. Initially, this concept was predominantly applied in health studies to explore how optimism bias shapes risk perception and health-related behaviours across various diseases such as cardiac and respiratory diseases (White et al., 2017; Masiero et al., 2018), diabetes (Guo et al., 2019; Rochefort et al., 2020), and cancer (Baumann et al., 2019). Subsequently, the concept has been adopted in non-medical disciplines such as health psychology, which investigates factors influencing optimism bias, whether political (e.g., Wolaver & Doces, 2022) or media-related (e.g., Van der Meer et al., 2022). Various studies have examined how optimism bias impacts adherence to preventive measures against infectious diseases (e.g., Fragkaki et al., 2021; Jeong, 2022; Rentner & Alsulaiman, 2022), noting that individuals with high levels of optimism bias may perceive risks as lower than they actually are, which might diminish their urgency in taking appropriate risk management actions.

Optimism bias can be conceptualised within the framework of dual-process theory, where cognitive (rational) and affective (emotional) processes interact to influence decision-making (Anat & Donald, 2010). Cognitive process involves a rational evaluation aimed at maximising one's benefits, while the affective process is driven by intuition and personal risk perceptions. Optimism bias can significantly influence the affective process by altering an individual's risk perception, thereby impacting the overall decision-making process (Anat & Donald, 2010). This interaction often results in a skewed perception of reality, where positive outcomes are overvalued, and potential threats are undervalued. For example, consider a smoker who is aware of the potential harms of smoking through various credible sources (cognitive).

However, due to the desire to enjoy the emotional benefits of smoking (affective), this individual may alter their risk perception, believing that they are less likely to suffer harm than what is statistically probable (optimism bias). This allows the individual to justify continued smoking, demonstrating how personal goals can influence risk beliefs, reflecting an optimism bias. Thus, optimism bias is not simply an error in risk assessment but also an expression of an inherent desire to maintain a positive outlook for future planning and stress reduction.

Besides, risk perception may shift over time as people accumulate experience with a given risk (Jang et al., 2020). Jang et al. (2020) suggest that people tend to rationally decrease their cognitive risk perception over time during a past epidemic, as they learn from experience and develop coping mechanisms to manage the risk they face. However, their affective risk perception tends to remain heightened throughout, indicating that even with an understanding that the risk has reduced, the fear of the infectious disease persists. Although the research context of our study is similar to that of Jang et al. (2020), where both explore individuals' experiences during an outbreak, our study diverges by demonstrating how this knowledge further influences one's perception of foreign destinations, specifically from the perspective of Malaysian tourists. We explore how experience with managing infectious disease risk influences coping mechanisms and subsequently affects tourist destination perceptions. The findings from Study 1 suggest that optimism bias influences the coping strategies tourists adopt and their perceptions of destinations. For instance, younger individuals who are vaccinated may believe they are less likely to contract the virus compared to older individuals. This optimistic view could make them less cautious about adopting preventive measures and more positive about foreign destinations, despite extensive lockdown experiences and knowledge of COVID-19 threats from credible sources. Consequently, we hypothesize that optimism bias moderates the relationship between risk perception and coping, as well as between risk perception and destination image.

2.11. Destination Image

Destination image, defined as the perceptions and attitudes that a person holds toward a specific destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003), plays a pivotal role in shaping tourists' travel decisions and experiences. It includes various attributes such as physical characteristics, cultural elements, and the overall anticipated experience (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Destination image encompasses both cognitive and affective components that collectively shape tourists' perceptions of a destination. The cognitive component involves the factual knowledge and beliefs about the destination's attributes, such as attractions, amenities, and infrastructure. On the other hand, the affective component relates to the feelings and emotions that a destination evokes in potential tourists (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). These components collectively form the overall image of the destination in the minds of tourists and are widely recognised and cited as fundamental to understanding destination image.

The concept of destination image has garnered significant attention for understanding its formation, antecedents, and consequences. Many factors can impact the overall perception of a destination. In the context of tourism, destination image plays a crucial role in the destination selection process (Ryu et al., 2013). According to the General Framework of Destination Formation, both personal and stimulus factors play a significant role in

influencing destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Personal factors include psychological and social elements, while stimulus factors encompass information sources, previous experiences, and distribution channels (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Personal factors include psychological characteristics and social influences, while stimulus factors comprise information sources, previous experiences, and marketing channels. These factors collectively shape how tourists perceive a destination, ultimately influencing their willingness to visit and their expectations of the experience. Research has shown that a positive destination image is essential for attracting tourists and influencing their satisfaction, which in turn impacts their overall travel experience (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Destinations with a strong and appealing image are more likely to be considered and chosen by potential tourists, making destination image a key factor in tourism marketing and management (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This relationship is crucial for tourism marketing and management, as a favourable destination image not only attracts tourists but also encourages repeat visits and enhances overall satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2020; Lu & Atadil, 2021). A well-crafted destination image can significantly influence a tourist's decision-making process, from the initial consideration phase to the final choice of destination. Understanding this dynamic is vital for destinations aiming to boost their attractiveness and competitiveness in the global tourism market.

The formation of destination image is influenced by various factors, which include both external and internal elements. Marketing efforts, media representation, word of mouth, and personal experiences. Information sources such as travel brochures, advertisements, and social media play a significant role in shaping tourist perceptions (Gartner, 1993). The rapid advancement of digital technology has further transformed the dissemination and accessibility of tourism-related information, with the Internet becoming a primary platform for information exchange and travel planning (Hidalgo Alcázar et al., 2014). The Internet has fundamentally transformed how tourism-related information is disseminated, as well as how people plan and experience travel (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). The rise of virtual interactions among tourists is largely due to the ease with which electronic media allows individuals to search for potential destinations, accommodations, and leisure activities (Hidalgo Alcázar et al., 2014; Jalilvand et al., 2012). Potential tourists have direct access to extensive and valuable information online, enabling them to make plans without relying on travel agencies. Research has confirmed that online browsing plays a dominant role in influencing both the emotional and cognitive aspects of the image formation process (Hidalgo Alcázar et al., 2014). Similar to the participants in the FGDs, all tourists who travelled abroad since the reopening (T1) planned their trips and made purchases online independently, without relying on travel agencies.

While the strong credibility of traditional word of mouth is well-known, scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015), where information exchange occurs digitally rather than through physical interaction. Tseng et al. (2015) studied travel blogs as agents of destination image formation in China and found that digital communications are often informal, with information exchange focusing more on the cognitive aspects, such as the usage or characteristics of specific goods and services. During the Phase 1 FGDs, T1 tourists consistently acknowledged the role of eWOM in shaping their travel choices. They utilised digital platforms, particularly social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Reddit, to assess the safety of their chosen destinations, learn about precautionary

measures, and discover attractions recommended by other tourists and local residents. This heavy reliance on eWOM highlights its significance in contemporary image formation and the decision-making process, as the credibility of online information has become a key determinant in shaping tourists' perceptions and behaviours.

Additionally, prior experiences and cultural backgrounds can affect how tourists perceive a destination (Chon, 1991). A positive destination image is critical for attracting tourists and encouraging repeat visits. It influences tourist expectations and satisfaction, which in turn impacts their overall travel experience (Pike, 2002). Destinations with a strong and appealing image are more likely to be considered and chosen by potential tourists, making destination image a key factor in tourism marketing and management (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). This was evident in Study 1, where most T1 tourists opted for destinations they had previously visited and had a deep understanding of. For example, Kelly, KM, Sara, Jim, and Kye all chose to travel to countries they were familiar with before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their confidence in these choices stemmed from their prior knowledge of the local culture, connections with friends or relatives residing there, and awareness of the destinations' infectious disease protocols.

2.11.1. Destination Image in the Times of Crisis – Especially After COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed the landscape of global tourism, reshaping the destination image of many countries, Major events like the pandemic can dramatically shift tourists' perceptions of destination safety and attractiveness, as highlighted by Zenker and Kock (2020). China, as the initial epicentre of the pandemic, serves as a pertinent example of how significantly a country's destination image can be impacted. The outbreak originating in China has led to heightened fear and apprehension among potential tourists, who may now associate the country with the virus and its spread. This association is likely to result in a prolonged recovery period for China's tourism industry, as the negative perception could deter visitors for an extended time (Barnes, 2020). The challenge for China, and other similarly affected destinations, will be to rebuild their image by emphasising successful containment measures, implementing stringent safety protocols, and promoting positive travel experiences to regain the trust of tourists. This process will require coordinated strategies to highlight the improvements and assure potential visitors feel confident in the safety and attractiveness of the destination.

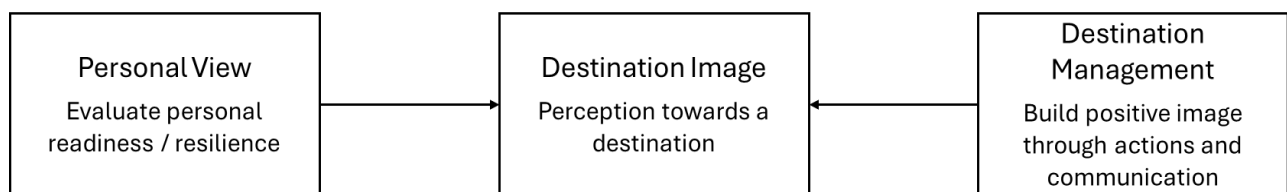


Figure 2.1. Destination image assessment through both individual and destination management assessment.

Such triggering event has altered how tourists evaluate destinations, placing greater emphasis on safety and health considerations. Destination image formation is now a more intricate interplay between tourists' personal assessments and the proactive measures destinations take to shape public perception. On an individual level, tourists assess destinations through a dual lens: evaluating their own resilience and the perceived safety of the environment. Health and safety have become top priorities in the post-pandemic era, superseding leisure and enjoyment from international travel. Research by Ahmad et al.

(2020) and Lu and Atadil (2021) has shown that perceptions of safety and security heavily influence travel intentions and destination image. For instance, Charlene thoroughly assessed her family's health and vaccination status before deciding to travel to Australia. She also actively sought information through various sources, such as SOPs, reviews from other tourists, and insights from her relatives residing in Australia. This comprehensive self-assessment and critical analysis of environmental factors demonstrates the role of personal resilience and coping mechanisms in shaping her perception of the destination.

However, personal views are only one side of the equation. The way destinations present themselves to the public is equally critical. Tourists form perceptions of a destination's environment through the information they receive, and destination with lower COVID-19 infection rate is likely to be viewed more favourably compared to those with higher infection rates. But how do tourists gain this awareness? The answer lies in strategic communication. Research by Lu and Atadil (2021) on China's destination image during the pandemic revealed that media representation and effective crisis communication heavily influence tourist perceptions, reinforcing the importance of effective strategies to manage destination image. Destinations that successfully communicated their safety measures and demonstrated a state of readiness to welcome tourists maintained a positive image and were able to attract visitors even amidst global uncertainty (Ahmad et al., 2020; Lu & Atadil, 2021). Effective communication and proactive crisis management thus play crucial roles in preserving and enhancing destination image. The role of effective communication in this context cannot be overstated, as it has helped to alleviate tourists' health-related concerns and foster trust. Charlene's experience further illustrates this point: her positive perception of Australia was shaped by the availability of reliable information, both online and offline. Study 1 findings show that many tourists, including those who have yet to travel internationally (T2), similarly form destination images based on various digital and social media platforms, which provide essential updates and reassurances.

This dynamic interaction between personal views and destination management strategies highlights the need for destinations to communicate effectively and implement measures that assure tourists of their safety. Tourists' travel decisions are influenced not only by their ability to manage potential risks but also by the extent to which destinations can assure them of safety. The pandemic has also led to a heightened demand for accessible health and safety information, making transparent communication more critical than ever. As a result, this interaction demonstrates that effective destination management is not solely about implementing safety measures but also about ensuring that potential visitors perceive these efforts as credible and feel confident in their readiness to travel.

2.12. Theoretical Model and Hypotheses Development

This section outlines the theoretical framework for understanding the factors influencing tourist behaviour in the post-pandemic travel landscape, particularly focusing on the interplay between risk perception, resilience, coping mechanisms, and destination image. The theoretical model is grounded in Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Resilience Theory (RT), emphasising the adaptive strategies tourists employ to navigate the uncertainties of international travel in a post-COVID-19 environment. The model also incorporates the moderating effects of optimism bias and nostalgia, which shape how tourists perceive and respond to risks.

2.12.1. Risk Perception and Risk Perception related to Infectious Disease

As highlighted earlier in section 2.6.1, risk perception plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' behaviours and decision-making processes. This study distinguishes between two key types of risk perception:

1. **Generic Risk Perception:** This comprises a broad evaluation of various potential risks, including health, financial, societal, and destination service risk that may influence travel decisions
2. **Risk Perception related to Infectious Disease:** This form of risk reception is specifically focused on health-related concerns, particularly in light of the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It involves the perceived threats of contracting infectious diseases while travelling.

It is important to clarify that the measurement items for health risks within generic risk perception differ from those used to assess risk perception specifically related to infectious diseases. The items under generic health risk focus on broader health concerns related to facilities, environmental conditions, and food safety at a destination. For example, items include: *"I am worried that the accommodation facilities will not be sanitary"* and *"I am concerned that the diet may be unhealthy."* Conversely, the measurement items under risk perception related to infectious diseases are more targeted, addressing specific concerns about the threat of infectious diseases. Examples of these items include: *"It is dangerous to travel internationally due to infectious diseases like COVID-19 and Monkeypox"* and *"Infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and Monkeypox are very frightening"* (refer Table 3.4 for the whole list of measurement items). These two types of risk perception capture different dimensions of tourists' concerns. Given their distinct focuses, both types of risk perception will be incorporated in this study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their influence on tourists' behaviours.

2.12.2. Risk Perception and Coping Mechanisms

Risk perception, particularly in the context of health risks related to infectious diseases, has been established as a significant determinant of tourists' travel decisions. As discussed in Section 6.3, coping mechanisms are critical strategies that individuals employ to manage the stress associated with perceived risks. Scholars have established that risk perception significantly influences the type of coping strategies tourists adopt (Han et al., 2022). Specifically, when individuals perceive a high level of risk, they are more likely to engage in strategies that either directly address the threat or manage their emotional response to it.

When tourists perceive elevated risks, whether related to health, safety, or environmental concerns, they may respond by adopting coping mechanisms that align with their assessment of the situation. Higher perceived risks typically drive tourists toward problem-focused coping, which includes proactive actions such as gathering information, adhering to safety guidelines, or taking preventative measures. On the other hand, in situations where risks are perceived as overwhelming or less controllable, tourists may resort to emotion-focused coping strategies to alleviate psychological distress. This might involve techniques like positive reframing or seeking social support to manage anxiety. Past research highlights

the greater effectiveness of problem-focused coping in managing pandemic-related risks. This emphasis on proactive, concrete actions aligns with existing literature, which has shown that problem-focused coping strategies contribute significantly to psychological well-being and effective risk management (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). Furthermore, problem-focused strategies demonstrated their effectiveness not only on a personal level but also collectively, promoting safer tourism practices. The findings of Han et al. (2022) are consistent with earlier research on health crises, such as Lee et al. (2012), which illustrated the efficacy of non-pharmaceutical interventions during the H1N1 pandemic.

Given this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Higher levels of generic risk perception are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.
- H2: Higher levels of risk perception related to infectious disease are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.

2.12.3. Risk Perception and Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt and bounce back from adverse or challenging situations (Luthar et al., 2000). In the context of tourism, resilience plays a crucial role in helping tourists overcome stress and uncertainties associated with travel, especially in the post-pandemic era. Previous studies have shown that individuals who perceive higher risks may develop resilience as a way to cope with and adapt to the challenges they face (Han et al., 2022). Risk perception can act as a catalyst for tourists to build psychological resilience. When tourists perceive elevated risks, they are likely to develop psychological resilience as a means of coping with these threats. This process involves a mental adjustment and practical actions that allow tourists to prepare for potential challenges and to persist in their travel plans despite perceived dangers. For example, research by Lee et al. (2012) found that individuals who perceived higher risks related to health threats were more likely to engage in resilience-building behaviours, such as acquiring knowledge about protective measures and adopting a positive mindset. Similarly, Han et al. (2022) suggest that tourists who perceive significant risks during the COVID-19 pandemic develop psychological resilience by mentally preparing for and adapting to potential disruptions.

Findings from Study 1 provide further evidence supporting these insights. The qualitative data revealed that post-pandemic tourists are now more proactive in their preparations for international travel compared to the pre-pandemic period. Tourists reported taking additional steps, such as purchasing travel insurance, carrying medical kits, COVID-19 test kits, and face masks, and even adjusting their travel schedules to avoid peak periods and crowded places. This behaviour reflects a heightened level of psychological resilience, as tourists are taking proactive measures to adapt to the new travel environment.

The data also suggests that, despite the lifting of international travel restrictions, tourists still perceive travelling during the pandemic as significantly riskier than before the pandemic. They are more conscious of potential health hazards and view travel as an activity that requires careful planning and risk management. The heightened risk perception has led to more meticulous preparation, as tourists recognise that unforeseen health threats may still

arise. Such cautious approach indicates that tourists are not only adapting to a new reality but are also building resilience by proactively managing potential risks. By taking such measures, tourists demonstrate their ability to adapt to a continuously evolving travel landscape, thereby bolstering their psychological resilience.

These findings align with previous studies (Lee et al., 2012; Han et al., 2022), highlighting that increased risk perception leads to the development of psychological resilience. Tourists are not only aware of the potential health threats but are also adopting behaviours that enable them to manage these risks effectively. By preparing for potential challenges, they build a mental and practical buffer that allows them to continue pursuing their travel plans despite uncertainties. As such, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Higher levels of generic risk perception are positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.

H4: Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.

2.12.4. Risk Perception and Destination Image

Destination image refers to the overall perception that tourists hold regarding a travel destination, encompassing both cognitive evaluations (e.g., perceived safety, infrastructure) and affective assessments (e.g., feelings of comfort and enjoyment) (Pike & Ryan, 2004). A positive destination image is crucial for attracting tourists, influencing their travel intentions, satisfaction levels, and overall travel experience (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). However, in the context of a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, perceived risks can significantly alter tourists' perceptions of a destination, thereby impacting its overall image (Ahmad et al., 2020; Lu & Atadil, 2021). Risk perception, particularly related to health and safety concerns, plays a significant role in shaping destination image. Whether due to health threats like infectious diseases or concerns about safety and security, when tourists perceive a destination as risky, they are more likely to develop negative perceptions about that destination (Han et al., 2022; Jahari et al., 2021). This negative perception can lead to reluctance in choosing such destinations, ultimately hindering tourism recovery efforts.

Study 1 findings further corroborate these insights, revealing that tourists have become more cautious when selecting travel destinations post-pandemic. Tourists expressed concerns over factors such as hygiene standards, healthcare infrastructure, and crowd density, which influenced their destination choices. Many tourists indicated that they prioritised destinations perceived to have robust health measures in place because these measures reduced the perceived likelihood of contracting the COVID-19 virus, thereby enhancing the destination's image. Conversely, destinations perceived as lacking adequate safety measures were viewed less favourably, even if they had been popular prior to the pandemic.

These findings align with existing literature suggesting that heightened risk perception negatively impacts destination image. As tourists become more aware of health risks, their assessments of destinations shift, placing greater emphasis on factors that contribute to a sense of security. Thus, risk perception—whether generic or specifically related to infectious diseases—can alter how tourists evaluate destinations, influencing both their willingness to visit and their overall satisfaction.

Based on the above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H5: Higher levels of generic risk perception are negatively associated with destination image.

H6: Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is negatively associated with destination image.

2.12.5. Coping Mechanism and Psychological Resilience

Coping mechanisms, particularly problem-focused strategies, play a critical role in enhancing psychological resilience. Previous research has demonstrated that individuals who actively engage in problem-solving behaviours are better equipped to manage stress and adapt to challenging situations (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). By directly addressing potential threats, whether through gathering information, following safety protocols, or taking preventive measures, tourists can reduce anxiety and increase their capacity to cope with uncertainties, thus strengthening their resilience (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Han et al., 2022). In the context of health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, adopting problem-focused coping strategies has been shown to promote resilience. For example, Lee et al. (2012) found that individuals who proactively prepared for health risks during the H1N1 pandemic were able to maintain their psychological well-being more effectively. Similarly, Biggs et al. (2017) highlighted how these strategies empower individuals to take control of their circumstances, thereby enhancing resilience.

Findings from Study 1 align with this perspective, revealing that post-pandemic tourists have become increasingly proactive in their travel preparations to safeguard their well-being. Tourists reported engaging in actions such as conducting extensive research on their destination of interest, preparing necessary items like medical kits, and purchasing travel insurance. These behaviours, which can be serve as coping strategies, not only mitigate perceived risks but also help tourists feel safer and more confident about their travel plans.

This proactive preparation give tourists confidence in travelling internationally, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience. By taking such measures, tourists perceive that they have adequately prepared for potential challenges, which, in turn, fosters a heightened sense of safety and control. This demonstrates that engaging in problem-focused coping strategies directly contributes to building psychological resilience, enabling tourists to maintain confidence in their travel decisions despite ongoing uncertainties. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: The use of coping strategies is positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.

2.12.6. Psychological Resilience and Destination Image

Destination image is a key factor influencing tourists' travel intentions and satisfaction levels (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). A positive destination image is crucial for attracting tourists, particularly in a post-pandemic context where tourists are more cautious about their choices. While much of the existing research has focused on how destinations can enhance their destination resilience to attract visitors (Chiappa, 2021; Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021), there has been limited exploration into the role of tourists' psychological resilience in shaping destination image (Prayag et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022).

Study 1 findings suggest that tourists who possess higher levels of psychological resilience are more likely to view destinations positively, even amidst uncertainties. This is because resilient tourists are better equipped to adapt to unexpected challenges, such as health-related risks, and are thus more inclined to form favourable perceptions of a destination's safety and appeal. For instance, tourists noted that their resilience enabled them to focus on aspects like the cultural experiences and hospitality of destinations, which in turn enhanced their overall perception of these destinations. This suggests that psychological resilience not only helps tourists manage stress but also influences their overall destination image.

Moreover, the interactive evaluation process highlighted in Study 1 reveals that tourists assess their own resilience alongside the safety measures implemented by a destination. For example, Kelly¹ from the focus groups expressed that her confidence in her ability to adapt and protect herself and her family members significantly influenced her perception of the destination's image. Although she was aware that the risk of contracting COVID-19 was higher compared to the pre-pandemic period (risk perception), she built her resilience through extensive research on how to stay healthy, purchasing travel insurance, and consulting her relatives living in Australia. These proactive measures led her to perceive Australia more positively as a safe destination, as she felt prepared to handle any potential challenges.

This dynamic indicates that tourists' psychological resilience can mediate the relationship between risk perception and destination image, allowing them to reinterpret perceived risks through a more positive lens. Given that existing literature has not yet empirically examined the direct influence of psychological resilience on destination image, this study is among the first to explore this relationship. Additionally, it introduces the novel idea that psychological resilience may serve as a mediating factor between risk perception and destination image. This indicates that resilient tourists are able to reduce the negative impact of perceived risks on their evaluations of a destination, thereby maintaining a more favourable destination image. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

¹ Note: All the names mentioned in this research are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the individuals involved.

H8: Higher levels of psychological resilience are positively associated with a more favourable destination image.

H9: Psychological resilience mediates the relationship between risk perception and destination image, such that higher resilience reduces the negative impact of perceived risks on destination image.

2.12.7. Moderating Variables

In addition to the primary constructs of risk perception, coping mechanism, psychological resilience, and destination image, this study considers several moderating variables that can influence the relationships between these constructs. Moderators are variables that affect the strength or direction of the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Rockwood & Hayes, 2020). Understanding these moderators is crucial because they can provide deeper insights into how different factors influence tourists' decision-making processes. The moderators considered in this study are nostalgia, and optimism bias.

Moderating Role of Nostalgia

Nostalgia, described as a sentimental longing for past positive experiences (Holbrook, 1993). In the context of tourism, nostalgia is often associated with memories of past travel experiences, motivating individuals to revisit destinations that hold personal or collective significance. This emotional connection to past experiences can significantly enhance a tourist's intention to travel, especially when the memories are positive and evoke a sense of comfort and familiarity (Moore & Norman, 2017).

Nostalgia can be triggered by various factors, including personal memories, cultural elements, and media representations. For instance, Chi and Chi (2020) explored how nostalgia is evoked through the reminiscence of others' experiences and found that such shared experiences can significantly improve the individuals' perception towards the given destination. This study highlighted that the emotional attachment to past experiences, whether personal or vicarious, can create a strong desire to revisit destinations associated with those memories. Moreover, Shin and Jeong (2022) examined the impact of Orlando virtual trips on tourists' nostalgia and their intentions to visit the actual destination. Their findings suggest that even virtual experiences can evoke nostalgic feelings and increase the desire to travel, demonstrating that nostalgia can positively influence destination perceptions even in non-physical contexts. Furthermore, Nguyen and Duong (2025) investigated the role of nostalgia in heritage tourism and found a positive correlation between nostalgic emotions and both destination image and travel intent. These findings indicate that integrating nostalgic elements into tourism experiences can enhance a destination's overall appeal.

In the context of this research, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, which restricted tourists' mobility, became a trigger for nostalgic feelings about pre-pandemic international travel. Social media, filled with images, stories, and updates, kept the desire for travel alive by continuously reminding individuals of their past travel experiences. These reminders of pre-pandemic freedoms intensified tourists' longing for travel, which was fully realised when international borders reopened. Despite being aware of potential health risks, many tourists in Study 1 preferred to revisit destinations tied to positive memories,

perceiving them as familiar and safer. This suggests that nostalgia can moderate perceived risk, making destinations more appealing even in the face of lingering health concerns.

While research has shown that nostalgia impacts destination image, there remains limited knowledge about its role in the overall travel decision-making process. For instance, it is understood that nostalgia can influence destination image, but it remains unclear at which stage of planning this impact is most significant. Does nostalgia affect tourists when they are considering potential risks (risk perception) associated with travel, or does it play a role when they are planning their coping strategies (building psychological resilience) for the trip? Study 1 findings offer additional insights into this dynamic. For example, Jene, a focus group participant, expressed a strong desire to revisit the United States despite acknowledging higher levels of uncertainty regarding adherence to preventive measures against COVID-19. Her nostalgia for previous experiences in the United States appeared to reduce her perceived risks and increase her confidence in her ability to manage herself while travelling there. This suggests that nostalgia may lower perceived risks or enhance psychological resilience by providing a sense of familiarity and confidence in one's ability to navigate the destination and hence view the destination more positively. This leads to the next hypotheses:

- H10: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.
- H11: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious disease and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.
- H12: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between psychological resilience and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia strengthen the positive effect of resilience on destination image.

Moderating Role of Optimism Bias

Optimism bias refers to the cognitive phenomenon where individuals overestimate the likelihood of positive outcomes and underestimate the likelihood of negative events happening to them (Gouveia & Clarke, 2001; Sharot, 2011). This bias can significantly influence tourists' decision-making processes, especially in the context of post-pandemic travel. During the COVID-19 pandemic, optimism bias has been shown to affect people's adherence to preventive measures and their perception of risk (Fragkaki et al., 2021; Jeong, 2022; Rentner & Alsulaiman, 2022).

Tourists exhibiting a high level of optimism bias may perceive travel-related risks as less severe than they actually are (Chen et al., 2022). This optimistic outlook can influence their coping strategies, leading them to believe that managing travel risks is less critical. As a result, tourists with higher optimism bias may be more willing to travel, feeling confident in their ability to navigate potential risks. For example, Sara, a participant in Study 1, was willing to travel far to the , believing that her youth, vaccination status, and knowledge of preventive measures would protect her. This optimistic belief not only influenced her coping strategies but also led her to view the UK's destination image more positively.

In the context of this study, optimism bias is considered a moderator that influences two key relationships. First, the relationship between risk perception and coping mechanisms. Tourists with higher levels of optimism bias are likely to perceive risks as less threatening, which may reduce their need for coping strategies. This can result in a weaker relationship between risk perception and the adoption of coping behaviours, as optimistic tourists feel less urgency to take preventive actions. Another key relationship is between risk perception and destination image, tourists with optimism bias may reinterpret perceived risks as less severe, which can enhance their perception of a destination's image. By downplaying potential risks, optimistic tourists are more likely to perceive destinations favourably, despite the objective threats that may exist. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H13: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and coping mechanisms, such that the relationship is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.
- H14: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious diseases and coping mechanisms, such that the relationship is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.
- H15: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and destination image, such that the negative impact of generic risk perception on destination image is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.
- H16: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious disease and destination image, such that the negative impact of risk perception related to infectious disease on destination image is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.

2.13. Summary of Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

This chapter comprehensively reviewed the existing literature and developed hypotheses to understand the factors influencing tourist behaviour in the post-pandemic travel landscape. Grounded in Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Resilience Theory (RT), this study explores how tourists navigate uncertainties in international travel by examining key constructs such as risk perception, coping mechanisms, and psychological resilience. The chapter also introduced the moderating roles of nostalgia and optimism bias, which can shape tourists' decision-making processes and destination perceptions.

The literature review highlighted that risk perception significantly influences tourists' coping strategies, psychological resilience, and destination image. Tourists' risk perception, including both generic and specific to infectious diseases, affect their travel planning and preparedness, which subsequently impacts their coping mechanisms, resilience, and evaluations of destinations. Additionally, qualitative insights from Study 1 revealed that nostalgia and optimism bias can influence tourists' perceptions of risk and their overall destination image, suggesting their potential moderating effects. The integration of existing theories, literature, and qualitative findings led to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

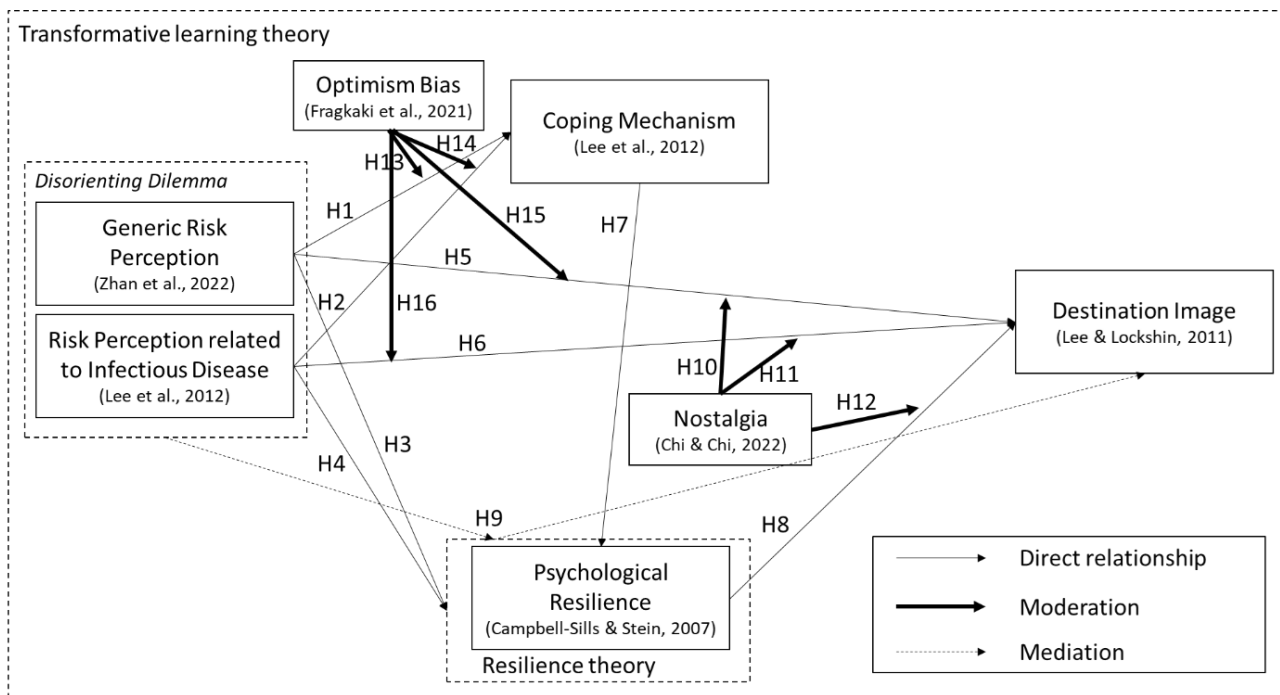


Figure 2.2: Theoretical model of this research

- H1: Higher levels of generic risk perception are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.
- H2: Higher levels of risk perception related to infectious disease are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.
- H3: Higher levels of generic risk perception are positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.
- H4: Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.
- H5: Higher levels of generic risk perception are negatively associated with destination image.
- H6: Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is negatively associated with destination image.
- H7: The use of coping strategies is positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.
- H8: Higher levels of psychological resilience are positively associated with a more favourable destination image.
- H9: Psychological resilience mediates the relationship between risk perception and destination image, such that higher resilience reduces the negative impact of perceived risks on destination image.
- H10: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.

- H11: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious disease and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.
- H12: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between psychological resilience and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia strengthen the positive effect of resilience on destination image.
- H13: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and coping mechanisms, such that the relationship is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.
- H14: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious diseases and coping mechanisms, such that the relationship is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.
- H15: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and destination image, such that the negative impact of generic risk perception on destination image is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.
- H16: Optimism bias moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious disease and destination image, such that the negative impact of risk perception related to infectious disease on destination image is weaker for tourists with higher optimism bias.

In conclusion, the adoption of TLT and resilience theory in this study is driven by their relevance in explaining the dynamic processes that underpin tourists' behavioural adaptations in the post-pandemic context. TLT provides a robust foundation for understanding how tourists reinterpret their travel experiences through critical reflection, leading to transformative changes in attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making processes. This perspective aligns well with the post-pandemic travel environment, where individuals are constantly reassessing risks, adjusting their expectations, and redefining their travel motivations. Resilience theory, on the other hand, complements TLT by highlighting how tourists develop coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies to manage the uncertainties and challenges associated with post-pandemic travel. It emphasises the capacity of tourists to withstand disruptions, maintain positive outlooks, and rebound from setbacks, which is essential in fostering sustainable travel intentions amidst evolving health and safety concerns.

By integrating TLT and resilience theory, this research establishes a comprehensive framework that captures both the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of post-pandemic travel adaptation. This dual-theory approach not only enhances the theoretical depth of the research but also ensures that the findings are well-grounded in established concepts that are pertinent to understanding tourists' transformation and resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACHES

This chapter outlines the study design approach in three main sections. The first section focuses on the philosophical assumptions, research methodology, rationale for the research design, and ethical considerations of this study.

The second section elaborates the qualitative research approach employed to explore the learning and adaptation processes of tourists during the post-pandemic period. It begins with researcher positioning, establishing the role and perspective of the researcher in the research. Respondent recruitment strategies are then detailed, followed by an overview of the data collection methods. This section further discusses the use of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and projective techniques to uncover unarticulated narratives. The data analysis process is described in detail to ensure a systematic approach to interpreting the findings. Additionally, the section addresses data trustworthiness, emphasising the reliability and validity of the research outcomes.

The third section delineates the second phase of this research, which adopts a quantitative approach to empirically examine the relationships between variables identified from theoretical frameworks, such as the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Resilience Theory (RT), and to validate the findings through statistical analysis. This section presents the research design, respondent recruitment strategy, survey instrument, data collection procedure, and analytical techniques employed to achieve the objectives of this study.

3.1. Philosophical Assumption of This Research

To recap, the overarching objective is to explore how individuals' perceptions of travel risks have changed after a 2-year lockdown, to understand the learning processes tourists use to ensure safety during international trips post-border reopening, and examine how these acquired protective measures influence their travel preparations and actions. Due to the constraint of limited secondary data availability, researchers must engage in extensive primary data collection. Consequently, determining the most suitable research approach to address the objectives becomes imperative. Before identifying the research approach, establishing the philosophical assumptions is essential. Philosophical assumptions guide the formulation of research goals and outcomes, ultimately shaping the selection of an appropriate research approach for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

This research is anchored from epistemological assumption, where the researcher immerses in the research and understands the phenomenon by being close to the relevant subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This research aims to uncover the “what” and “how” of tourists' behaviour in the context of international leisure travel. For instance, *what* do the tourists do to ensure their international trip is safe and enjoyable? *How* do they decide which countries are safe to visit? To answer these questions, it is essential for the researcher to immerse in the research and maintain close interactions with tourists (i.e. the relevant subject), to explore the phenomenon comprehensively, including any changes in international travel behaviour. By adopting epistemological assumptions, this study aims to gain insights into Malaysian tourists barriers to international travel and their resilience-building strategies through direction interaction and engagement with them.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and uncover underlying truths, it is crucial to determine an appropriate research approach. The objectives of this research lean towards exploration and subjective understanding of the experiences of Malaysian tourists, aligning well with the principles of constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this approach, researchers aim to construct meaning through open-ended questioning, allowing for a nuanced understanding of respondents' perspectives. However, the research extends beyond exploration; it seeks to validate and analyse the interactions between identified factors, shedding light on their significance in shaping travel perceptions and behaviours. Given this multifaceted aim, pragmatism emerges as fitting, offering the flexibility needed to comprehend the learning process in tourists' travel intentions and the role of identified factors therein (Morgan, 2014).

3.2. Selecting an Appropriate Methodology

Pragmatism is particularly suitable for this study because it accommodates multiple interpretations of a context, enabling researchers to identify appropriate courses of action to address the situation effectively (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Unlike traditional philosophical approaches, pragmatism acknowledges that truth may evolve over time, allowing for flexibility in research methods.

In the context of this research, a singular research strategy, whether quantitative or qualitative, falls short in fully addressing the primary research inquiries and objectives. While quantitative research can identify significant factors influencing travel risk perception and decisions, it lacks the depth to uncover the nuanced evolution of travel risk perception amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the learning processes among tourists striving for safe and enjoyable international travel post-border reopening. On the other hand, while qualitative research can provide valuable insights, it may struggle to validate and measure significance with a sufficiently large and representative sample size. Hence, a mixed-methods approach integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies is chosen to afford a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Mixed-methods research is a comprehensive and intricate methodology that incorporates the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative research component conceptualises the transformative learning journey among tourists, exploring motivators and barriers to travel, as well as protective measures adopted before, during, and after trips. Subsequently, the quantitative research component refines and validates these exploratory findings. By integrating findings from both types of data, this approach provides nuanced insights into a phenomenon. It goes beyond traditional qualitative and quantitative analyses by leveraging the strengths of each method to complement one another. This approach aligns with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) recommendation that mixed-methods research is appropriate when research problems require both exploration and validation.

Even though it is evident that a mixed-methods approach is appropriate for this research, it is equally important to determine the specific type of mixed-method design to be employed. Morgan (1998) initially proposed a typology with four types of mixed-method designs, based on usage sequence, duration of each method and weightage in terms of impact in answering the research. Over time, the definitions and characteristics of these designs have evolved,

leading to Creswell & Plano Clark's (2011) classification of six major design types, which are as follows:

1. Convergent Parallel – Conduct quantitative and qualitative research simultaneously with equal priority, analyse them independently, and then integrate the results during interpretation
2. Explanatory Sequential – Conduct quantitative research first, followed by qualitative research to explain the initial quantitative results
3. Exploratory Sequential – Conduct qualitative research first, followed by quantitative research to generalize the initial qualitative findings.
4. Embedded – Integrate a secondary data type (either qualitative or quantitative) within the main research design to support the primary method used in the study.
5. Transformative – Conduct research with a purpose beyond just gathering data, using various methods to advocate for social change.
6. Multiphase – Combine both sequential and concurrent strands within the research design.

Guest & Fleming (2015) extracted common dimensions from the existing typologies to assist scholars in identifying the most suitable research design for their studies. These dimensions are timing, weighting and purpose. *Timing* refers to the chronological order in which research methods are employed, whether concurrently or sequentially. *Weighting* pertains to the relative emphasis placed on qualitative or quantitative methods, indicating which method takes precedence or whether they are treated equally. *Purpose* denotes the overarching aim of employing mixed methods, such as exploration, explanation, or validation.

Firstly, in terms of *timing*, this design prioritises qualitative data collection and analysis before moving on to quantitative research. This sequence is appropriate because the study aims to uncover nuanced insights and patterns related to tourists' transformative learning and resilience-building in the post-pandemic context. Only after understanding these complex phenomena qualitatively can the study proceed to quantitatively assess the prevalence and significance of the identified constructs.

Secondly, regarding weighting, this study places greater emphasis on the qualitative phase, as it serves as the foundational stage for generating insights and identifying key themes related to tourists' lived experiences and behavioural changes. The primary objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of tourists' lived experiences and behavioural changes before testing the generalisability of these insights through quantitative validation. While the quantitative phase is important, it functions primarily as a means of validating and extending the insights gained from the initial qualitative exploration, rather than being the dominant component of the research process.

Lastly, the purpose of choosing the exploratory sequential design is to develop a robust understanding of emerging behaviours in post-pandemic tourism. This approach enables the researcher to generate hypotheses and theoretical insights from qualitative findings, which are then tested and confirmed through quantitative measures. Given the emerging nature of post-pandemic tourism behaviour, it is crucial to first capture the lived experiences and perspectives of tourists to understand how their attitudes and behaviours have evolved.

By doing so, the study ensures that the quantitative phase is grounded in real-world experiences, making the results both contextually relevant and empirically validated.

In summary, the *exploratory sequential design* aligns with the study's objectives by allowing for an in-depth exploration of new phenomena, giving priority to qualitative insights before quantitative testing, and achieving the purpose of understanding and validating evolving tourist behaviours in a dynamic post-pandemic landscape.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) guidelines. The research topic is related to tourism, which does not collect sensitive or private information, hence the application for ethics clearance constituted a low-risk human research category (Monash University, 2020). The application was submitted and received approval from MUHREC.

Following protocol, research explanatory statements (Appendix A) and consent forms (Appendix B) were provided to and signed by all respondents. Prior to recruitment, respondents were required to review research explanatory statements to grasp the context of the study, and then read and sign consent forms, which ensured their anonymity and the confidentiality of their personal identifiable information. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw from participation at any point during the study.

3.4. Research Rigour

Given the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods, it is important to ensure the rigour of mixed-methods research. Creswell (2022) provides a guideline summary comprising of nine essential elements to incorporate in order to uphold this rigour:

1. Type of research design
2. Recruitment procedures
3. Sampling approach
4. Number of respondents
5. Types of collected data
6. Instruments used for data collection
7. Data cleaning before analysis
8. Data analysis procedure
9. Approach to ensure data validity and reliability

These elements will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections to provide a comprehensive understanding.

3.5. Qualitative Research Phase

3.5.1. Researcher Positioning

It is also vital to acknowledge the positioning of the researcher as the researcher may be biased in the interpretation of the data (Morrow, 2005). I am the only researcher in this study who is responsible for recruiting, scheduling, drafting the interview guide, conducting the interviews, note-taking, analysing and finalising the major themes and result narration. My prior working experience as a qualitative researcher in a multi-national market research agency has been valuable throughout the fieldwork. Besides, all the respondents in this study are Malaysian; having a moderator with similar nationality like myself helps to set a more comfortable environment for participants to share their feelings about international travel.

3.5.2. Sampling

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not aim for probability sampling to achieve generalisation or validation. Instead, it requires a small, intentional sample that can best inform the researcher about the problem under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this study, the aim was to gain a nuanced understanding of post-pandemic travel behaviours and resilience-building among Malaysian tourists. To achieve this, two types of respondents were identified as most relevant: (i) *Malaysian tourists who have travelled internationally since the reopening of borders* (i.e., since April 2022) (T1), and (ii) *Malaysians who have not travelled internationally since reopening* (although they may have travelled abroad prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) (T2). This selection allows for the exploration of diverse perspectives regarding international travel experiences and motivations in the post-pandemic context.

To ensure the selection of respondents who would provide meaningful insights, this study employed a *criterion* purposive sampling strategy. *Criterion* purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting individuals who meet specific pre-established criteria that are vital to addressing the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this study, the key criteria were: (1) having or not having undertaken international travel since the reopening of borders, and (2) being a working adult with financial autonomy. This strategy was chosen because it enables the identification of participants who possess firsthand experiences or relevant perspectives related to international travel after the pandemic.

To execute this sampling strategy effectively, a short screening questionnaire was administered prior to the group discussion. The questionnaire collected travel status information (e.g., "Did you travel out of Malaysia in the last year?") as well as socio-demographic data (e.g., age, gender, educational level). This screening process was essential to ensure that the selected participants met the inclusion criteria, thereby enhancing the relevance and coherence of the data collected.

Respondent recruitment was conducted using a combination of strategies, including advertisements on personal social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), postings within the university campus, and word-of-mouth referrals. These methods were chosen to maximize outreach while ensuring alignment with the target population. The emphasis on working adults was intentional, as they are more likely to possess the financial

capacity and autonomy to plan and fund international trips, which aligns with the study's objective of understanding self-funded travel behaviours and resilience-building.

A total of 30 respondents were initially recruited, but due to last-minute dropouts, 27 were eventually interviewed

Profiles	Categories	Interview (n = 27)	
		n	%
Gender	Male	12	44.4
	Female	15	55.6
International Travel Behaviour	Travelled internationally (TI)	14	51.9
	Yet to travel internationally (YTI)	13	48.1
Age group	20 - 29	10	37.0
	30 - 39	14	51.9
	40 - 49	1	3.7
	50-59	2	7.4
	60 and above	0	0.0
Education Level	Primary	0	0.0
	High School	1	3.7
	Degree	15	55.6
	Postgraduate	11	40.7
Marital Status	Single	21	77.8
	Married without kid	5	18.5
	Married with kid	0	0.0
	Single Parent	1	3.7
Monthly Household Income (MHHI)	Less than RM 2,500	2	7.4
	RM 2,501 - RM 3,169	3	11.1
	RM 3,170 - RM 3,969	3	11.1
	RM 3,970 - RM 4,849	1	3.7
	RM 4,850 - RM 5,879	1	3.7
	RM 5,880 - RM 7,109	3	11.1
	RM 7,110 - RM 8,699	4	14.8
	RM 8,700 - RM 10,959	3	11.1
	RM 10,960 - RM 15,039	2	7.4
	More than RM 15,040	5	18.5
COVID-19 Contraction Frequency	Never	12	44.4
	Once	12	44.4
	Twice	3	11.1
	Three times or more	0	0.0

Table 3.1: Interviewed respondents in the focus group discussion (FGD)

The respondents were predominantly single in marital status, with high educational levels; and half of them never contracted COVID-19 virus (Table 3.1). The respondents were grouped into 6 separate sessions, with 4-5 respondents in each group. To ensure the homogeneity within the group, 3 groups consisted of respondents who travelled internationally since reopening (TI) and another 3 groups consisted of respondents who have yet to travel internationally since reopening (YTI). Such group designs would allow us to understand two extreme perspectives and learn about their journey on international travel

planning for a post-pandemic context. Maintaining homogeneity within each FGD is crucial to avoid interactions and conflicts that are not related to the topic between the respondents (Malhotra et al., 2002). Hence, homogeneity in terms of international travel status for each FGD is applied in this research. After 6 group interviews, a high degree of similar themes emerged, indicating the collection had reached data saturation point.

Before any group discussions, all respondents are required to acknowledge the explanatory statement (Appendix A) and e-sign consent form (Appendix B) to ensure they are informed on the following:

- 1) Research context – All the respondents understand the brief context of the research, commitment required for the research, reason to be chosen for the research, the academic discipline of the research and remuneration from participation
- 2) Data confidentiality, storage of data, possible use of data for other purposes
- 3) Complaint channel

3.5.3. Data Collection

This research explored the phenomenon of transformative leisure travel through the lived experiences of Malaysian tourists who travelled abroad since reopening (April 2022) and understand the barriers to travelling abroad. A semi-structured discussion guide (see Appendix 3) is drafted based on the research questions, applicable to both TI and YTI respondents. This semi-structured discussion guide is designed to prompt TI respondents to reflect on their recent travel experience, critically assess their situation to travel during the trip and discuss the perceived impact of their travel experience. It also stimulates YTI respondents to reflect about their pre-pandemic travel experience, critically assess the lack of travel motivation and discuss the perceived risk during post-pandemic travel. Using a semi-structured discussion guide allows the researcher to gather insights related to the research objectives, at the same time allow insights exploration based on respondents' discussions.

3.5.3.1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

We adopted focus group discussion (FGD) as the qualitative research approach, this is because travel planning and consideration is a generic topic that does not consist of any sensitive or private information, which people are comfortable to discuss in a group setting. Besides, travel is considered a leisure activity and often requires intensive planning and research. Thus, it is an engaging topic to discuss in a group setting, where the respondents can share their experiences, exchange ideas and build upon each other's insights (Gordon, 2009). Those conducted FGDs confirmed the reasoning, the respondents were excited in exchanging their learnings, decision-making processes and experiences throughout the sessions.

The duration of each FGD took around 90–120 minutes. The respondents may shift the conversations based on their experiences and shared ideas, thus a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 3) was prepared to help steer the discussion back to the objectives if it strayed too far, while still allowing for new discoveries to arise. The majority of the sessions (4 out of 6) were conducted online via Zoom, reflecting a continuation of

habits formed during the lockdown period when people became more comfortable with online interactions. Additionally, all sessions were conducted in English, ensuring there were no potential inaccuracies and errors in translation and transcription. All the sessions were recorded in audio and video, and later transcribed.

3.5.3.2. Projective Techniques in Unveiling Unarticulated Narratives

It may be stimulating to share their travel experience, but the respondents may not discuss or share everything in detail or even unaware their deeper thoughts relating to international tourism. In order to understand their thoughts in-depth and encourage them to be more open in sharing details, several projective techniques were used to sift such information (Gordon & Langmaid, 1988):

1. Word association

The purpose is to understand their instinctive association of a trigger word – ‘international travel’, from practical and emotional perspectives. This test is conducted verbally, by asking “*What comes to your mind when I say, ‘international travel’?*” Such activity gave me a variety of associated vocabulary, so that I can use those words to discover their thoughts and emotions in detail. This is also an engaging test where the respondents captured some vocabulary and discussed it among themselves, which is an observational finding.

2. Projective questioning

People usually find it difficult to talk about themselves, as they feel their opinions may be judged by others. And such information is crucial to understand their thoughts and feelings. This technique allows them to share their opinions from a third-person perspective, reducing their self-consciousness so that they can express themselves freely. Example questions used in this research are: (i) If your friend is thinking whether he/she should travel abroad, what would you suggest? (ii) Other T1 respondents told me that travelling to neighbouring countries is better, why do you think they said that?

3. Role Play

This technique is usually used to identify the feeling about certain countries or certain considerations related to international travel. Respondents may provide insights from different perspectives, allowing us to understand how considerations may differ when one of the elements was changed. Such technique was used in different stages of discussions: (i) Let’s say now you are going to travel somewhere, at the airport customs, checking-in. I am the customs officer there and I have requested to open your luggage bags. What would I see in those bags? (ii) Imagine your friend has just returned from country X (country name is determined from the discussion, usually asked twice with two distinctive different countries, e.g. neighbouring country and further country) and is now sharing their experience with you, how would you react? (iii) Your friend is thinking whether they should travel abroad; how would you advise them?

3.5.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is adopted for data analysis in this research, as it is a fundamental qualitative analysis method that identifies, analyses, organises, and describes the themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis method will uncover insights related to travel risk perception, travel appetite, behaviour change and most importantly, transformative learning process to ensure safe and enjoyable international vacations. The sequence of analysis follows the guide from Braun & Clarke (2006).

Analytic steps	Description
Familiarising the data	Transcribe the data, understand the data by re-reading, taking notes
Generate initial codes	Code the interesting features in the data in a systematic way
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gather related data into the themes
Reviewing themes	Check if the themes are related to the coded context
Defining and naming the themes	Refine the features of each theme, generate clear names for each theme
Reporting	Discussion of analysis, relate the themes back to the research question or literature, write manuscript

Table 3.2: Thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Familiarising the Data

Familiarisation with the data is the first step in thematic analysis, involving a thorough engagement with the data to gain an in-depth understanding of its content. This step is crucial as it lays the foundation for identifying patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, data familiarisation starts during the fieldwork, where the researcher takes detailed notes and debriefs supervisors after each FGD session. These debriefings allow us to record findings, reflect on the discussions, and evaluate our moderation approach, helping us to uncover potential points for further exploration in subsequent sessions.

We made slight adjustments during the fieldwork to improve our understanding and ensure we gathered comprehensive insights. Noting down initial themes during the sessions enabled us to dive deeper into these areas in later discussions. All sessions were audio-recorded and meticulously transcribed to preserve the context of the conversations, which was essential for a thorough analysis. By combining these notes, reflections, and transcriptions, we effectively familiarized ourselves with the data, setting the stage for the next steps in thematic analysis.

Generate Initial Codes

Generating initial codes is the second step in thematic analysis, where key features of the data are identified and labelled to capture their essence. This step is vital as it helps to organise the data into meaningful groups, laying the groundwork for theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After transcribing the audio recordings, I carefully read through the transcripts multiple times to immerse myself in the data and identify significant phrases, words, or sentences. Each of these significant segments was systematically assigned a label or "code" that succinctly captured its meaning. This manual coding process ensured a deep engagement with the data, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the respondents' perspectives.

Following the guidelines of Bogdan and Biklen (2007), I searched for regularities and similar patterns within the data. This involved meticulously examining the transcripts for recurring topics and themes that emerged across different focus group discussions. By highlighting and recording words and phrases that represented these topics and patterns, I was able to capture the essence of what the respondents were conveying. To further systematise the coding process, I developed a list of coding categories. This list was comprehensive, covering a range of topics and patterns identified during the initial reading of the transcripts. The coding categories served as a reference to ensure consistency and thoroughness in the coding process. The initial coding process was iterative, with codes being refined and adjusted as new insights emerged. Throughout this process, I frequently consulted with my supervisors to ensure the consistency and reliability of the coding. These consultations helped me to verify the codes and refine them as necessary, ensuring that our coding accurately reflected the data. This meticulous approach to generating initial codes, guided by the principles outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), ensured a robust foundation for the subsequent thematic analysis.

Searching for Themes

The third step in thematic analysis, searching for themes, is pivotal in transitioning from individual codes to broader patterns of meaning within the data. Themes serve as encapsulations of significant concepts derived from the collation and integration of various codes into cohesive categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, after generating a comprehensive list of codes, the focus shifted to identifying overarching themes by analysing the coded segments. This involved discerning connections and relationships between codes, aiming to group them under coherent themes that captured the essence of the data. The process required careful review of the coded data to identify recurring patterns and associations indicative of potential themes.

To refine the coding process, I implemented a method called data reduction. This involved meticulous review of transcripts and notes to fine-tune coding categories, ensuring precision and eliminating overlaps or redundancies. Multiple iterations through the coding process were undertaken, with periodic revisits to validate codes and maintain coherence over time, enhancing the reliability of the analysis. Throughout this phase, constant reference to the original data ensured alignment between emerging themes and respondents' perspectives. Collaborative discussions with supervisors further enriched the process, facilitating refinement and adjustment of themes to accurately capture the depth and complexity of

respondent experiences. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, efforts were directed towards developing distinct yet interconnected themes that provided a coherent narrative of the data. Each theme was clearly defined, with sub-themes identified where necessary to capture nuanced insights.

In summary, searching for themes involved a meticulous examination of initial codes to identify broader patterns and relationships. Through iterative reviews, themes were developed to condense key findings, laying the foundation for further analysis and refinement in subsequent stages of the thematic analysis process.

Reviewing Themes

During the thematic analysis process, reviewing themes is a critical step that ensures the coherence and relevance of identified themes. This stage involves examining the emerging themes in relation to the coded data to validate their accuracy and comprehensiveness. Upon identifying initial themes, a systematic review of the coded segments is conducted to assess the fit and alignment of each theme with the underlying data. This process involves revisiting the coded data to verify that the themes accurately capture the key insights and nuances present in the dataset.

Themes are analysed within the theoretical framework of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) to review and analyse how they emerge in the context of this framework. The 10-step process from TLT serves as a lens to evaluate the themes and ascertain whether they align with the theory or require revision to better fit the context. This ensures that the themes not only reflect the data but also contribute to theoretical understanding and interpretation.

In addition to reviewing themes through the lens of TLT, a review of the literature also involved evaluation of any behaviour types identified in latent research that are possibly relevant to the research objectives. This process helps identify factors and measurement items for the second phase of the research involving a quantitative survey. By integrating insights from existing literature, the analysis gains depth and context, enriching the interpretation of themes and findings. By aligning the themes with these objectives, the thematic analysis provides valuable insights into the research questions and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

Defining and Naming the Themes

Defining and naming themes is a crucial phase in thematic analysis where the identified themes are refined and clearly articulated to capture the essence of the data. This step involves a detailed analysis to ensure that each theme is distinct, coherent, and accurately represents the underlying data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process begins by reviewing each theme to clarify its scope and content. This involves a thorough examination of the data extracts associated with each theme to ensure they provide a comprehensive and consistent narrative. Each theme is then defined by outlining its key characteristics, capturing the central idea that it represents. This process helps in distilling the core essence of each theme, making it easier to understand and communicate. During this phase, the themes are also named in a way that succinctly conveys their essence. The names should be concise, descriptive, and reflective of the data they represent. This naming process is

essential for effective communication of the findings, as it allows the themes to be easily recognized and understood by others.

To further ensure that the themes are well-defined and accurately named, they are cross-checked with the theoretical framework of TLT and existing literature. This step involves assessing whether the themes align with the stages of TLT and whether they resonate with findings from previous studies. This cross-referencing not only validates the themes but also situates them within a broader theoretical and empirical context.

Additionally, defining and naming themes also involves considering how they address the research objectives. For example, themes that reflect shifts in travel risk perception and learning processes adopted by tourists directly relate to the objectives of assessing changes in perceived risks and understanding safety measures during international trips. Ensuring that the themes align with the research objectives enhances the coherence and relevance of the analysis.

Finally, the process includes the creation of a detailed description for each theme, including illustrative quotes from the data. These descriptions provide a nuanced understanding of each theme and demonstrate how they were derived from the data. This detailed documentation is crucial for transparency and rigor in qualitative research.

Reporting

The final phase of thematic analysis is reporting, where the themes and findings are presented in a clear, coherent, and compelling manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase involves crafting a narrative that not only describes the themes but also illustrates how they address the research questions and objectives.

The reporting process begins by organising the themes into a logical structure that flows smoothly. Each theme is presented in a separate section or subsection, with a clear and concise introduction that outlines its relevance and significance. This organization helps to guide the reader through the findings, making it easier to understand the key insights and their implications.

To ensure that the reporting is comprehensive, the themes are discussed in relation to the research objectives. This involves explicitly linking the findings to the objectives, demonstrating how each theme addresses specific aspects of the research questions. For example, themes related to changes in travel risk perceptions and safety measures adopted by tourists can be directly tied to the objectives of understanding shifts in perceived risks and examining learning processes for ensuring safety during international trips.

Additionally, the themes are discussed in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, such as TLT. This step involves comparing the findings with previous studies and theoretical concepts to highlight similarities, differences, and new insights. This contextualisation not only validates the themes but also situates them within a broader scholarly discourse, enhancing the credibility and relevance of the findings.

3.5.5. Data Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) have established a set of criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research's data worthiness, which are:

Data Worthiness elements	Description
Credibility	Actions taken to ensure the truthfulness of the data
Dependability	Ensure a logical, traceable research process (Tobin & Begley, 2004)
Confirmability	Audit to identify any possible bias due to personal experience or research interest
Transferability	Ability to transfer all information related to the research process for replication

Table 3.3: Data Worthiness Elements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Such criteria are to ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, through a comprehensive approach. Each element is meticulously addressed through various strategies, ensuring that the findings are robust, reliable, and applicable to broader contexts. This rigorous approach not only strengthens the validity of the research but also enhances its contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Credibility

To ensure the overarching trustworthiness of the data, a multifaceted approach is employed. Central to this endeavour is the establishment of credibility, whereby the veracity and validity of the shared experiences and opinions (data) are assured. This objective is pursued through the cultivation of trust-based relationships with respondents, a thorough comprehension of their perspectives, conscientious researcher positioning, and peer review of data interpretation. In essence, the attainment of data credibility hinges upon the establishment of trust relationships with oneself, respondents, and peers throughout the research trajectory.

The cultivation of trust relationships with respondents commences from the recruitment phase, serving as the initial point of contact. The interactions at this juncture significantly influence respondents' propensity to engage in FGDs and their willingness to candidly share their experiences within a group setting. Initial interactions determine their willingness to participate in FGD sessions and their eagerness in sharing their experiences in a group setting. I spent time getting to know the respondents individually, through screening criteria for participation and understanding their personal backgrounds. It helps in 'fitting' myself between the respondents and their views. Their understanding of the explanatory statement regarding the research and signing of the consent form enforces the legitimacy of the research and their willingness to share their views freely.

Further consolidation of data credibility occurs during the subsequent contact point—FGD sessions—wherein respondents and researchers convene either in-person or virtually (e.g., via Zoom video calls) for the first time. My researcher role as 'someone who wishes to

understand more about them' is established at the beginning of the sessions, where I set a comfortable atmosphere through an informal conversation approach. This conducive environment engenders a sense of safety, emboldening respondents to express themselves freely. Encouraged by this rapport, I can then seek clarifications from respondents, who are now predisposed to open dialogue. Post-discussion, preliminary findings and emergent themes are deliberated with my peers or supervisors, with insights garnered serving to refine subsequent inquiries and deepen the exploration of the phenomenon under study.

Dependability

Dependability focuses on the consistency and reliability of research findings over time. Achieving dependability involves a systematic and rigorous approach to data collection and analysis. Employing thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), ensures a structured and replicable process. The coding process is meticulously conducted, with themes being revisited and refined to maintain consistency. Throughout the analysis phases, steps are taken to ensure trustworthiness, including careful data storage and organisation, and clear documentation of the analysis approach. The findings and their interpretations will be clearly reported in the following chapters, adhering closely to the principles of thematic analysis to ensure reliability.

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures that the research findings are shaped by the participants' responses rather than researcher bias, and that the interpretations are logically derived from the data. Several strategies were implemented to achieve this.

First, reflexivity played a crucial role. My professional qualitative research experience trained me to approach data and respondents' responses objectively, without judgment. The core of qualitative research is not about the researcher, but about the respondents and the phenomenon in this research. Given their diverse backgrounds, I consciously noted potential biases related to considerations and decision-making processes due to demographic differences. I constantly reminded myself to understand the data and respondents objectively to minimise unintentional bias.

Second, member checking was utilised during the data analysis phase. I discussed and presented the emerging themes and interpretations to some respondents to obtain their feedback on whether these accurately represented their experiences and views. The presentation was made in layman terms to ensure they could easily understand and provide meaningful feedback.

Third, peer debriefing was a consistent practice. I regularly debriefed my supervisors after every FGD session, during the analysis phase, and after the analysis was completed. These discussions provided valuable feedback and helped refine the findings.

Additionally, prolonged engagement was essential in building trust and understanding the respondents' perspectives. Although the FGD sessions lasted only 90-120 minutes, my engagement with the respondents began during the recruitment period. We chatted briefly about our lives, getting to know each other, and discussing their travel appetites and habits prior to the FGD sessions. This extended engagement helped create a comfortable environment for respondents to share openly during the FGDs.

Triangulation was also employed to enhance confirmability. This involved using multiple data sources, perspectives, and methods to cross-verify the findings. By comparing the results from different FGDs and triangulating them with existing literature, the research findings were validated and confirmed. During the review of themes, I analysed the data through the theoretical framework of TLT to understand how the themes emerged within this theoretical process. This iterative review ensured that the themes accurately reflected participants' perspectives and aligned with TLT 10-step framework, allowing for any necessary revisions to fit the context. Additionally, while reviewing the themes, I examined existing literature to evaluate any behaviour types identified and integrated these insights into the research. This step was crucial for identifying factors and measurement items for the second phase of this research, which involves a quantitative survey. These efforts ensured the research objectives were addressed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or groups. To enhance transferability, detailed and rich descriptions of the research context, respondents, and the phenomena being studied are provided. This involves describing the settings of the FGDs, the backgrounds of the respondents, and the specific contexts in which the data were collected. By offering these detailed descriptions, other researchers can make informed decisions about the applicability of the findings to different contexts.

Additionally, to support transferability, the selection criteria for respondents are documented comprehensively. This includes demographic information and other relevant characteristics that contribute to the understanding of the study's scope. Such thorough documentation allows others to gauge the relevance and applicability of the research outcomes to their own settings.

3.6. Quantitative Research Phase

3.6.1. Quantitative Research Design

The objectives of this phase of research are to examine the significance of the learning outcomes from their leisure travel planning experience and identify the relationship of these learning outcomes. Quantitative research method with statistical procedure is adopted to answer these research objectives. There are two main types of quantitative research methods, which are survey method and experimental method (Creswell, 2009), survey research is adopted in this research as it helps to provide standardised information to describe the variables, study the significance of the variables and the relationship between the variables (Malhotra & Grover, 1998).

Questionnaire Item Development

A questionnaire comprising 57 items distributed across six sections was developed to empirically test the theoretical framework. This was reviewed by two marketing professors. The sections encompass the following domains: (1) Past Travel Behaviour, (2) Future Travel Plan and Interested Destination, (3) Generic Risk Perception, (4) Risk Perception related to Infectious Diseases, (5) Psychological Resilience, (7) Destination Image, (8) Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism, (9) Nostalgia, and (10) Optimism Bias. To address common

method variance, a Marker Variable, introduced by Miller & Simmering (2023), was included as Section 6, strategically positioned between Section 5 (Psychological Resilience) and Section 7 (Destination Image). The majority of items were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from '1 = Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree'. However, construct sections such as (1) Past Travel Behaviour and (2) Future Travel Plan and Interested Destination are using categorical responses and included open-ended questions. Table 3.4 provides a comprehensive list of all items included in the questionnaire.

Tourist Resilience developed by Gottschalk et al. (2022) was initially integrated into the questionnaire due to its apparent relevance to the tourism research context. However, upon performing correlation analysis among the latent variables with a pre-test sample of 64 participants, it became evident that Tourist Resilience significantly contributed to multicollinearity issues, rendering it impossible to calculate the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test. In response to this, the construct of Psychological Resilience, proposed by Campbell-Sills & Stein (2007), was adopted in the questionnaire. This adjustment ensures continued alignment with the research context, as the focus remains on evaluating individual resilience within the tourism context.

Inclusion of Risk Perception related to Infectious Diseases (Section 4) based on the work of Lee et al. (2012) in the questionnaire supplements the existing Generic Risk Perception (Section 3). The rationale behind this addition stems from the generic nature of the measurement items in the Generic Risk Perception section, which encompass security, health, financial, and other forms of risk. Given the specific focus of the research on fostering resilience in the context of prevalent infectious diseases, particularly COVID-19, incorporating an additional section specifically addressing perceived risk related to infectious diseases becomes imperative. This adjustment ensures enhanced relevance and specificity to the research context, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the factors influencing resilience-building in the face of infectious disease outbreaks.

Due to the limited number of measurement items ($N = 3$) included, there is a concern that Optimism Bias may not pass the reliability test, especially since scales with only a few items are more prone to low internal consistency. Initially, one of the items was negatively coded, which was later revised to ensure consistency among the items. However, despite this adjustment, the limited set of items ($N = 2$) may still lead to inconsistencies in responses, potentially undermining the construct's reliability. Although Optimism Bias has the potential to contribute valuable insights, if it is proven to be inconsistent and unreliable, we may be forced to remove this construct from the model. For now, this construct will retain within the model until internal consistency has been tested.

While various measurement items have been proposed to gauge re-travel intention (Lee et al., 2012; Chaulagain et al., 2019; Han et al., 2022), these inquiries tend to focus on anticipatory inclinations rather than concrete actions. Assessing re-travel intention solely through anticipated intent may not fully capture the nuanced dynamics involved in actual travel behaviour. For instance, a tourist may express a strong inclination to travel abroad yet may not proceed to initiate concrete plans regarding the timing or destination of the intended trip. This discrepancy highlights a potential disparity between the perceived intent to travel and the actual realization of travel plans. Within the scope of this research, which focuses on individuals who have either recently returned from international travel or are actively

engaged in planning such travels, employing inquiries structured to prompt actionable responses may offer a more precise understanding of their re-travel intentions and actions.

Section	Constructs	Measurement Items	Reference	
1	Past Travel Behaviour (PTB)	PTB1. How many times have you travelled out-of-Malaysia since April 2022?	1 = Haven't travelled yet 2 = Once 3 = Twice 4 = Three times or more	Lee et al. (2012)
		PTB2. Where did you visit internationally since April 2022? Please state your most recent destination in the past 12 months.	Open Ended Question	
		PTB3. What was the purpose of the trip?	1 = Holiday 2 = Visit friends and relatives 3 = Business 4 = Volunteer work 5 = Others	Tasci (2021)
		PTB4. How much did you spend on your most recent trip? (per person)	1 = Less than RM 2,000 2 = RM 2,000 – RM 4,000 3 = RM 4,001 – RM 6,000 4 = RM 6,001 – RM 8,000 5 = RM 8,001 – RM 10,000 6 = More than RM 10,000	Added for the interest of this study
2	Future Travel Plan and Interested Destination (FT)	FT1. When are you planning to travel abroad again?	1 = Yes, in the next 1-3 months 2 = Yes, in the next 4-6 months 3 = Yes, in the next 7-9 months 4 = Yes, in the next 10-12 months	Added for the interest of this study

Section	Constructs	Measurement Items	Reference
			5 = Not planning to travel in the next 12 months
		FT2. Where do you plan to visit? Please write the name of the country you are most interested in visiting.	Open Ended Question
		FT3. Why aren't you planning to travel abroad?	Open Ended Question
		GRP1. I am worried that the accommodation facilities will not be sanitary.	Zhan et al. (2022)
		GRP2. I am worried about food hygiene issue during my travel.	
		GRP3. I am worried about getting sick during my travel.	
		GRP4. I am worried about other physical harm during my travel.	
		GRP5. I am afraid that I can't get timely treatment for illness or other physical harm during my travel.	7-point Likert Scale ('1 = Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree')
3	Generic Risk Perception (GRP)	GRP6. I am afraid the costs will be higher than before.	
		GRP7. I am afraid there will be some unexpected expenses.	
		GRP8. I am worried that my expenses for my travel is not value for money.	
		GRP9. I am worried that the people who care about me will be anxious with my travel decision.	
		GRP10. I am afraid the people who care about me, will think I'm irrational.	
		GRP11. I am afraid travel internationally will cause conflicts between	

Section	Constructs	Measurement Items	Reference
		couples / family members.	
		GRP12. I am afraid the tourist facilities will not be good enough.	
		GRP13. I am afraid that tourist services will not be good enough.	
4	Risk Perception related to Infectious Diseases (RPID)	RRID1. It is dangerous to travel internationally because of infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	Lee et al. (2012)
		RPID2. Infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox is very frightening.	
		RPID3. I have much information about infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	
		RPID4. I am afraid of infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	
		RPID5. People around me seem to refrain from traveling internationally due to infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	
5	Psychological Resilience (PR)	PR1. I can deal with whatever happens while traveling.	Campbell-Sills & Stein (2007)
		PR2. I am not easily discouraged, even if my trip is ruined.	
		PR3. Coping with stress while traveling makes me stronger.	
		PR4. I can stay focus under any pressure while traveling.	
		PR5. I can achieve my goals no matter what obstacles I face in my journey.	
6	Marker Variable (M)	M1. I like the colour blue	7-point Likert Scale ('1 = Strongly
		M2. I like the colour blue	

Section	Constructs	Measurement Items	Reference
		M3. I like the colour blue	Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree')
		The destination that I will choose for holidays,	
7	Destination Image (DI)	DI1. Is safe and secure	
		DI2. Offers exciting and interesting places to visit	7-point Likert Scale ('1 = Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree')
		DI3. Has beautiful scenery and natural attractions	
		DI4. Has a pleasant climate	
		DI5. Offers good value for money as a tourism destination	
		IDCM1. I will check the information of on infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) by visiting the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or WTO before traveling internationally.	
		IDCM2. I will read and check precautions about infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) through doctors or health centers before traveling internationally.	7-point Likert Scale ('1 = Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree')
8	Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism (IDCM)	IDCM3. I will prepare a first aid kit for infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) before travel internationally.	
		IDCM4. I will get the information about local medical facilities and country Embassy to prepare for an emergency because of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) before traveling internationally.	
		IDCM5. I will frequently wash my hands while traveling internationally.	

Section	Constructs	Measurement Items	Reference
		IDCM6. I will refrain from touching my eyes, nose, and mouth while traveling.	
		IDCM7. I will cover my mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing while traveling internationally.	
		IDCM8. I will keep away from those who have the symptoms of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) while traveling internationally.	
		IDCM9. I will refrain from meeting people for a while after traveling internationally.	
		IDCM10. will carefully keep an eye on my health condition after traveling internationally.	
9	Nostalgia (N)	<p>N1. I fantasise about my past international travel experience.</p> <p>N2. I imagine I was living like pre-COVID period.</p> <p>N3. I felt like I am back in time.</p> <p>N4. I imagine I was travelling internationally in the simple and pure time.</p> <p>N5. I was nostalgic for pre-COVID time.</p> <p>N6. I felt my imagination was like an avalanche and I thought of all different things about the past</p>	<p>7-point Likert Scale ('1 = Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree')</p> <p>Chi & Chi (2022)</p>
10	Optimism Bias (OB)	OB1. I don't think it's going to happen to my loved ones.	<p>7-point Likert Scale ('1 = Strongly Disagree' to '7 = Strongly Agree')</p> <p>Fragkaki et al. (2021)</p>

Section	Constructs	Measurement Items	Reference
		OB2. I am afraid that someone I love may get infected (rev.) I don't think someone I love may get infected	= Strongly Agree')
		OB3. I don't think it's going to happen to me	

Table 3.4. Measurement Items used in the study

3.6.2. Data Collection

3.6.2.1. Sampling

Although the quantitative research phase could theoretically adopt a similar criterion purposive sampling method as the qualitative phase, the objectives of the two phases differ slightly. The primary aim of the quantitative phase is to generalise and validate the factors identified during the qualitative phase. This objective differs from the objective from qualitative phase, where it aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of tourists' lived experiences and behavioural changes. As such, the sampling strategy for the quantitative phase required a more targeted approach to ensure the reliability and validity of the data.

Initially, it was considered to maintain consistency with the qualitative phase by recruiting respondents with similar travel backgrounds. However, it became evident that validation and examination of the relationships between variables would be compromised if respondents had not engaged in international travel since the reopening of borders. At the same time, excluding those who are actively planning their first international trip since reopening would result in an incomplete perspective. Consequently, the criteria for quantitative research participation were refined to encompass the following two groups:

1. T1: Those who have travelled internationally since reopening
2. T1.5: Those who are actively planning to travel abroad for the first time since reopening

To execute this sampling strategy effectively, the first 2 sections of the questionnaire designed as a screening stage to accurately capture the intended respondent types. The screening questions included items such as "*How many times have you travelled out of Malaysia since April 2022?*" and "*Where did you visit internationally since April 2022? Please state your most recent destination in the past 12 months.*" Respondents who qualified as T1 were those who reported having travelled internationally at least once and specified a destination.

For respondents categorised as T1.5, there remained a possibility that they had not travelled abroad since reopening. Therefore, an additional screening question was included: "*Where do you plan to visit? Please write the name of the country you are most interested in visiting.*" This question ensured that respondents who had not yet travelled but were actively planning a trip could still be included.

Respondents who indicated that they still hesitant to travel internationally (T2) were asked to provide an open-ended response explaining their reasons (“*Why aren’t you planning to travel abroad?*”), after which the questionnaire was terminated. This approach not only maintained the integrity of the sampling process but also ensured that the study captured insights from both experienced and prospective travellers, thereby enhancing the robustness of the data.

Respondent recruitment was conducted in two phases: pre-testing and main testing. During the pre-testing phase, respondents were recruited through personal networks using various strategies, including advertisements on personal social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram), postings within the university campus, and word-of-mouth referrals. These efforts resulted in a total of 158 responses, which were utilised for three separate rounds of pre-testing. The objective was to ensure that the survey questions were well understood and appropriately framed before proceeding to the main testing phase.

For the main testing phase, respondents were recruited through various channels, including personal social media platforms, two-weeks paid Facebook advertisement campaign and online panel managed by Perfect Solutions and Insights Sdn. Bhd., a market research company in Malaysia. A total sample size of 479 was collected after more than a month of effort. However, among the responses obtained from the paid Facebook advertisements, 40 were identified as problematic. Specifically, some respondents provided inaccurate or irrelevant answers to open-ended questions, for instance, listing Malaysian states (such as Kedah and Kelantan) instead of naming international travel destinations, suggesting potential attempts to manipulate the system. Additionally, some responses were incomplete, further compromising data quality. These issues raised concerns regarding the reliability and validity of the data collected through this method.

3.6.2.2. Web Survey

The emergence of Information Communications and Technology (ICT) has enabled researchers to access large populations cost-effectively through the Internet (Wright, 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased people's familiarity with ICT. Consequently, a web survey was adopted as the data collection tool for this research. This method was chosen for several reasons, many of which are highlighted by Bryman & Bell (2007). Firstly, the visual format of web surveys is user-friendly and includes guided instructions, making it easy for respondents to complete the survey independently. Additionally, screening logic can be implemented to filter out unsuitable respondents, ensuring that only relevant respondents complete the survey. Web surveys can also embed restrictions, preventing respondents from proceeding to subsequent questions without answering the current ones, thereby reducing incomplete responses. The responses are automatically stored in a database, facilitating easy extraction and data analysis. Using web surveys also offers practical benefits, such as saving the cost of recruiting additional personnel to collect responses with pen and paper and reducing printing costs, which is more environmentally friendly.

Despite the convenience of web surveys, it is crucial to ensure the personal data of respondents is well protected, aligning with data privacy protection acts from the university and Malaysia. To safeguard respondent privacy, detailed personal information such as names, contact details, and residence addresses are not collected in the questionnaire. Instead, less identifiable demographic questions, such as age, ethnicity, and marital status,

are gathered. Two systems were used: Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey, that allow tracking the source of responses (IP address) to avoid multiple replies. These measures address concerns about the risks of web surveys, including multiple responses, confidentiality issues, and unclear answers, as highlighted by Bryman & Bell (2007).

3.6.2.3. Pre-Test

Pre-testing is defined as the “first attempt to get empirical feedback from a highly controlled sample to assess the appropriateness of the original instrument” (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 392). During pre-testing, respondents are asked to complete the instrument and provide feedback on aspects such as format, content, understandability, terminology, and ease and speed of completion (Lewis et al., 2005). According to Bryman and Bell (2007) pre-testing is crucial as it indicates how well the questions flow, enhances comprehension, and allows the researcher to check the adequacy of instructions to respondents.

Three successive rounds of pilot testing were conducted to refine the survey instrument. The first pilot test aimed to ensure clarity and mitigate ambiguity in the questionnaire items among Malaysian tourists. Approximately 30 respondents were recruited via personal social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to assess the questionnaire's readability and design clarity. Minor revisions, primarily grammatical adjustments, were made based on the feedback received. While preliminary concerns regarding multicollinearity arose during this phase, definitive conclusions were limited due to the small sample size. Subsequently, a second round of pilot testing was conducted with a larger sample of 64 respondents, again recruited through personal social media channels, to enable factor analysis and evaluate data reliability. This round of pilot testing confirmed the presence of multicollinearity issues. As a result, adjustments were made to the construct, replacing Tourist Resilience with Psychological Resilience to enhance construct validity. A third pilot test was then conducted to validate the revised construct. For consistency, factor analysis and reliability assessments were performed on another set of 64 respondents. The entire pilot testing process spanned approximately one month, ensuring that the questionnaire was both accessible to respondents and free from potential statistical issues. This iterative process was essential in refining the instrument to improve its reliability and validity.

3.6.2.4. Common Method Bias

To address potential common method bias, a marker variable was included in the PLS-SEM model. Marker variable consisted of three indicators, using the indicators “*attitude toward the colour blue*”, which is theoretically unrelated to the primary constructs under investigation (Miller & Simmering, 2023). The evaluation of potential bias involved comparing the R-squared values of the model before and after including the marker variable, as shown in Table 8.7 (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results reveal no changes in the R-squared values, indicating the absence of common method bias in the model.

	R-squared (without Marker Variable)	R-squared (with Marker Variable)
CM	0.374	0.374
DI	0.289	0.345
PR	0.426	0.426
PCR	0.124	0.124

Table 3.5. R-squared value comparison before and after adding Marker Variable.

3.6.2.5. Follow-Up Understanding

While the quantitative survey effectively captures factual behaviour and identifies relationships between constructs, it falls short in uncovering the underlying reasons behind certain attitudes and decision-making processes. To gain a more holistic understanding of these behaviours, mini-depth interviews were conducted with respondents who had previously completed the web-based survey. According to Gordon (1999), mini-depth interviews are typically brief, lasting approximately 20-30 minutes, and are designed to delve into specific, focused issues. They are frequently employed alongside conventional survey research, including quantitative surveys, to provide deeper insights into the data obtained.

The purpose of these mini-depth interviews in this study was to gain a more nuanced understanding of the responses provided in the main survey, thus potentially enhancing the insights drawn from the quantitative data (Gordon, 1999). The nature of these interviews was deliberately fluid, allowing questions to be tailored based on respondents' previous answers in the survey. However, several key questions were consistently asked, mirroring some of the questions from Study 1:

In this research, even the questions are fluid, there are few key questions which are commonly asked to the respondents, some of which are similar to the questions in Study 1:

1. I saw you mentioned you travelled to country [X] for [holiday], why did you choose to travel there?
2. Can you share your experiences about your travel to that country?
 - a. What did you do before you travel? Why did you do this way?
 - b. What did you when [XXX] happened? How did you overcome it?
3. How was the travel style like as compared to pre-pandemic travel style? Why such changes? / Why can you still remain the same?
4. I saw you mentioned you are interested to travel overseas again, why is that?
 - a. I saw you mentioned you don't plan to travel overseas again, why is that?
5. I saw you rated [XXX] quite [highly/lower], can you tell me more about why you rated this way?

6. Let's say someone is considering travelling overseas, not sure where to start, what would you advise this person?
7. Before we end this call, how do you summarise the whole travel experience in post-pandemic context?

The demographic profile of the 20 respondents who participated in the mini-depth interviews is summarised in the table below. It is important to note that some of these respondents were individuals within my personal network, including friends, relatives, and acquaintances of friends. This approach was necessary given the high rejection rate encountered when reaching out to the broader survey pool. Another approach to maximise the response rates was to schedule the calls based on the respondents' stated occupations from the main questionnaire. For instance, attempts were made during weekday evenings for those working standard office hours, while those with more flexible schedules were contacted during weekends. This tailored approach was intended to optimise the chances of completing the interviews within the allocated time frame.

Despite these efforts, achieving the target number of interviews remained challenging, with only 20 successful completions out of 80 contact attempts. However, the insights gathered from these interviews are invaluable, the qualitative context will complement the quantitative survey findings. These qualitative insights will be further integrated into the subsequent chapter to substantiate the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative results, offering a more comprehensive understanding of respondents' decision-making processes and travel behaviours.

Profiles	Categories	Frequency (N = 20)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	8	40%
	Female	12	60%
Ethnicity	Malay	10	50%
	Chinese	8	40%
	Indian	2	10%
Age group	21 – 30 years old	5	25%
	31 – 40 years old	10	50%
	41 – 49 years old	3	15%
	50 years old and above	2	10%
Education	Postgraduate	3	15%
	Degree	15	75%
	Technical Vocational School beyond High School level	2	10%
Marital	Single	14	70%
	Married	6	30%
Monthly Personal Income (MPI)	RM 3,170 - RM 3,969	2	10%
	RM 3,970 - RM 4,849	3	15%
	RM 4,850 - RM 5,879	5	25%
	RM 5,880 - RM 7,109	4	20%

Profiles	Categories	Frequency (N = 20)	Percentage (%)
	RM 7,110 - RM 8,699	3	15%
	RM 8,700 - RM 10,959	1	5%
	RM 10,960 - RM 15,039	1	5%
	More than RM 15,040	1	5%
COVID-19	Never	11	55%
Contraction	Once	8	40%
Frequency	Twice	1	5%

Table 3.6. Demographic Profile of Mini-Depth Interviews Respondents

3.6.3. Data Analysis

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique was selected for data analysis due to its suitability for exploratory research and its ability to handle complex models with multiple constructs and indicators. The analysis process involved assessing measurement models, evaluating structural models, and conducting moderation analysis to explore the relationships between perceived risk, coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, destination image, and the moderating effects of nostalgia and optimism bias.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is a family of multivariate statistical techniques that allows researchers to test complex relationships among latent variables (LVs) and their associated measures (Chin, 1998b; Gefen et al., 2000). It serves a powerful tool to evaluate both the measurement model, which assesses the relationship between constructs and their indicators, and the structural model, which examines the hypothesised relationships among constructs (Gefen et al., 2000). SEM integrates multiple analytical techniques, including regression analysis, path analysis, and factor analysis, allowing researchers to test theoretical assumptions comprehensively (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010).

There are two main approaches within SEM: covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and component-based SEM (PLS-SEM) (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982; Hair et al., 2014). CB-SEM is typically used for theory confirmation and model fit assessment, whereas PLS-SEM is more suited for theory development and prediction (Hair et al., 2014). The choice between these approaches depends on the research objectives, model complexity, and data characteristics (Hair et al., 2014).

This study adopted PLS-SEM as the primary data analysis method for several reasons. First, it aligns with the research objectives of this study, which seeks to expand the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Resilience Theory (RT) by examining the intricate relationships between perceived risk, coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, and destination image, along with the moderating effects of nostalgia and optimism bias. The aim is not to confirm an existing theory, which would typically involve assessing how well a theoretical model fits observed data. Instead, the goal is to explore and predict relationships between constructs, making PLS-SEM a more suitable choice. PLS-SEM relies on pre-specified networks of relationships among constructs to evaluate these interactions (Hair et al., 2014), thus supporting the focus on theory development and prediction rather than strict model fit.

Second, PLS-SEM offers significant flexibility in handling both reflective and formative constructs (Chin, 1998b; Hair et al., 2017). This flexibility is essential given the diverse nature of constructs involved in this study. Additionally, PLS-SEM is robust against violations of normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2014). In contrast, CB-SEM relies on maximum likelihood estimation, which assumes multivariate normality and requires data to meet stringent assumptions regarding distribution. PLS-SEM, however, uses an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression-based technique that maximises the explained variance of dependent constructs (Hair et al., 2014; Sosik, Kahai, & Piovoso, 2009), making it more adaptable for complex, real-world data.

Third, PLS-SEM is advantageous in cases where data may not follow a normal distribution, which is highly beneficial given the exploratory nature of this study and the potential for non-normality in survey responses. The use of PLS-SEM is also justified due to its suitability for small to medium sample sizes and its ability to manage complex models with multiple latent variables (Henseler et al., 2009). If CB-SEM were to be adopted, it would necessitate normally distributed data and a large sample size; failure to meet these assumptions could result in highly inaccurate findings (Hair et al., 2011). In contrast, PLS-SEM provides a more robust option that can accommodate the inherent variability of social science data, thereby allowing for more accurate and meaningful insights into the hypothesised relationships.

Overall, PLS-SEM is an optimal choice for this study, as it facilitates the examination of complex constructs and their interactions while also accommodating the exploratory nature of the research. This approach aligns well with the study's aim to develop a comprehensive model of tourist behaviour and resilience in the context of post-pandemic travel.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the thematic analysis of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with two distinct sets of tourists: those who have travelled abroad since the reopening of international borders (T1) and those who remain hesitant to travel (T2). The analysis aims to address two primary research questions: (1) how tourists learn to ensure they can have safe and enjoyable overseas trips after a 2-year lockdown period, and (2), what tourists learn and do when planning their international travel trips, especially after having acquired certain levels of protective measures during the lockdown period.

The following sections are organised into five main parts. The first part of the findings presents the key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. These themes provide insights into tourists' adaptive strategies, risk perceptions, and decision-making processes. Each theme is supported by quotes from tourists, illustrating the diverse experiences and perspectives within the two groups. Second, the study examines how the findings apply and expand upon Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). This includes identifying the stages of transformative learning experienced by tourists and how their learning processes have evolved in the context of post-pandemic travel. The third part discusses the implications of these findings for future research, particularly the potential for quantitative exploration. This section outlines the key questions that arise from the thematic analysis and suggests how they can be explored through survey-based studies to identify relationships and broader patterns.

Following the qualitative analysis, the quantitative findings are presented to empirically examine the relationships between risk perception, coping mechanisms, resilience, and destination image in the context of post-pandemic tourism. An overview of the descriptive statistics of the survey data will be given, offering insights into the demographic profile of the respondents and summarising the central tendencies and variability of the constructs measured. These descriptive analyses are essential for understanding the characteristics of the sample and ensuring that the data meets the assumptions necessary for further analysis.

The last section focuses on the PLS-SEM model results, following the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The evaluation begins with an assessment of the measurement model to confirm the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs. Once these criteria are satisfied, the structural model is tested to understand the hypothesised relationships between the constructs. Specifically, the analysis investigates the effects of risk perception, coping mechanisms, and resilience on destination image, while also evaluating the moderating roles of nostalgia and optimism bias. This process involves testing the hypothesised relationships using key metrics, such as path coefficients, R^2 values, and predictive relevance (Q^2), to assess the robustness of the model and the strength of these relationships.

Overall, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of post-pandemic travel behaviour and empirical evidence to support or refute the hypotheses developed in earlier chapters. The findings offer valuable insights into the factors influencing tourists' decision-making processes in the evolving landscape of international travel. Additionally, the results provide practical implications for tourism stakeholders, enabling them to enhance

destination image and adapt their strategies to align with the changing behaviours and expectations of post-pandemic tourists.

4.1. Qualitative Research Findings

4.1.1. Transformative Learning in the Context of Leisure Tourism

TLT was initially developed by Jack Mezirow (1991), who posits that transformative learning occurs through a process of critical reflection, which leads to profound changes in how individuals perceive and engage with the world. Originally applied in the field of education to describe the journey of adult learning during periods of choice or critical events, TLT outlines a 10-step process (see Figure 4.1.). Among these steps, four main dimensions are particularly significant: disorienting dilemma, self-reflection, exploring new actions, and the development of new skills, attitudes, and beliefs (Wolf et al., 2017). These dimensions collectively shape the foundation of TLT, revealing the transformative journey individuals undergo towards personal growth and cognitive development.

The findings of this study reveal a complex and unique application of TLT within the context of post-pandemic leisure tourism. While the core elements of TLT, as introduced by Mezirow (1991), remain relevant, the unique challenges and dynamics of contemporary leisure travel, influenced by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to significant adaptations and expansions of the theory. This section compares these study findings with the theoretical concepts discussed in the literature, identifying both consistencies and deviations.

In this research context, tourists appear to undergo a slightly different transformative learning process compared to the traditional theory. As illustrated in Figure 4.4, the transformative learning journey in post-pandemic leisure tourism demonstrates a reconfigured sequence of steps and adaptations that better reflect the realities of contemporary travel planning. These changes capture the nuanced nature of post-pandemic travel, where safety concerns, resilience, and adaptive strategies play a prominent role in shaping the transformative learning journey. While the foundational elements of Mezirow's (1991) theory are still apparent, the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to adjustments that accommodate heightened safety concerns and resilience-building efforts. A more detailed discussion of these modifications will follow in subsequent sections.

The **disorienting dilemma** observed in this study presents a deviation from how it is typically described in the literature. Magrizos et al. (2021) suggest that disorienting dilemmas in tourism often arise from intense, singular events, such as exposure to cultural differences or socio-economic disparities, particularly in volunteer and educational tourism. In contrast, the findings in this study show that for post-pandemic leisure tourists, the dilemma is a prolonged and deeply embedded experience. The ongoing impact of the pandemic, marked

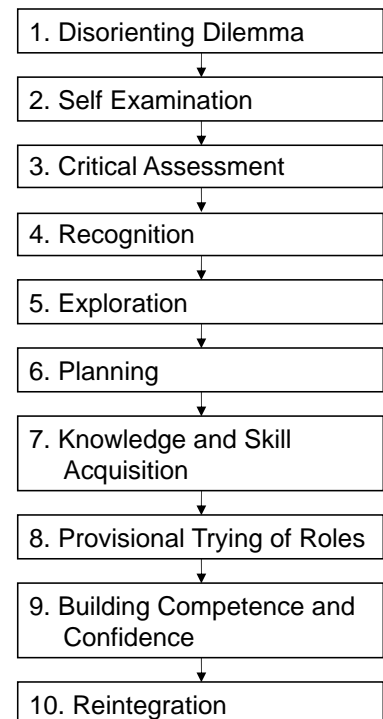


Figure 4.1. Mezirow Transformative Learning Theory Model

by fluctuating travel restrictions and persistent health concerns, has created a sustained phase of uncertainty and risk perception. Unlike the immediate, one-time events found in other tourism types, the dilemma in leisure tourism is pervasive, shaping tourists' decision-making and learning processes over an extended period. This expanded understanding of the disorienting dilemma highlights how leisure tourists face a more psychologically enduring trigger, reflecting the lasting effects of external disruptions on their transformative journey.

In addition to the altered nature of the disorienting dilemma, the **sequence of transformative learning steps** also differs from the traditional TLT framework. The theoretical framework of TLT often describes a sequential progression through learning steps, including self-examination, critical reflection, exploration of new actions, and planning (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2009). However, the findings from this study suggest a more fluid and simultaneous engagement with these steps, differing from what Coghlan & Gooch (2011) observed in volunteer tourism. In the leisure tourism context, especially with the wide availability of various resources, tourists frequently engage in recognising others' experiences (Step 4), exploring new ideas (Step 5), planning actions (Step 6) and acquiring knowledge and skills (Step 7) concurrently. This overlap is facilitated by information channels, where information is absorbed and applied almost instantaneously. Such a condensed and dynamic process is different from the sequential process traditionally outlined in TLT, highlighting the adaptability required in a post-pandemic leisure travel environment.

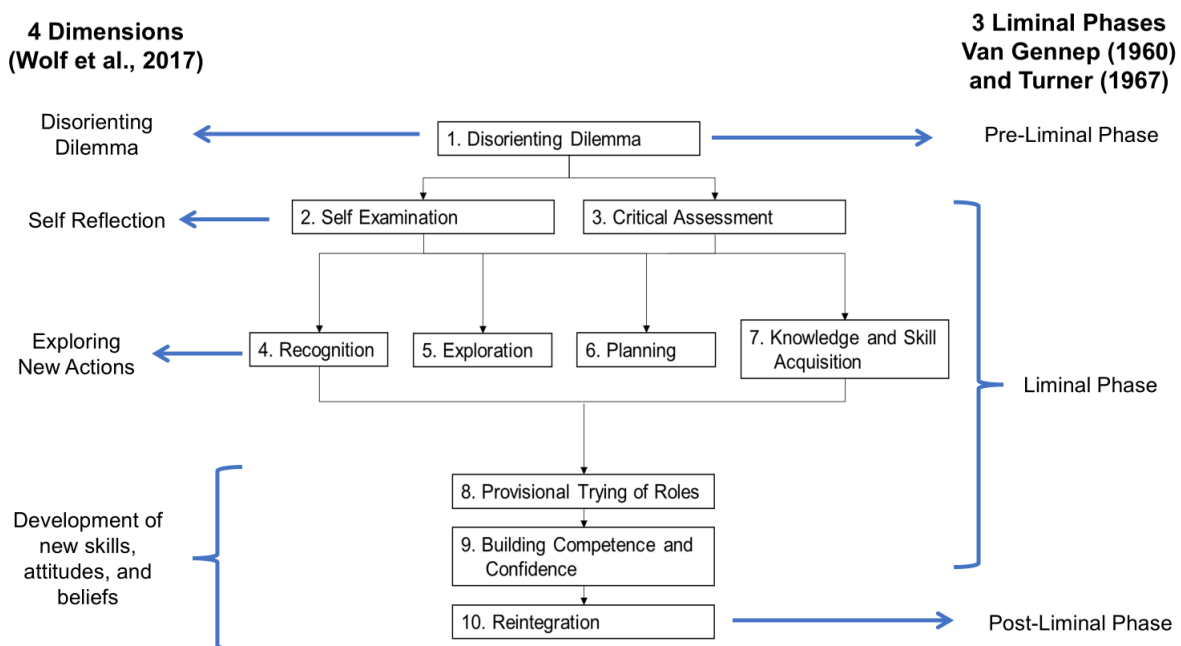


Figure 4.2 Comparison between 4 dimensions framework by Wolf et al. (2017) and Liminal Phases framework (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967) with transformative learning process in this study.

Besides that, the comparison between Wolf et al. (2017)'s and Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967)'s frameworks highlights an important distinction in how **transformative experiences** are **conceptualised**. Wolf et al. (2017)'s approach is goal-oriented, focusing on distinct and purposeful dimensions: the disorienting dilemma, self-reflection, exploring new actions, and the development of new skills, attitudes, and beliefs. This structure aligns well with the findings of this study, where tourists engage in specific and varied activities at each phase. Instead of experiencing transformation as a sequential process, tourists go

through a series of targeted efforts, such as reflecting on personal readiness, recognising others' experiences, exploring and testing new actions, and integrating newly acquired skills into their daily lives or future travel plans. In contrast, Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967)'s time-oriented framework emphasises the concept of liminal phases, representing a continuous transition from a pre-liminal to a post-liminal state. While this model effectively captures the idea of being "in-between" two states, it is less suitable for the complexities observed in this study, as the notion of "in-between" is too generic. The distinct and varied activities that tourists undertake within the same liminal phase challenge the idea of a homogeneous transformative process. For instance, the primary objectives in Phase 2 (Step 2 and Step 3) involve deciding whether to travel internationally and determining potential destinations. In Phase 3 (Steps 4 to 7), the focus shifts to learning how to travel safely and enjoyably. Finally, in Phase 4 (Steps 8 to 10), tourists test whether their preparations align with the realities encountered at their destinations, which ultimately influence their daily lives upon return and future international travel intentions. If these three phases were simply grouped together as a single liminal phase, the analysis would lack granularity and reduce the relevance of practical implications. As such, the goal-oriented framework by Wolf et al. (2017) provides a more granular and practical approach in understanding the transformative learning process in post-pandemic leisure tourism compared to the generic, time-oriented model of Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967). By distinguishing the unique activities and objectives at each phase, this study offers more precise insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing tourists' adaptive and reflective experiences.

The previous section (Chapter 2.3) highlights a few elements that show the deviation between leisure tourism from the initial analysis as compared to volunteer and educational tourism. These are namely self-reflection, underlying intention and scope of learning which add onto the discussion of theoretical foundations. Firstly, **self-reflection** is a foundational element of TLT, and in tourism studies, it is often depicted as a deep and transformative process. In volunteer tourism, for instance, self-reflection frequently involves a critical evaluation of one's values, privileges and societal roles (Sharpe, 2016). However, in the context of post-pandemic leisure tourism, self-reflection takes on a more pragmatic and situational nature. The findings of this study reveal that tourists do not necessarily engage in profound philosophical introspection. Instead, their self-reflection centres on assessing their readiness for international travel, evaluating potential safety risks, and considering the well-being of travel companions. This practical and adaptive form of self-reflection reflects the unique demands of a travel landscape shaped by health concerns and safety protocols. Unlike the transformative journeys that involve a re-evaluation of one's worldview, the self-reflection observed in this study is more focused on making informed and precautionary decisions. This distinction underscores how the context of leisure tourism influences the depth and focus of self-reflective practices.

Next, the **underlying intent** behind transformative learning in leisure tourism also contrasts sharply with that of other tourism types. In volunteer tourism, the motivation is often altruistic, centred on social awareness, community engagement, and fostering global citizenship (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Magrizos, 2020). Educational tourism focusses on personal growth and intellectual transformation (Cavender, Swanson & Wright., 2020). Both volunteer and educational tourism share a noble intent, as they contribute positively not only to individual development but also to the well-being of society as a whole. Conversely, the

primary intent of leisure tourism is less transcendental, but rather hedonistic: namely personal enjoyment, exploration, and relaxation. The pandemic has added new layers to this intent, making leisure travel more complex and multifaceted. Tourists are now driven not only by the desire to explore and enjoy but also by the necessity of ensuring safety, both for themselves and for those around them. The study's findings suggest that the motivation to travel has evolved to include considerations of resilience, adaptability, and health-consciousness. This shift in underlying intent illustrates how external crises like a global pandemic can transform the motivational landscape of leisure tourism, merging the pursuit of pleasure with an increased awareness of risk management and personal responsibility.

Finally, the **scope of learning** in post-pandemic leisure tourism has broadened significantly compared to traditional views of transformative learning, which are often more well-defined, as volunteers or students must engage with structured programs designed to achieve specific outcomes. On the other hand, leisure tourists engage in a wider and self-directed learning experience. They must independently gain awareness of global health risks, understand local practices, identify potential tourism spots, and develop adaptability in unfamiliar environments. This broader scope arises because leisure tourists are not required to participate in formal programs for international travel; instead, they have more decision-making power to plan and navigate their journeys on their own, acquiring diverse and practical knowledge along the way.

In summary, the study findings are consistent with the initial analysis comparing leisure tourism with volunteer and educational tourism. The key differences lie in the nature of self-reflection, underlying intent and scope of learning, all of which were highlighted in the theoretical foundation (Chapter 2.3). Leisure tourism, especially in a post-pandemic context, reveals a more pragmatic approach to self-reflection, focusing on situational awareness, personal readiness and precautionary measures rather than deep philosophical introspection. The underlying intent of leisure tourism centred on personal enjoyment, even though tourists must incorporate health and safety considerations due to the recent pandemic, contrasting drastically with the altruistic or self-transcendent motivations in volunteer and educational tourism. Furthermore, the scope of learning in leisure tourism is broader and more self-directed, requiring tourists to independently gain practical knowledge. This comparison reinforces the unique and adaptive nature of transformative learning in leisure tourism, demonstrating consistency with the initial analysis discussed in the theoretical foundation.

4.1.2. Reimagining Transformative Learning Process from Post-Pandemic Leisure Tourism Perspectives

This section focuses on the transformative learning process experienced by tourists in the context of post-pandemic international leisure travel. Building on the conceptual framework of TLT as proposed by Mezirow (1991), this section reveals how the traditional transformative learning steps have been reshaped by the unprecedented challenges and evolving dynamics of international travel through an in-depth analysis.

Phase 1: The Dilemma of Traveling in a Post-Pandemic World

Step 1: Disorienting Dilemma

Disorienting dilemma is described as a triggering event that brings about a heightened level of self-awareness and prompts a shift in an individual's understanding of their environment (Mezirow, 2012). Although the impact of such event may vary among individuals based on factors such as gender, age, marital status, experience, and personality, it is considered a 'triggering event' within the context of TLT if it leads to a fundamental change in one's perception of the world. Within the scope of this study, the disorienting dilemma specifically refers to a shift in understanding within the realm of leisure tourism.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lifted travel restrictions created significant disorienting dilemmas for tourists. After a long period of lockdown, tourists experience conflicting emotions when considering whether it is the right time to travel. On one hand, they feel a strong desire to travel again and are excited about the prospect of returning to normalcy. On the other hand, they have concerns about their safety due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as noted from Nicole (T1)²:

"I wanted to travel, since we hadn't travelled for so long, I got excited when the borders were opened. But many things need to be considered before deciding it, because COVID-19 is still around... Even if it is safe for us to travel, what we need to consider, to prepare, or what we can do will not be the same as pre-pandemic period anymore. This is different from the other diseases like SARS."

In addition to safety concerns, tourists also contemplate the necessary preparations for travel. They are uncertain about the specific travel restrictions and protocols implemented by different countries, and they worry about potential challenges and inconveniences they may encounter during the preparation process. This highlights the complexity of international travel planning and supports our initial assumption that tourists must take into account multiple aspects that can create a dilemma. While they are eager to travel, they are also mindful of the risks and potential difficulties that could impact their overall travel experience. This finding is reflected in this verbatim from Kyle (T1):

"When I was planning to go to Singapore early last year (2023), the documentation process or documents needed to enter Singapore changed too frequently! The information Singapore government needed was different from other countries, and because of the frequent changes, the requirements mentioned on the news were different from those on their official website. That created two layers of variations that I had to research, and it confused me greatly. I was constantly questioning about whether

² Note: All the names mentioned in this research are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the individuals involved.

I had prepared the correct documentation to enter Singapore, worrying whether I would get stuck, which will waste all my bookings in Singapore, on top of the constant worry about whether I will remain safe and healthy throughout the entire trip.”

These reflections illustrate the profound disorienting dilemmas faced by tourists in the post-pandemic era. The uncertainty and complexity surrounding travel during the ongoing COVID-19 virus have significantly altered tourists' decision-making processes, highlighting the need for heightened awareness and adaptability. The tension between the desire to travel and the concerns for safety, coupled with the challenges of navigating ever-changing travel protocols, has triggered the start of the transformative nature of this experience. This shift in tourists' understanding signals a potential long-term change in how individuals approach travel in a post-pandemic world where the virus still lingers.

At first glance, the situation appears to be a straightforward health versus desire dilemma, with a strong desire to travel abroad again on one side and significant health concerns on the other. Tourists are eager to return to leisure international travel, excited to experience new cultures and destinations, yet remain deeply concerned about the potential risks to their health. This internal conflict is central to the transformative nature of their experience as they balance their longing for travel with the imperative to safeguard their well-being.

However, this situation is not merely a health versus desire dilemma. A deeper analysis reveals an additional layer of complexity: the practical challenges of navigating ever-changing travel protocols. Beyond the emotional struggle between travel desire and health concerns, tourists are also confronted with practical questions, such as the paperwork and documentation required to enter different countries. The uncertainty surrounding these protocols, adds another dimension to the disorienting dilemma that force tourists to consider not only their emotional readiness to travel but also the practicality and feasibility of executing their travel plans (summary shown on Figure 4.3). This added complexity leads them into the next phase of their transformative learning journey, where they engage in self-reflection and critical assessment to answer crucial questions: Is it a good idea to travel? Where is it safe and feasible for me to travel? Am I fit enough to undergo this journey? What are the processes and requirements for the destinations I am considering?

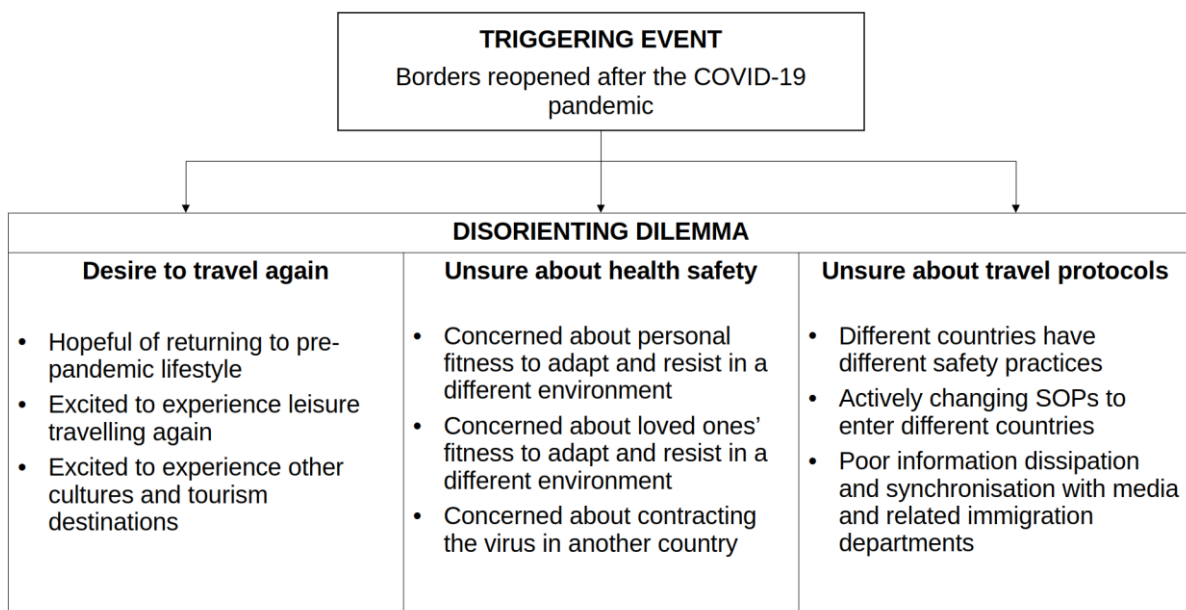


Figure 4.3. Three Dimensions of Disorienting Dilemma

Phase 2: Inward Glance, Outward Gaze

Step 2: Self Examination and Step 3: Critical Assessment happen concurrently

This phase explores the self-reflection and critical assessment that tourists undergo as they reconsider their travel behaviours after international borders lifted. Building on the initial disorienting dilemma discussed in the earlier sub-section, where tourists were confused and conflicted about whether travelling abroad again is a wise idea, Phase 2 focusses on how they navigate the complexities and uncertainties of international travel. Prolonged lockdowns and heightened health awareness have not only reshaped tourists' perceptions of travel but have also prompted them to critically assess both their personal readiness and external conditions. In this process, tourists must carefully reflect on whether leisure travel aligns with their current circumstances, consider potential travel companions, and thoughtfully select suitable destinations.

Tourists engage in deep self-examination during this phase, reflecting on both their pre-pandemic travel experiences and the new realities that shape international travel today. A key part of this reflection involves evaluating their physical and emotional readiness, they assess whether they are healthy enough to manage the risks and uncertainties associated with travel in a foreign environment. This heightened awareness stems from a sense of responsibility not only for their own well-being but also for public health. The self-reflection process plays a crucial role in helping tourists navigate the complexities of post-pandemic travel, striking a balance between their desire to explore and the need to protect their health and the well-being of others. In the words of Jim (T1):

“When the borders opened, I was very excited about travelling again! But, compared to pre-pandemic period, I now had to make sure whether I am healthy enough to travel to foreign country, did I get the correct vaccine to travel. Luckily, I am young, so I think I’ll be safe in a foreign country as compared to my parents.”

Several tourists, particularly younger ones, expressed the belief that being younger offers a health advantage, as they perceive their immune systems to be stronger compared to older individuals. As shown in the verbatim above, several tourists, including Jim, who are younger, shared this perspective. This perception suggests that younger tourists may be more inclined toward adventurous activities and travel experiences than their older counterparts, given their confidence in their physical resilience and ability to manage health risks.

Their heightened health awareness, shaped by the pandemic and lockdown experience, has also influenced their travel preferences. Tourists shared that if they decided to travel, protecting themselves would be a priority, leading them to carefully consider how they should travel after the borders reopened. In comparison to the pre-pandemic period, tourists explained that travelling used to require very little thought. They could pack their bags and leave, with the only concern being where they wanted to go. Now, however, travel involves far more complex considerations. Tourists must think about health risks, hygiene standards, safety protocols, and their well-being. As Sara (T1) explained:

“Before the pandemic, I was adventurous and love to meet different people. I would stay at budget hotel and mingle with other tourists from all over the world. After the borders lifted, I value more on the service, privacy, cleanliness of the hotel when I travel. Now, I find budget hotel is risky, because place like that may not hygiene enough and too crowded. I rather pay more to stay in nicer hotel.”

In the process of deep self-examination, tourists also engage in an assessment of their surrounding and external environment. This involves evaluating the readiness of potential travel companions, typically parents or friends, as well as determining whether global conditions, such as public health measures, travel protocols, and political stability, are conducive to leisure travel. This assessment aligns with Mezirow's (1991) concept of critical assessment, where individuals assess the surrounding and environment to make informed decisions. A significant part of this assessment involves determining the preparedness of household members, particularly parents. Tourists carefully assess whether their parents are in good health and able to manage the demands of international travel, as well as their willingness to travel together. Additionally, they reflect on the responsibility of ensuring their parents' safety upon returning from a trip, especially in avoiding the potential transmission of illness. This concern is particularly crucial for those who live with their parents or frequently visit them, as illustrated by Ned (T2):

"I thought about going to US when the borders reopened, finally we get to travel again, right? But I live with my parents, what if I got COVID-19 there? My parents would worry sick. Even if I can come back safely, I still need to quarantine for at least 2 weeks, which means, my parents have to worry about me, take care of me, and pose risk to contract the virus from me! I don't want my parents to risk that, that's unfair to them."

These considerations often discourage tourists from travelling abroad, as they prioritise the safety and well-being of both themselves and their loved ones. A key consideration is whether their friends share similar travel preferences, particularly when it comes to the balance between comfort, safety, and adventure. For example, one friend may prioritise a more comfortable and secure travel experience, preferring to stay in safer, higher-end accommodations, while another may still seek adventure, favouring more spontaneous and riskier activities. These differing approaches can create tension, especially when tourists are less willing to compromise.

The experience of isolation during the lockdown has reduced many tourists' tolerance for such compromises. After extended periods of restrictions, tourists expressed a stronger desire to prioritise their own preferences when borders reopened. Having experienced the limitations of lockdown, they now want to ensure that their travel aligns more closely with their personal desires, whether that means opting for a more controlled, secure trip or pursuing new and adventurous experiences. As Sara shared:

"I used to enjoy friends' company, and travel with friends. That time, I always tried to choose things that all of us enjoyed. But, the pandemic has taught me to be a little more selfish about what I want. I figured that, the past me had been trying to please people, and this pandemic made me realise I should prioritise what I want for myself. Now, I really enjoy my me-time, choose whatever movie I want to watch, and even just fly anywhere I want. I don't have to compromise to travel places that I'm not that interested in just because my friends want to go; I can properly spend my money to go places that I want."

This shift in mindset reflects a greater focus on self-care and personal fulfilment, with many tourists feeling less inclined to sacrifice their ideal travel experience for the sake of group harmony. As a result, some tourists have become more selective about their travel companions, preferring to travel solo or with a small, intimate group that shares similar values and travel preferences. The reduced willingness to compromise has led to a

preference for smaller travel groups, where alignment on travel style is easier to maintain and where the experience can be more personal and tailored to individual desires.

Another critical aspect of the assessment process involves determining where tourists should travel. Tourists consider their purpose for travelling, whether it is to visit friends or family members overseas or simply to explore a destination on their own. They also reflect on whether they prefer to visit countries they have previously travelled to or whether they want to explore new destinations. Furthermore, the proximity of the destination plays a role in their decision-making, with some weighing the benefits of travelling to neighbouring countries versus venturing much further abroad. These considerations are often addressed sequentially, helping tourists arrive at a final decision about whether or not to travel internationally. Tourists are more likely to commit to travel when they have clear answers regarding their purpose and a specific destination in mind. For instance, Kelly (T1) quickly decided to travel to Australia because her purpose was to visit her sister who resides there. In Kelly's case, both her travel purpose and destination were established early on, which simplified her critical assessment of the environment. Conversely, Fred (T2), despite having a clear purpose for leisure travel, ultimately chose to stay put. When evaluating global conditions, such as COVID-19 protocols and travel SOPs, Fred found the inconsistencies between countries and even within the same country too overwhelming. The complexity and frequent changes in regulations made the assessment process tedious and confusing, leading him to postpone his travel plans. Some tourists, while acknowledging the complexities and variations in travel SOPs across different countries, choose to filter their destination options based on familiarity and proximity to their home country. For example, Matthew (T1) decided to visit Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia, as he believed that the travel protocols in these countries would be relatively similar to those in Malaysia. Additionally, he felt that if he contracted COVID-19 while travelling in these neighbouring countries, it would be easier to seek assistance due to his familiarity with their cultural and social practices. In contrast, Matthew was less confident about travelling to more distant destinations, particularly in the West, where he felt unfamiliar with local practices and social norms. Financial considerations also play a crucial role in these decisions. Neighbouring countries to Malaysia, such as Thailand and Indonesia, do not have significant currency differences compared to the Malaysian Ringgit, unlike stronger currencies such as the US Dollar, Euro, or British Pound. Tourists believe that, should they require treatment or need to quarantine in these nearby countries, the financial burden would be manageable. In contrast, getting stuck in Western countries with stronger currencies would impose a much greater financial strain. Moreover, the overall cost difference, including daily expenses and flight cost, would be far more difficult to bear if they encountered difficulties in distant countries.

In summary, tourists' decision-making processes regarding international travel in the post-pandemic era have become far more complex and reflective. Their considerations now extend beyond mere destination preferences to include a critical assessment of personal and environmental factors. Tourists will embark on international trips if they have a clear purpose, such as visiting family or friends abroad, and a well-defined destination in mind. Additionally, knowing how they wish to travel, whether alone or with a compatible group of companions, also plays a crucial role in their decision-making process. On the other hand, tourists tend to stay put if they feel emotionally unready or believe they are not physically

capable of handling the rigours of travel. Concerns about the safety of household members, particularly elderly parents, also discourage travel. Additionally, the absence of a clear destination makes the critical assessment stage significantly more tedious, especially when the travel protocols vary widely across different countries. In such cases, tourists are required to navigate complex and ever-changing regulations, entry requirements, and safety protocols for multiple destinations, which can create confusion and complicate their decision-making process, ultimately leading them to postpone or cancel their travel plans. These findings further reinforce the importance of self-examination and critical assessment in the transformative learning process, as highlighted by latent literature (e.g. Taylor et al., 2016; Singer-Brodowski, 2023). Tourists must navigate a critical decision-making process, weighing the benefits of travel against personal and external factors. Those who feel prepared, both physically and mentally, and have a clear purpose and destination, are more likely to proceed with international travel, implementing protective measures as suggested by Lo et al. (2011) and Reichel et al. (2007). Conversely, those who lack emotional readiness or a specific destination, or who have heightened concerns about the safety of household members, often choose to forgo travel altogether. This aligns with the findings of McKercher and Hui (2004), who note that some individuals decide not to travel when faced with too many uncertainties.

Phase 3: Contours of Exploration

Step 4: Recognition, Step 5: Exploration, Step 6: Planning and Step 7: Knowledge and Skill Acquisition are interconnected, emerging from similar processes and influencing one another without following a fixed sequence

In this phase of their transformative learning journey, tourists engage in a dynamic and reflective process that integrates recognition, exploration, acquiring knowledge and skill, and planning. These steps are interconnected rather than occurring sequentially, as they utilize various channels to learn from the experiences of others, acquire new knowledge and skill, and develop strategies for their upcoming travels. These channels include: (1) word of mouth, (2) social media, (3) news channels, (4) official government websites, and (5) third-party travel booking websites, such as Klook. Once they have decided on a specific country to visit, they undertake comprehensive research, which enables them to design a well-considered, safe, and enjoyable itinerary before embarking on their journey.

Tourists in this study recognise the significant value of sharing informal experiences (i.e. **word of mouth**) with their trusted individuals, mainly their peers and family members. They usually engage in such conversations with two main groups: those who have already travelled abroad and those who live in the country they plan to visit. These discussions typically focus on recent travel experiences and include seeking advice to help with their own travel preparations. It is shown that word-of-mouth exchanges often highlight critical details that are unstated on the formal research sources, such as official government websites. For example, Kelly and Meng (T1) learnt valuable information from their own relatives living in Australia about the challenges of obtaining a travel visa. They learned that the process had become more stringent, requiring additional documents to prove their identities and demonstrate that they would not seek employment illegally in Australia while visiting as tourist. Although these details were listed as optional on the official visa application website, it was believed that providing a complete set of information would

increase their chances of getting their travel visa approved. In this conversation, they completed three steps of the Transformative Learning process: they recognised the value of the experiences shared by their relatives, acquired new knowledge about the visa application process, and used this information to better plan their upcoming trip. By ensuring they prepared all necessary documents, even those described as optional, they were able to strategically ensure they are fully prepared and smoothen their immigration issues before they travel to Australia. Using word-of-mouth can provide a wealth of practical insights, because other than providing the unofficial yet critical details, tourists also can learn how others have adapted to new travel norms, safety protocols, and any restrictions that remain in place. By listening to the experiences of trusted individuals, tourists can build confidence and feel reassured that their own concerns or uncertainties are valid and shared by others in similar situations.

Tourists in this study also use **social media** as a valuable tool to gather information and make informed decisions in their travel planning. Various platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit, provide a wealth of user-generated content that help them learn when it is a good and safe time to travel, identify less commercialised tourist destinations, understand the cultural dos and don'ts of a country after lockdown, and uncover critical details that may not be revealed on official websites. Tourists ensure the accuracy and reliability of what they have learnt by cross-checking information from different sources, which then enhances their travel planning process. For instance, Kyle conducted extensive research for his upcoming trip to Japan, particularly focusing on how to travel safely during the Sakura season, which is known to attract large crowds. Through Instagram reels and TikTok videos created by ordinary travellers, he discovered hidden spots in Japan where Sakura blossoms flourish away from the main tourist areas. This newfound knowledge was quickly incorporated into his travel itinerary, enabling him to experience the beauty of the Sakura season while avoiding heavily crowded locations. Similar to word-of-mouth exchanges, interactions between netizens on social media often reveal critical details that may not be mentioned on official government websites. Sam (T1) shared an experience where reading reviews from other travellers on Reddit provided crucial information about the potential challenges to entering South Korea. She discovered that the South Korean government had quietly implemented more stringent measures against Southeast Asian travellers, following rumours of unreported cases of tourists illegally seeking employment in the country. With this in mind, Sam prepared additional documents to prove her genuine tourist status. She recounted her experience:

"When I first arrived in South Korea, the immigration officer took me to an interrogation room, searched my luggage, and asked me numerous questions to determine if I intended to find a job in South Korea while travelling. Fortunately, I had printed out my bank statements to show I had stable employment, along with my hotel itinerary and flight details to prove that I would be returning to Malaysia after two weeks. Those documents helped to prove that I was just a tourist."

These examples illustrate how social media interactions provide tourists with practical insights and warnings that can be critical to their travel experiences. By engaging with a community of netizens, tourists not only gain deeper knowledge but also learn to better prepare for potential challenges that may not be evident through official channels.

Tourists also rely on **news channels** to stay informed about important developments that could affect their travel plans. They seek slightly different information from these sources compared to other channels, focusing on updates such as the number of COVID-19 cases in their destination country, government announcements about changes to travel SOPs, and reports on overcrowding at popular tourist sites and how the authorities are responding. Monitoring the number of COVID-19 cases help tourists assess the risk level of travelling at a particular time. For example, Ben (T1) shared his experience:

"I have been thinking about going to Bali since the MCO, so I keep track of the number of COVID-19 cases there for a long time through online news channels. When the borders reopened, I already knew the contraction trend in Bali was going down as well. So, I knew Bali should be safe for me to travel alone."

In addition, tourists pay close attention to government announcements about SOP changes to ensure that they have the correct documentation and are familiar with the latest procedures before travelling. This preparation is crucial to avoid being barred from entering a country or facing delays at immigration. By staying updated on these changes, tourists can travel with greater confidence and minimise the risk of disruptions. News channels also provide valuable insights into which tourist destinations are experiencing overcrowding. During discussions, participants mentioned that they could learn about such issues through news reports. For instance, Jim saw a news story about overcrowding in Japan, which had become so severe that it affected the daily lives of local residents. In response, the Japanese government decided to close down certain travel destinations to protect their citizens. This example shows how news information can be passed along to others, as Kyle learned about Japan's overcrowding issue from Jim during the FGD. Kyle's reaction illustrates how information originally sourced from news channels can be disseminated second-hand through word of mouth, sparking awareness and discussions among tourists. This flow of information demonstrates the interconnected nature of various research channels and how one source can influence another, ultimately shaping tourists' perceptions and travel strategies.

Official government websites are another crucial source of information for tourists, offering reliable and up-to-date details on travel regulations and safety guidelines. Tourists use these websites to verify the latest entry requirements, such as visa documentation, health declarations, and COVID-19 testing or vaccination mandates, ensuring they are fully prepared and compliant with all necessary procedures before embarking on their trip. Official government websites are also deemed to provide more detailed information, as news channels typically only share announcements and summaries of SOP updates. Tourists often rely on these government sites to review the full details and ensure they have prepared everything correctly. Research through official government websites help to minimise the risk of being turned away at borders or facing unexpected complications upon arrival. In addition, these websites provide information on local laws, emergency contacts, and health advisories, which tourists perceive to better understand the environment they will be entering.

However, the credibility of official government websites seems to be declining for two main reasons. First, the information on these websites is not updated as frequently as media announcements on news channels. Fred (T2) explained this frustration:

"The government keeps changing the SOPs because they are still finding the right one, but the website details don't change as fast as their announcements to the public. The government may release version 4 of the SOPs, but the website is still showing version 2. That is very confusing to the public."

Second, official government websites often fail to provide granular details, such as those experienced by Kelly, Meng, and Sam. This lack of detailed information forces tourists to cross-check with other netizens through social media platforms to get a complete picture of what to expect. As a result, while official government websites remain an essential resource, tourists often feel compelled to supplement this information by seeking additional insights from informal sources to ensure they are fully prepared. Overall, these limitations highlight the need for tourists to use multiple channels to navigate the complexities of international travel regulations confidently.

Third-party travel booking websites, such as Klook, represent another important channel that some tourists use to gather travel information. Although these platforms were not widely utilised across the tourists in this study, they play a notable role in this phase. Some tourists turn to Klook as an alternative to official government websites, particularly because its information are often updated more in-line with media announcements on news channels. As a business dedicated to selling tickets for tourism destinations, Klook is perceived to offer accurate and practical information, especially for more complex travel scenarios, such as transit flights. For instance, Jen (T1) shared her experience of relying on Klook for guidance:

"When I was flying to the US, I had to transit in Japan. I didn't know which SOP I should follow because it involved three countries: Malaysia, Japan, and the US, each with different SOPs. I was also unsure how the SOPs applied when I was only transiting in Japan. I couldn't find the answer from news channels or official government websites because those platforms only provided information for their own countries. So, I had to check Klook to see what I should do."

This example illustrates how third-party platforms can offer critical, up-to-date information that may not be readily available from official sources, making them a valuable resource for travellers navigating complex itineraries.

Comparing these sources of information, each one offers distinct advantages and limitations that influence tourists' travel planning. Official government websites are perceived to be the most accurate and reliable for verifying essential travel regulations, such as entry requirements, health declarations, and COVID-19 protocols. However, their credibility is declining due to the delays in updating information and the lack of granular details, which forces tourists to seek additional insights elsewhere. News channels, while helpful for summarising major changes and providing real-time updates on COVID-19 case trends or overcrowding issues, often lack the comprehensive details that travellers need. Social media platforms and word-of-mouth exchanges, although less formal, play an increasingly important role in tourists' planning processes. These sources provide practical, experience-based information that addresses nuances often omitted from official announcements, such as how to navigate specific transit requirements or avoid heavily crowded tourist spots.

Third-party travel booking websites, like Klook, serve as a unique bridge between official and informal sources, offering timely updates and context-specific information for complex itineraries.

Collectively, these sources of information reflect the transformative learning process that tourists experience, where multiple steps occur simultaneously rather than sequentially. TLT outlines steps such as Recognition of Others' Perspectives (Step 4), Exploration of New Perspectives (Step 5), Plan Actions (Step 6), and Knowledge and Skill Acquisition (Step 7), all of which happen concurrently within the same conversation or even through a single source of information. For instance, when tourists engage in a discussion with friends or read a detailed post on social media, they might simultaneously recognise the value of *others' travel experiences* (Step 4) and *explore new ways of thinking* about safety measures or destination choices (Step 5). In that same moment, they may *start planning actions* (Step 6) by considering how this new information could apply to their travel itinerary and *acquire new knowledge and skills* (Step 7), such as understanding the requirements for transit procedures or the best times to visit less crowded attractions.

The interconnected nature of these learning steps is supported by existing literature. For example, Coghlan & Gooch (2011) condensed the *recognition of others' experiences* (Step 4) and the *exploration of new perspectives and actions* (Step 5) in their study on volunteer tourism. However, in this study of leisure tourism in a post-pandemic context, with the high accessibility of information on popular topics like international leisure travel, the condensation of transformative learning steps appear to be expanded. The high accessibility of information on popular topics like international leisure travel allow tourists to engage in simultaneous and overlapping learning processes, highlighting a more fluid and dynamic approach compared to the transformations observed in volunteer tourism.

Bueddefeld & Duerden (2022) further support this idea, suggesting that *knowledge and skill acquisition* (Step 7) can occur at different points within the learning process. In this study, *knowledge and skill acquisition* often happens concurrently with *action planning*, depending on the type of knowledge or skill acquired. For instance, tourists who learn about documentation requirements for travel visas to countries like Australia or South Korea typically *acquired knowledge* before adding the task into their travel *planning*, as they must understand what documents are needed before making plans to gather them. Conversely, tourists like Jen, who had already planned her trip details, sought for specific information (i.e. *acquire knowledge and skill*) on how to handle transit flight SOPs after they decided on their travel itinerary (i.e. *planning*). Similarly, Kyle's experience show how these two steps can merge: while researching his trip to Japan, he simultaneously learned about less commercialised locations to view Sakura (*knowledge and skill acquisition*) and immediately incorporated this information into his travel itinerary (*travel planning*) in real-time while watching an Instagram reel.

This integration shows that transformative learning is a fluid and dynamic process. Tourists do not compartmentalise their learning; instead, they blend these steps as they absorb and apply information, adapting to the complexities of post-pandemic travel planning. Each interaction or piece of content, whether from word of mouth, social media, news channels, or booking websites, can simultaneously trigger multiple aspects of their learning and planning journey. Thus, the overlapping and interconnected nature of these steps illustrate

how tourists navigate an adaptive and ever-evolving landscape, transforming their approach to international leisure travel in a way that reflects the realities of a post-pandemic world.

Although those who have not travelled abroad yet (T2) may seem to have dropped out of the transformative learning process of international leisure travel during Phase 2, since they chose to stay put, they were, in fact, continuing to learn and adapt from a different perspective. Even without travelling, these tourists actively engaged in Phase 3, demonstrating how transformative learning can occur without immediate action. For example, Diana (T2) spoke to her friend, a pharmacist who had recently travelled to Vietnam. The pharmacist introduced Diana to a medicated nasal spray, explaining that it creates a protective layer in the nostrils to help prevent COVID-19 infection. Although Diana had not travelled abroad, she was convinced by her friend's recommendation and incorporated the nasal spray into her daily routine. Over several months, this proactive measure gradually built her confidence in the idea of international travel. During the FGD, Diana explicitly shared that she now felt more open to travelling abroad in the near future. This example demonstrates that even when some tourists choose to stay local or limit themselves to domestic travel, they continue their transformative learning journey. Their focus shifts to recognising others' experiences, exploring new preventive measures, and acquiring knowledge and skills that enhance their self-protective practices. Although these actions are initially aimed at improving their safety and comfort in a domestic context, they ultimately contribute to a greater openness to the idea of international travel in the future.

Phase 4: From Trial to Lasting Change

Step 8: Provisional Trial, Step 9: Building Competence and Confidence and Step 10: Reintegration occur in a sequential progression, with each step following the completion of the previous one.

The journey of transformative learning in *Phase 4: From Trial to Lasting Change* highlights how tourists move from initial experimentation to lasting transformation in their travel behaviours. This phase unfolds through three sequential steps: *Step 8: Provisional Trial, Step 9: Building Competence and Self-Confidence, and Step 10: Reintegration.*

Step 8: Provisional Trial

In this phase, tourists apply the knowledge and strategies they have learnt during the preparation stages of their transformative learning journey. They test their plans by practising the destinations' safety measures, cultural practices, and adaptive travel strategies. However, the realities they encounter can sometimes deviate significantly from what they had anticipated, leading to inconsistencies with the official SOPs and potential confusion for tourists. For example, Hillary (T1) arrived in Thailand and India with thorough preparation: she had all her vaccination documents ready, wore a medical face mask, and carried hand sanitiser as instructed by the official SOPs. However, to her surprise, the reality at these destinations was quite different. The immigration and customs officers did not even check her prepared documents and allowed her to pass as though it were pre-pandemic times. Additionally, many locals were not wearing medical face masks, making her stand out among the crowd for her adherence to health protocols. This unexpected experience serves as a trial where tourists realise that their pre-trip expectations may not align with on-the-ground realities.

In contrast, there are also cases where tourists' expectations align with the reality they encounter. For instance, Kelly and Meng had a more predictable experience in Australia. Meng explained:

"Before we flew to Australia, my relative had already warned us that the locals are very relaxed there because COVID-19 virus is rather controlled. The people there don't even wear masks anymore. So, we mentally prepared ourselves for this fact before flying. And true enough, they really don't wear masks at all. We only wore masks in airports and train stations or places that share confined spaces because we were still a bit afraid, but what we saw there was the same as what we had learned. Hence, it wasn't really a shock for us."

These contrasting experiences exemplify the essence of *Step 8: Provisional Trial*. Tourists are actively testing their prepared strategies and must make real-time adjustments based on the social and cultural cues they receive from locals. The feedback they receive from these encounters shapes their actions and adaptations. For example, Charlene (T1) brought her parents to Australia and insisted on wearing medical face masks upon arrival, only to be met with odd and unfriendly stares from the locals, making her family feel out of place. Ultimately, they decided to forgo wearing masks to blend in better.

Jen's experience further illustrates the complexity of this phase. Despite her thorough preparation to manage the challenges of transit flights and moving between three countries on her trip to the United States, the realities proved even more complicated than she had anticipated. During her transit in Japan, she was stopped because she had not declared her health status through an official app that had only recently been launched. The app was so new that media sources had not yet reported on it, and Jen had to seek assistance from local airport officers to complete this unexpected procedure. This situation presented several additional challenges: she had to figure out a process she was unaware of, manage confusion due to a language barrier (since the officers were not proficient in English), and navigate the interface of the app, which was available only in Japanese. These unforeseen obstacles during a transit flight emphasised the unpredictable nature of travel, even for those who make meticulous preparations.

While Coghlan & Gooch (2011) proposed that *action planning* (Step 6) could be combined with *provisional trial* (Step 8) as part of a continuous self-development process, this study on leisure tourism in a post-pandemic context disagrees. Here, *provisional trial* follows the entire Phase 3, which integrates Steps 4 to 7, as tourists explicitly test the strategies and knowledge they have accumulated. The experience of putting plans into action and receiving feedback, whether through supportive or challenging encounters, serve as a critical moment of learning. Tourists may realise the need for flexibility, adjusting their behaviour to better align with local norms, or may find affirmation in their research when their expectations match the realities that they encounter. This trial phase connects the preparation period with real-world experiences, setting a foundation for building greater competence and confidence in the next steps of their transformative learning journey.

Those who have yet to travel internationally (T2) also proceed to *Step 8: Provisional Trial*, by applying what they have learnt during Phase 3 in a domestic context. For instance, Diana, who learnt about using a medicated nasal spray from her pharmacist friend, decided to test this method locally. Although she did not yet travelled abroad, she practised this preventive

measure at home to gauge its effectiveness and build confidence in her preparations for future international travel. This illustrates that even without venturing internationally, tourists continue to engage in provisional trials domestically, allowing them to refine their strategies and feel more equipped for future international journeys. Likewise, other T2 tourists expressed the same approach, emphasising that they prefer to test what they have learnt domestically before venturing abroad. They explained that immediately implementing these measures in an international setting feels too risky. Concerns about potential failures, such as health or safety strategies not working as expected, could leave them vulnerable or stranded in a foreign country, adding further complexity to an already stressful situation. This sentiment highlights the cautious and strategic approach of T2 tourists, who aim to ensure their methods are effective before taking the significant step of travelling internationally.

Step 9: Building Competence and Self-Confidence

After provisional trials (step 8), tourists enter *Step 9: Building Competence and Self-Confidence*. At this stage, they reflect on the outcomes of their real-world experiences and begin to internalise what they have learnt. Depending on their experiences, the development of self-confidence and competence vary, with some tourists feeling more assured than others based on the challenges they have faced and how effectively they have managed them. Typically, this step occurs towards the end of their trip, as tourists prepare to return to their home and continue until they have safely arrived back. During this period, tourists consolidate the experiences and evaluate what strategies were successful and how they navigated various situations, gaining a deeper sense of assurance and readiness for future travel.

Positive feedback from the successful application of their strategies often reinforces their sense of competence and boosts their self-confidence. Tourists who found that their preparations aligned well with the realities of their destinations felt validated in their efforts. For instance, Kelly and Meng had a seamless experience in Australia, where the local environment matched their research. This consistency affirmed their planning skills, strengthened their self-assurance, and boosted their belief in their ability to handle future travel scenarios with confidence. Similarly, Hillary, despite her initial anxiety, realised that travelling abroad was not as daunting as she had feared. As she observed that strict adherence to health measures was not always necessary, her confidence grew, and she became more comfortable adapting her approach to different situations.

Even when adjustments were needed, the process of adapting to new environments and navigating unexpected challenges provided a strong foundation for developing skills and self-assurance. Charlene's travel experience exemplifies this adaptability. Initially feeling conspicuous and uncomfortable wearing medical face masks in Australia, she and her family noticed the odd and unfriendly stares from locals. Recognising the need to adjust, they decided to stop wearing masks to blend in better, which ultimately led to a more pleasant and culturally aware experience. This ability to adapt in response to negative feedback enhanced Charlene's confidence and cultural competence, teaching her the importance of balancing safety with situational awareness.

However, not all feedback was positive or confidence-boosting. Jen's experience during her transit in Japan serves as an example of how unexpected obstacles can undermine confidence. Despite her detailed preparations, she had to navigate unforeseen procedural and language challenges. The confusion, coupled with the language barrier, made the situation overwhelming, leaving Jen feeling less confident about managing similar complexities in the future.

T2 tourists, who have yet to travel internationally, also experience elements of Step 9, though in a different context. Their journey of building competence and self-confidence often occur domestically as they test and refine their strategies for future international travel. For example, Diana had been incorporating safety measures, like using a medicated nasal spray, into her daily routine, which had gradually increased her confidence. Although she had not yet faced the challenges of international travel, the act of practising and familiarising herself with protective measures contribute to a growing sense of readiness. For T2 tourists, the feedback loop is less immediate and more preparatory, but the process of internalising and evaluating what works well still play a critical role in building self-assurance for when they eventually decide to travel abroad.

Overall, Step 9 reveals that the development of competence and self-confidence among tourists is a complex process. Positive experiences and successful adjustments generally lead to increased self-assurance for those who have travelled internationally, while for T2 tourists, practising strategies domestically lay the groundwork for future confidence. However, when experiences are particularly stressful or challenging to manage, they can erode confidence, underscoring the delicate balance in the transformative learning journey. These varied outcomes reflect the multifaceted nature of the transformative learning journey, where both triumphs and preparatory experiences shape tourists' readiness and adaptability for international travel.

Step 10: Reintegration

Step 10: Reintegration marks the final stage of the transformative learning journey, where tourists incorporate the lessons, skills, and new perspectives gained from their experiences into their everyday lives. At this stage, tourists further reflect on how their travel experiences have reshaped their attitudes, decision-making processes, and overall approach to future travel. Reintegration involves more than just a return to normalcy; it is about embedding these transformative changes into one's worldview and behaviour, making them lasting and meaningful.

For T1 tourists who have travelled internationally, reintegration often involves a blend of confidence, cultural awareness, and a more flexible attitude towards travel. For example, tourists like Hillary, who initially worried about the complexities of post-pandemic travel, have become more adaptable and less anxious about future trips. The realisation that she could manage unexpected situations and adjust her plans in real-time instilled in her a sense of resilience. Her experience has influenced how she will approach travel in the future, perhaps with less rigidity and greater openness to adapting based on circumstances. Tourists like Kelly and Meng, whose expectations were consistently met, have reintegrated their learnings with a renewed trust in their ability to plan effectively. They may continue to use the research methods and planning strategies that served them well, knowing that their

preparations align with on-the-ground realities. This affirmation reinforces their sense of control and enhances their future travel planning, making them more confident and strategic tourists.

For T2 tourists, such as Diana, the reintegration process looks different but is equally significant. Even though they had not yet travelled abroad, the practices and routines they adopted domestically, such as using health protection measures, are likely to remain part of their daily lives. Diana has integrated these habits into her regular routine, building a foundation for when she eventually decides to travel internationally. This demonstrates that reintegration can still occur in a preparatory context, influencing future behaviours and shaping a readiness to embrace international travel when the time comes.

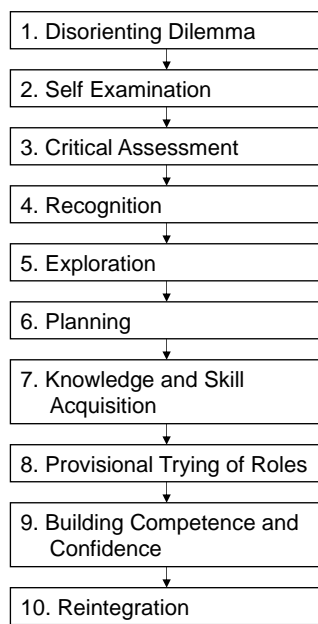


Figure 4.1. Mezirow Transformative Learning Theory Model

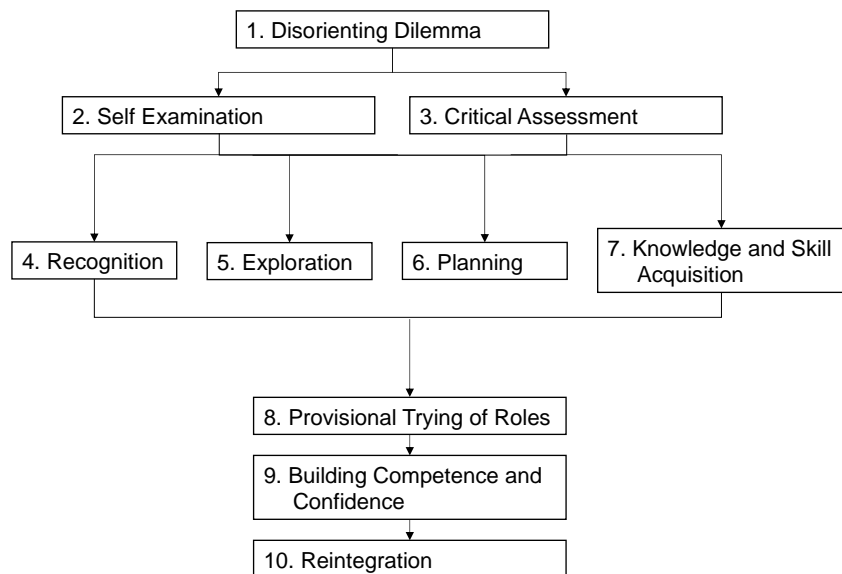


Figure 4.4. Transformative Learning Theory Model for Leisure Tourism

Figure 4.4 visually summarises the holistic nature of transformative journey about international leisure travel, illustrating the non-linear dynamics of the initial and middle phases and the sequential nature of the final stages, compared to the conventional sequence in Figure 4.1. This model highlights the evolving mindset of tourists as they navigate the complexities of post-pandemic travel, balancing resilience, preparedness, adaptability, change in impression towards different countries and change in the attitude towards international leisure travel.

4.1.3. Core Themes of Transformative Learning Journey in Leisure Tourism

The qualitative findings of this study reveal key themes that represent the main learning outcomes for post-pandemic leisure tourists: resilience, risk perception, coping, nostalgia, and optimism bias. These themes were derived through a rigorous thematic analysis, which involved coding and identifying recurring patterns across participant narratives. By examining how tourists described their learning experiences, decision-making strategies, and adaptive measures, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how they have adjusted to the new realities of international travel. While these themes offer rich insights into tourists' adaptive behaviours, certain questions remain unanswered,

highlighting the need for a follow-up with a quantitative approach to further explore and validate these findings.

4.1.3.1. Resilience as a Key Learning Theme

Resilience emerged as a central theme in this study, reflecting how post-pandemic leisure tourists have adapted to the uncertainties and risks associated with international travel. Defined as ability to respond to crises and disasters (Brown et al., 2018; Cartier & Taylor, 2020), resilience, in this context, is demonstrated through proactive measures aimed at mitigating potential risks and ensuring well-being. A significant aspect of this resilience involves gathering comprehensive information in advance of their trips, in other words, getting prepared for what may come. Tourists relied on multiple sources, such as online searches, social media platforms, and advice from family and friends residing in their destination country, to prepare for various contingencies. By equipping themselves with this knowledge, they were able to respond effectively to unforeseen events, such as contracting COVID-19 or facing unexpected scrutiny from local authorities upon arrival. This preparedness aligns with Gottschalk et al.'s (2020) concept of tourist resilience, which emphasises the importance of planning and adaptability in risk management.

The study also highlights tourists' adaptability to local culture and practices as a reflection of resilience. Consistent with findings by Hall et al. (2018), tourists often observe and emulate the behaviours of locals to enhance their travel experiences. Tourists observed and adapted the cultural norms or local practices of the destination, with the purpose of maximising their enjoyment while minimising risks. This behaviour is evident in tourists like Charlene and Hillary, who adjusted their safety precautions based on how locals approached health measures. Such adaptive approaches reflect the essence of resilience, as tourists modify their actions and strategies to navigate unfamiliar and potentially hazardous environments effectively and meaningfully.

Furthermore, the use of projective techniques in discussions provided more evidence of tourists' resilient behaviours. When asked to reveal the contents of their luggage, participants disclosed items such as hand sanitiser, medical masks, COVID-19 test kits, and basic medical supplies. These precautionary measures highlight how tourists have translated their pandemic-related knowledge into concrete actions. This behaviour echoes Gottschalk et al. (2020)'s idea of resilience, where thoughtful preparation and the practical application of knowledge are crucial in responding to crises. By converting gathered information into actionable strategies, tourists embody resilience, showcasing their ability to anticipate challenges and implement effective measures to maintain safety and well-being in an unpredictable post-pandemic travel landscape.

All these findings show that resilience is not a fixed trait, but a continuous learning process, consistent with the findings from latent literature (i.e. Folk, 2006; Kuntz et al., 2017; Cartier & Taylor, 2020; Bhaskara & Filimonau, 2021), where resilience is built through learning from past experience and other perspectives. Tourists actively engage in self-examination (step 2) and critical assessment (step 3) to their surroundings (phase 2), which involves evaluating their ability to face challenges. In this phase, tourists not only assess their own coping abilities but also reflect on their experiences during the pandemic lockdown, considering how those experiences can be applied to post-pandemic travel planning.

Additionally, tourists engage in information gathering (phase 3, steps 4 to 7) to prepare for potential risks. They critically evaluate their previous assumptions about travel safety, drawing on their experiences in dealing with COVID-19 during the lockdown, and incorporate new information to anticipate challenges. This iterative process, involving continuous learning and reassessment, shapes their decision-making for a successful journey. As tourists test out different strategies, such as adopting safety precautions or understanding local customs, they enter phase 4 (steps 8 to 10), where they actively experiment with new roles and perspectives. For example, tourists like Charlene and Hillary adapt their actions based on the observed safety measures of locals, demonstrating a trial-and-error phase typical of transformative learning.

4.1.3.2. Shifting Risk Perception

Risk perception emerged as another crucial theme in this study, especially how it influences tourists' planning and decision-making in post-pandemic context. This term is defined as a subjective assessment of the likelihood of encountering a negative experience, it acts as a key determinant that shapes human behaviour and decision-making (Slovic, 1987). The pandemic has drastically heightened tourists' perception of risk, with health and safety concerns now taking centre stage. Unlike the relatively carefree nature of pre-pandemic leisure travel, the possibility of health-related threats has become a dominant factor affecting travel intentions.

This heightened risk awareness has led tourists to adopt more vigilant and deliberate approaches to travel planning. They engage in comprehensive risk assessments, which include monitoring COVID-19 trends, familiarising themselves with local regulations, and evaluating the safety measures in place before committing to travel. This awareness results in either extensive research and preparation to mitigate health risks or a preference for travelling to familiar, low-risk destinations. The study identified three distinct responses among tourists. First, there are tourists like Jim, who prefer to travel to nearby countries with similar protective measures to those in their home country, Malaysia, feeling confident without the need for extensive preparation. Second, tourists like Sam invest considerable effort into gathering information from various sources to ensure they are thoroughly prepared for international travel, such as the preparations she made for her trip to South Korea. Finally, there are tourists like Fred, who decide to stay put despite the reopening of international borders, choosing to avoid travel altogether due to lingering health concerns and the perceived risks involved. Empirical studies support these findings, showing that risk perception can lead tourists to either refrain from travelling to avoid potential dangers (McKercher & Hui, 2004) or to adopt protective measures to reduce risks (Reichel et al., 2007; Lo et al., 2011). This study aligns these findings, capturing detailed accounts of how risk perception shapes varied travel behaviours in a post-pandemic world.

This study highlights how risk perception aligns with Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), particularly at the disorienting dilemma (step 1). The unpredictable nature of COVID-19 and other lingering infectious diseases (e.g. MonkeyPox, H5N1) created a disorienting dilemma for tourists, fundamentally challenging their preconceived notions of travel safety and forcing them to confront the reality of heightened health risks. This dilemma acts as a critical turning point, where tourists realise that their past travel habits and carefree attitudes are no longer viable in the new global context. Confronted with this dilemma, they experience a sense of

disruption and uncertainty, prompting them to reassess their risk management strategies and overall travel intentions.

Following the initial disorienting dilemma, risk perception continues to evolve during the information gathering phase (phase 3, steps 4 to 7). As tourists seek to reduce uncertainty, they actively gather information from diverse sources, including government websites, social media, third-party booking websites and firsthand accounts from other tourists. This process of information seeking and preparation marks a shift from initial confusion to a more proactive stance in managing perceived risks. Tourists critically evaluate the credibility and relevance of the information they obtain, comparing it with their prior knowledge and experiences. This learning process helps them build a more nuanced understanding of current risks and identify practical strategies to address potential challenges.

In summary, risk perception acts as a catalyst for transformation by triggering a disorienting dilemma that challenges existing beliefs and encourages critical reflection. This dilemma motivates tourists to seek new knowledge, adapt their strategies, and make decisions that reflect a deeper understanding of safety in post-pandemic travel.

4.1.3.3. Coping Mechanism

Coping emerged as another theme in understanding how post-pandemic leisure tourists manage the stress, uncertainty, and risks associated with international travel. It is defined as a process by which individuals actively change their thoughts and actions to minimise or overcome stress caused by internal or external stressors, often associated with risk (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Brough et al., 2005), coping mechanisms play a crucial role in maintaining psychological well-being, self-care, and quality of life (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). When faced with perceived risks and the stress that accompanies them, tourists employ various strategies to manage and mitigate these challenges.

One prominent coping mechanism identified in this study is thorough *preparation and information gathering* (phase 3, steps 4 to 7). Tourists engage in extensive research, consulting a range of sources, including official government websites, social media, and advice from friends and family, to ensure that they are fully informed about health regulations, entry requirements, and potential risks at their destination. By proactively gathering detailed information, tourists feel more confident and better equipped to handle unforeseen circumstances, such as sudden changes in travel restrictions or health-related emergencies. This proactive approach does more than just equip tourists with knowledge; it also uplifts their psychological well-being. The act of preparing for various contingencies provide a sense of control over the situation, reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of empowerment. This sense of preparedness not only minimises stress but also enhances their ability to make informed and adaptive decisions during their travels.

Another key coping strategy is the use of *protective measures*. Tourists have incorporated new habits into their travel routines, such as carrying hand sanitiser, wearing medical masks, and packing COVID-19 test kits and basic medical supplies. These tangible actions provide a layer of security, serving as a physical buffer against the perceived threat of infection. By adopting these precautions, tourists are able to maintain a sense of control over their safety, which help to alleviate anxiety and reduce the psychological stress associated with potential health risks. This behaviour reflects an active approach to managing external stressors and exemplifies the importance of self-care in post-pandemic travel.

Overall, these coping mechanisms illustrate how tourists actively manage the challenges of post-pandemic travel. Tourists can boost their well-being and resilience through preparation and protection. This adaptive approach highlights the evolving strategies that travellers use to navigate a complex and uncertain travel landscape, demonstrating the profound impact of the pandemic on travel behaviours and attitudes.

4.1.3.4. The Role of Nostalgia

Nostalgia surfaced as a powerful motivator, influencing some tourists to revisit familiar destinations in search of comfort and a sense of normalcy. The concept of nostalgia was initially introduced by Holbrook (1993), that describe one's longing for past positive experiences. In this study, the longing for pre-pandemic travel experiences appear to serve as both a source of emotional support and a driver for travel planning. The emotional pull of nostalgic memories drives many tourists to select familiar destinations and activities that evoke joy and comfort from previous travels. This desire to reconnect with cherished experiences provides a sense of psychological reassurance in a world still grappling with post-pandemic uncertainties.

During discussions about their recent travel experiences, participants frequently cited motivations centred on reconnecting with friends and family or revisiting destinations that held sentimental value. This preference for familiar places not only offers emotional comfort but also facilitates their learning and resilience-building processes. For instance, tourists like Charlene chose to return to destinations visited before the pandemic, motivated by a longing to relive happy memories, reconnect with family members, and enjoy the familiarity of navigating well-known environments. This combination of emotional ties and ease of travel reduced the mental and emotional effort required to adapt, fostering a stronger inclination to travel and boosting her confidence in managing potential risks. For another group of tourists like Jim, Ben, and Nicole, the longing was less about specific destinations and more about the overall experience and feeling of travel itself. They expressed a deep yearning for the excitement and freedom that travel once provided, highlighting how nostalgia for the act of travelling, rather than any particular place, can be a powerful motivator. This broader sense of nostalgia reflects a desire to recapture the emotions and sensations associated with exploration and adventure, which were significantly restricted during the pandemic.

Linking back to the TLT framework, sentiment of nostalgia plays a significant role in influencing the disorienting dilemma (step 1), where tourists confront the reality of how travel has changed since the pandemic. Nostalgia triggers reflection on past travel experiences and prompts a desire to recapture a sense of normalcy and joy that characterised pre-pandemic journeys. This emotional response continues to influence subsequent stages, particularly during self-examination (step 2) and critical assessment (step 3), as tourists reflect on their yearning for past experiences and critically evaluate how these emotions shape their current travel decisions and preparedness.

Nostalgia, in this context, not only influences travel decisions but potentially influence the choice of destination, especially when the past experience is associated with a specific country (like Charlene). By choosing familiar destinations, tourists aim to relive positive memories while simultaneously reducing the uncertainty of navigating unfamiliar environments. This intertwining of emotional attachment and practical considerations demonstrates how nostalgia can guide both the motivation to travel and the selection of a destination.

The last group includes those who have yet to travelled internationally, such as Diana, Fred, and Elaine. Although they have chosen to stay put locally, they expressed a strong longing to experience travel as they did before the pandemic. Elaine summarised this sentiment:

"Of course everyone loves to travel, who wouldn't like to travel overseas? I miss experiencing winter that Malaysia doesn't have, walking on the street just to feel that we are on holiday and in a different country. But I think it is still risky to travel at the moment, so I decided to stay put first."

This type of nostalgia is characterised by a deep yearning for the unique experiences that only international travel can offer, such as different seasons and the feeling of being in a foreign environment. However, this longing is tempered by a cautious awareness of the current risks, leading them to prioritise safety while still holding onto the hope of travelling abroad in the future.

Although nostalgia is present, its influence is less dominant compared to the fear driven by risk perception (step 1). In the context of TLT, the disorienting dilemma emerges as these tourists grapple with the tension between their desire to recapture past travel experiences and their heightened awareness of potential health threats. Unlike those who resume travel, this group remains more risk-averse, opting to self-examine (step 2) their readiness for international travel and critically assess (step 3) the evolving situation. By continuing to observe and gather information, they demonstrate a reflective stance, balancing their nostalgic desire against the perceived risks. This cautious approach reflects how risk perception ultimately outweighs nostalgia in shaping their travel decisions, resulting in a prolonged reflective process before making a final decision.

4.1.3.5. Optimism Bias

Optimism bias also emerged as a notable theme in this study, with some tourists displaying an overly optimistic view of their ability to avoid risks while travelling. This cognitive bias appears to encourage more adventurous travel behaviours, as tourists feel confident in their capacity to manage potential threats. However, it also introduces potential hazards if they underestimate the challenges they may encounter. As highlighted by Fragkaki et al. (2021), individuals with an overly optimistic outlook may be less compliant with preventive measures, believing they are less likely to experience negative outcomes. This behaviour is particularly evident among younger tourists under the age of 35 and those who prefer to travel alone or in small groups of fewer than four people.

An illustrative example from this study is Sara, who felt confident in her decision to travel far to the UK. Her optimism was rooted in her belief that being young and fully vaccinated significantly reduced her risk of contracting COVID-19. Additionally, she felt assured in her knowledge of preventive measures, which she believed would keep her safe. This optimistic view made her feel less vulnerable to the virus compared to other travellers, despite the fluctuating health situation in the UK at the time. Sara's optimism not only influenced her willingness to travel but also shaped her perception of the UK's destination image. She viewed the destination more favourably, reassured by her belief that she could manage any risks effectively.

These findings demonstrate how optimism bias can alter both risk perception and travel behaviour. While this bias may encourage tourists to resume international travel and view destinations in a more positive light, it also raises concerns about the potential underestimation of risks. The sense of invulnerability associated with optimism bias can

result in less rigorous adherence to health and safety protocols, posing challenges for the tourists themselves and the wider community. Recognising the impact of optimism bias is essential for developing strategies that promote balanced and well-informed decision-making in post-pandemic tourism.

From the perspective of TLT, optimism bias plays a significant role during the disorienting dilemma (step 1), as tourists initially struggle with the contrast between their desire to travel and the reality of ongoing health risks. During self examination (step 2) and critical assessment (step 3), their optimistic outlook shapes how they evaluate their own ability to manage risks, often downplaying potential threats and reinforcing their confidence in personal safety measures. This mindset influences their planning (step 6), where they may prepare less thorough compared to more risk-averse tourists, given their belief that they are inherently stronger. This process highlights how optimism bias not only affects travel decision assessment but also shapes the planning phase by minimising perceived challenges and prioritising positive expectations.

4.2. Moving Towards a Quantitative Analysis

The qualitative phase of this research has provided an in-depth understanding of the complex and multifaceted learning outcomes experienced by post-pandemic leisure tourists. Themes such as resilience, risk perception, coping mechanism, nostalgia, and optimism bias have been explored through rich and nuanced narratives, revealing how tourists have adapted to the evolving landscape of international travel. However, while these findings offer substantial insights into individual experiences, they also highlight the need for further exploration through a quantitative approach to achieve a more comprehensive and generalisable understanding.

The next phase of this mixed-method research will focus on quantifying these key themes across a larger and more diverse sample. The quantitative analysis will examine the prevalence, intensity, and interrelationships of the key themes, providing statistical evidence to support or challenge the qualitative findings. By measuring these variables on a broader scale, the study aims to identify patterns and correlations that are not easily discernible from qualitative data alone, thereby enriching the overall understanding of post-pandemic leisure tourism behaviours.

In summary, the quantitative phase will complement the qualitative findings by providing empirical data to identify patterns, correlations, and variations across a broader population. This integrated approach will enable a more holistic understanding of post-pandemic leisure tourism, enriching both the theoretical framework and practical strategies for the tourism industry.

4.3. Quantitative Research Findings

4.3.1. Descriptive Statistics

4.3.1.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The total sample is 439, where 45% were males and the remaining were female. Given that Malaysia is a multi-racial country, it is crucial to consider the ethnic composition of respondents to ensure inclusivity. The sample includes Malays (51%), Chinese (43%), Indians (2%), Natives (4%), and Others (1%). Upon further investigation, the "Others" category includes respondents whose parents are of different ethnic backgrounds, reflecting inter-racial marriages. This diversity reflects Malaysia's rich cultural fabric and allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different cultural backgrounds may influence perceptions of travel risks, coping mechanisms, and resilience.

The majority of respondents are married (62%), with 35% being single, 3% single parents, and 1% widowers. The educational background of respondents is predominantly at the degree level (74%). Additionally, 14% hold postgraduate qualifications, while a smaller portion have attended technical or vocational schools beyond high school (4%), completed high school (8%), or have no formal education (0.2%). The higher education levels observed may influence respondents' awareness of travel risks and their ability to adopt coping mechanisms.

The distribution of respondents' monthly personal income was categorised based on the Malaysia Department of Statistics report (DOSM, 2022). This categorisation ensures that respondents have the financial capacity to make independent travel decisions. Notably, nearly half of the respondents (50%, n = 221) report earning between RM 3,970 to RM 8,699, reflecting a substantial portion with mid-range personal income levels. This suggests that many respondents possess the financial means to independently decide on international travel. A significant portion of respondents reported having never contracted COVID-19 (41%), while 40% had been infected once. Finally, A smaller group had contracted the virus twice (16%) or three times or more (3%). This history may influence their risk perception and coping strategies when considering international travel in the post-pandemic context.

Below is an overview of the demographic profile of the respondents.

Profiles	Categories	Frequency (N = 439)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	199	45%
	Female	240	55%
Ethnicity	Malay	222	51%
	Chinese	187	43%
	Indian	10	2%
	Natives	17	4%
	Others	3	1%
Age group	Below 20 years old	2	0%
	21 – 30 years old	146	33%
	31 – 40 years old	140	32%
	41 – 49 years old	93	21%
	50 years old and above	58	13%
Education	Postgraduate	63	14%
	Degree	324	74%
	Technical Vocational School beyond High School level	18	4%
	High School	33	8%
	Primary	0	0%
	No formal Education	1	0%
Marital	Single	154	35%
	Married	270	62%
	Single Parent	12	3%
	Widowers	3	1%
MPI	Less than RM 2,500	36	8%
	RM 2,501 - RM 3,169	53	12%
	RM 3,170 - RM 3,969	40	9%
	RM 3,970 - RM 4,849	51	12%
	RM 4,850 - RM 5,879	62	14%
	RM 5,880 - RM 7,109	55	13%
	RM 7,110 - RM 8,699	53	12%
	RM 8,700 - RM 10,959	34	8%
	RM 10,960 - RM 15,039	38	9%
More than RM 15,040	17	4%	
COVID-19 Contraction Frequency	Never	180	41%
	Once	175	40%
	Twice	72	16%
	Three times or more	12	3%

Table 4.1. Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

4.3.1.2. Past Travel Behaviour of the Respondents

In addition to the demographic information, understanding respondents' past travel experiences is crucial to contextualise their travel perceptions in the post-pandemic era. The survey results indicate varying levels of travel frequency, destinations, travel motivation, and expenditures, reflecting a diverse range of travel behaviours.

Profiles	Categories	Frequency (N = 439)	Percentage (%)
Past Travel Frequency	Haven't travel	28	6%
	Once	124	28%
	Twice	110	25%
	Three or more	177	40%
Past Travel Country(ies)	Asia	344	78%
	Middle East	21	5%
	Europe	25	6%
	North America	6	1%
	Oceania	16	4%
	Haven't travel yet	28	6%
Past Travel Motivation	Holiday	347	79%
	Visit fam	26	6%
	Business	23	5%
	Volunteer	2	0%
	Others	13	3%
	Haven't travel yet	28	6%
Past Travel Expenses	Less than RM 2,000	66	15%
	RM 2,001 – RM 4,000	112	26%
	RM 4,001 – RM 6,000	87	20%
	RM 6,001 – RM 8,000	63	14%
	RM 8,000 – RM 10,000	43	10%
	More than RM 10,000	40	9%
	Haven't travel yet	28	6%

Table 4.2. Past-Foreign Travel Record of The Respondents

The data above shows that a significant portion of respondents (40%) reported having travelled internationally three times or more since travel restrictions were lifted, while 28% travelled once, and 25% travelled twice, only a minority (6%) have not travelled internationally since the reopening of borders. These results suggest that the respondents recruited for this study are well-suited for understanding the constructs identified, given their diverse travel frequency and past experiences.

Among those who have not travelled internationally, only 2 out of 28 respondents participated in the mini-depth interviews. Both of these respondents shared similar reasons for delaying travel. This finding is consistent with the observations from T2 respondents in Study 1. Collectively, they cited inconsistencies in standard operating procedures (SOPs) across different countries, and even within the same country, as a significant deterrent. These inconsistencies raised concerns about potential fines or even being barred from

entering a country after extensive travel planning efforts. As a result, they opted to observe the evolving situation and wait for conditions to stabilise before making any travel plans.

Reflecting findings from the qualitative phase, the data also indicates a strong preference among respondents for travelling to neighbouring countries within Asia (78%). This preference can be attributed to factors such as greater familiarity with these destinations, a clearer understanding of how these countries implement preventive measures and standard operating procedures (SOPs), lower risk and reduced financial strain compared to long-haul travel. This alignment between qualitative insights and survey data highlights that tourists are more likely to choose destinations that are perceived as safer and more financially accessible, especially in a post-pandemic context where uncertainties around international travel persist.

The primary reason for travel was for holidays, with 79% of respondents indicating leisure as their main travel purpose. Other travel motivations included visiting family (6%), business trips (5%), and volunteering (0.5%). A small segment (3%) travelled for other reasons. Understanding these intentions provides insight into the motivations behind post-pandemic travel and highlights the dominance of leisure tourism among respondents. In terms of expenditure, the most common spending range was between RM 2,000 to RM 4,000 (26%). Approximately 20% spent between RM 4,000 to RM 6,000, and 15% spent less than RM 2,000. A smaller group (9%) spent more than RM 10,000 on their most recent trip. This diversity in spending habits indicates that the sample captures a wide range of financial capabilities, which is beneficial for the generalisation of findings.

Some respondents from mini-depth interviews shared about the increased cost in travel expenses as compared to pre-pandemic period, as quoted:

“Some people may say travel now is very expensive, because they (airline) want to cover the lost during lockdown; some people may say travel now is cheaper because they want to encourage people to travel. Both views are correct, depend on where you fly and how you plan your trip, like whether you get promotion price or not. For me, regardless the air ticket price, the travel cost actually higher than before because we need to buy insurance, we need to bring medical face mask and COVID-19 test kit, and the expenses we incur after we come back because we need to quarantine awhile after we are back.”

4.3.1.3. Future Travel Plan of the Respondents

Understanding the future travel plan from the respondents also can get a glimpse of how the respondents react towards their past-travel experience. According to the data below, only 1% of the respondents are not planning to travel abroad again in the near future. This suggests a low likelihood of encountering tourists similar to Jen, who was traumatised by her past travel experience and decided to refrain from future trips. The overwhelming majority of respondents appear ready to resume international travel, reflecting a generally positive attitude towards future travel despite any challenges they may have faced previously.

Profiles	Categories	Frequency (N = 439)	Percentage (%)
Future Travel Plan	next 1-3 months	121	28%
	next 4-6 months	155	35%
	next 7-9 months	75	17%
	next 10-12 months	82	19%
	not planning to	6	1%
Interested Country(ies) for Future Travel	Asia	303	69%
	Middle East	41	9%
	Europe	45	10%
	North America	9	2%
	South America	1	0%
	Sub-Saharan Africa	1	0%
	Oceania	31	7%
Don't know	2	0%	

Table 4.3. Future Travel Plan of The Respondents

The majority of respondents (35%) indicated plans to travel internationally within the next 4-6 months, followed by 28% who intend to travel in the next 1-3 months. A smaller portion plans to travel within the next 7-9 months (17%) or 10-12 months (19%). Insights from the mini-depth interviews revealed that many respondents had already purchased transportation tickets (e.g., air tickets, train tickets, or self-drive) and booked accommodations. This demonstrates that respondents are taking concrete steps towards their travel plans, indicating a strong commitment to travel beyond mere intention. This observation further reinforces the discussion in Chapter 7, where it was noted that relying solely on re-travel intention as a measure is insufficient, as this construct alone does not necessarily indicate a commitment to travel. Respondents may express a high intent to travel without taking any concrete actions. By directly inquiring about their future travel plans, including the timing and destination of interest, this study was able to gauge a deeper level of commitment. Notably, some respondents demonstrated their intent through the mini-depth interviews by sharing specific details of their current travel preparations, such as booking tickets and accommodations. These actionable steps confirm that they are actively planning their trips, aligning with the study's focus on understanding tourists who are genuinely preparing for future travel.

Comparing with the patterns observed in past travel behaviour, the majority of respondents (69%) expressed a preference for travelling within Asia. Again, this aligns with the findings from the qualitative phase, where respondents in Study 1 indicated a preference for nearby destinations due to greater familiarity, perceived safety, and knowledge of the countries' preventive measures and standard operating procedures (SOPs). Other preferred destinations include the Middle East (9%), Europe (10%), and Oceania (7%). Travel interest in regions such as North America (2%), South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa (<1%) remains minimal. This trend highlights a continued cautiousness among tourists, who prefer regions perceived as less risky and more accessible.

However, the slight drop of 9% in preference for Asian destinations compared to previous patterns suggests that respondents may be gaining confidence to explore more distant or less familiar regions after their initial post-pandemic travel experiences. This shift could indicate a growing willingness to be more adventurous as travellers become more comfortable with international travel in the current climate.

4.3.1.4. Descriptive Analysis of Constructs

The calculation of Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for each measurement item can offer general insights into respondents' perceptions and behaviours. The mean summarises the average score for each item, offering an understanding of the general trends in responses to key aspects of the study. For example, when examining destination image, the mean can indicate how respondents rate factors such as safety and attractiveness. The standard deviation, in contrast, evaluates the variability of responses around the mean. It reveals whether opinions are consistent among respondents (low variability) or widely divergent (high variability). A low standard deviation indicates agreement among respondents, whereas a high standard deviation signals diverse viewpoints or potential differences in interpretation. Furthermore, these calculations are in crucial for identifying potential issues with survey items, such as ambiguous wording or inconsistent responses. For example, an extremely high or low mean, combined with a high standard deviation, may suggest a need for refinement in the survey design. Together, the mean and standard deviation not only enhance the reliability and interpretability of survey findings but also provide a foundation for more advanced statistical analyses.

Latent Variable (LV)	Measurement Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Generic Risk Perception	GRP1 I am worried that the accommodation facilities will not be sanitary	4.59	1.69
	GRP2 I'm worried that the diet will be unhealthy.	4.70	1.49
	GRP3 I'm worried about getting sick during my travel	5.20	1.64
	GRP4 I'm worried about other physical harm during my travel	4.81	1.54
	GRP5 I'm afraid that I can't get timely treatment for illness or other physical harm during my travel	4.88	1.41
	GRP6 I'm afraid the costs will be higher than before	5.39	1.40

Latent Variable (LV)	Measurement Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	
	GRP7	I'm afraid there will be some unexpected expenses.	5.35	1.54
	GRP8	I'm worried that I will not get good value for money for my travel.	4.77	1.59
	GRP9	I'm worried that the people will be anxious who care about me	4.22	1.70
	GRP10	I'm afraid the people will think I'm irrational who care about me.	3.71	1.79
	GRP11	I'm afraid it will cause conflicts between couples / family members.	3.45	1.61
	GRP12	I'm afraid the tourist facilities will not be good enough.	4.14	1.63
	GRP13	I'm afraid that tourist services will not be good enough.	4.23	1.36
Risk Perception related to Infectious Disease	RPID1	It is dangerous to travel internationally because of infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	4.26	1.53
	RPID2	Infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox is very frightening.	5.32	1.20
	RPID3	I have much information about infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	5.19	1.50
	RPID4	I am afraid of infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	5.22	1.70
	RPID5	People around me seem to refrain from traveling internationally due to infectious disease like COVID-19 and Monkey Pox.	4.30	1.19
Psychological Resilience	PR1	I can deal with whatever happens while traveling.	5.01	1.22
	PR2	Coping with stress while traveling makes me stronger.	4.97	1.23
	PR3	I can achieve my goals no matter what obstacles I face in my journey.	5.07	1.27
	PR4	I can stay focus under any pressure while traveling.	5.00	1.21
	PR5	I am not easily discouraged, even if my trip is ruined.	5.14	1.35
Destination Image	DI1	is safe and secure	6.02	0.99
	DI2	Offers exciting and interesting places to visit	5.99	1.02
	DI3	Has beautiful scenery and natural attractions	6.11	1.07
	DI4	Has a pleasant climate	5.77	1.07
	DI5	Offers good value for money as a tourism destination	5.87	1.51
Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism	IDCM 1	I will check the information of on infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) by visiting the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or WTO before traveling internationally.	5.31	1.50

Latent Variable (LV)	Measurement Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	
	IDCM2	I will read and check precautions about infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) through doctors or health centers before traveling internationally.	5.26	1.46
	IDCM3	I will prepare a first aid kit for infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) before travel internationally.	5.21	1.47
	IDCM4	I will get the information about local medical facilities and country Embassy to prepare for an emergency because of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) before traveling internationally.	5.15	1.11
	IDCM5	I will frequently wash my hands while traveling internationally.	5.92	1.40
	IDCM6	I will restrain from touching my eyes, nose, and mouth while traveling.	5.33	1.25
	IDCM7	I will cover my mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing while traveling internationally.	5.81	1.15
	IDCM8	I will keep away from those who have the symptoms of infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19, Monkey Pox) while traveling internationally.	5.93	1.57
	IDCM9	I will restrain from meet people for a while after traveling internationally.	5.05	1.17
	IDCM10	I will carefully keep an eye on my health condition after traveling internationally.	5.81	1.38
	Nostalgia	N1	I fantasize about my past international travel experience	5.41
N2		I imagine I was living like pre-COVID period	4.86	1.59
N3		I felt like I am back in time	4.83	1.44
N4		I imagine I was travelling internationally in the simple and pure time	5.26	1.52
N5		I was nostalgic for pre-COVID time	5.05	1.50
N6		I felt my imagination was like an avalanche and I thought of all different things about the past	4.84	1.69
Optimism Bias	OB1	I don't think it's going to happen to my loved ones	4.04	1.41
	OB2	I don't think someone I love may get infected	2.60	1.65
	OB3	I don't think it's going to happen to me	3.78	0.50

Table 4.4. Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Survey Measurement Item

The results for Generic **Risk Perception** indicate moderate to high levels of concern among respondents regarding various aspects of travel risks. Items such as "*higher travel costs*" (mean = 5.39) and "*unexpected expenses*" (mean = 5.35) scored among the highest, suggesting financial concerns are prominent for tourists. Health-related worries also ranked significantly, with "*getting sick during travel*" (mean = 5.20) and "*lack of timely treatment*"

(mean = 4.88), highlighting the perceived vulnerabilities of travelling in uncertain conditions. In contrast, concerns about interpersonal or social issues, such as "*causing conflicts among family members*" (mean = 3.45) or being seen as irrational by others (mean = 3.71), scored lower. These results suggest that respondents are primarily focused on tangible risks, such as financial and health-related concerns, rather than social or relational implications of their travel decisions.

The results for **Risk Perception Related to Infectious Disease** indicate a strong awareness of health risks associated with infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and Monkeypox. Items like the "*frightening nature of diseases*" (mean = 5.32) and "*fear of infection*" (mean = 5.22) scored high, reflecting significant concerns among respondents regarding the potential dangers posed by such diseases. These findings appeared to be consistent with the finding from Study 1 and mini-depth interviews, where the respondents expressed their concerns about COVID-19 mutations that make the virus more resilient and harder to prevent. Additionally, the item "*I have much information about infectious diseases*" (mean = 5.19) suggests that respondents are well-informed. This finding aligns with prior research by Ritchie and Jiang (2019) and results from Study 1, which emphasised the role of information dissemination through various platforms and personal experiences in shaping perceptions of risk.

The mean scores also highlight an important observation: although financial concerns dominate the Generic Risk Perception construct, respondents demonstrate similarly high concerns for health risks, particularly regarding infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and Monkeypox. This indicates that tourists' concerns cover both financial and health dimensions. The standard deviations for both Generic Risk Perception and Risk Perception Related to Infectious Diseases range from 1.19 to 1.79, reflecting a moderate spread in responses. This suggests some variation in individual perceptions of risk, potentially pointing to differing thresholds of risk tolerance among respondents.

The responses for **Psychological Resilience** reflect moderate to high levels of confidence among respondents in their ability to adapt to challenges during travel, as measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Items such as "*I am not easily discouraged, even if my trip is ruined*" (mean = 5.14) and "*I can achieve my goals no matter what obstacles I face in my journey*" (mean = 5.07) scored relatively high, indicating a strong sense of determination and adaptability among respondents. Additionally, the ability to "*stay focused under pressure*" (mean = 5.00) and "*cope with stress while travelling*" (mean = 4.97) further highlight the psychological resources respondents possess when faced with travel-related difficulties. The standard deviations, which range from 1.21 to 1.35, suggest a moderate degree of variation in resilience levels, indicating that while many respondents exhibit high psychological resilience, there is variability in their ability to cope with travel challenges.

The responses for **Destination Image** show consistently high mean scores, indicating favourable perceptions of destination attributes. Items such as "*has beautiful scenery and natural attractions*" (mean = 6.11) and "*is safe and secure*" (mean = 6.02) scored the highest, suggesting that while safety has become increasingly important when selecting a travel destination, the natural appeal of a location continues to play a critical role in decision-making. Additionally, "*offers good value for money*" (mean = 5.87) and "*has a pleasant climate*" (mean = 5.77) further highlight the multifaceted nature of destination image,

incorporating financial, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions. The low standard deviations (0.99 to 1.51) indicate strong consensus among respondents regarding these attributes.

The responses for **Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism** reflect a proactive approach among respondents to manage potential health risks while travelling. Items such as "*frequently washing hands*" (mean = 5.92) and "*avoiding those with symptoms of infectious disease*" (mean = 5.93) scored the highest, indicating a strong adherence to basic preventive behaviours. Additionally, more preparatory behaviours, such as "*checking information on infectious diseases*" (mean = 5.31) and "*preparing a first aid kit*" (mean = 5.21), suggest that respondents are making considerable efforts to mitigate risks before travel. The standard deviations (1.11 to 1.57) indicate moderate variability, suggesting differences in the extent to which respondents adopt coping mechanisms. These findings highlight the importance of health literacy and access to information in empowering travellers to adopt preventive measures. They are consistent with findings from Study 1 and the mini-depth interviews, where respondents noted that international travel now requires greater preparation and research, including understanding the SOPs of the destination country, purchasing travel insurance, and assembling a medical kit that includes COVID-19 test kits.

The results for **Nostalgia** reveal moderate levels of longing for pre-pandemic travel experiences. Statements such as "*I fantasise about my past international travel experience*" (mean = 5.41) and "*I imagine I was living like pre-COVID period*" (mean = 4.86) scored the highest among the measurement items, suggesting the emotional connection respondents have with their past travel experiences. Similarly, "*I was nostalgic for pre-COVID time*" (mean = 5.05) reflects a broader sentiment of longing for a simpler and more carefree period. This aligns with findings from Study 1, where respondents emphasised the emotional significance of pre-pandemic travel memories, particularly in the context of coping with the uncertainties of current travel environments. The standard deviations (1.44 to 1.69) reflect moderate variation, indicating that nostalgia is more pronounced among some respondents.

The responses for **Optimism Bias** indicate relatively low levels of belief in personal immunity from health risks, with items such as "*I don't think it's going to happen to me*" (mean = 3.78) and "*I don't think it's going to happen to my loved ones*" (mean = 4.04) scoring lower compared to other constructs. Notably, "*I don't think someone I love may get infected*" (mean = 2.60) scored the lowest, reflecting a cautious or realistic outlook among respondents regarding the risks posed by infectious diseases.

These results align with findings from Study 1 and the mini-depth interviews, where respondents highlighted the importance of proactive measures such as purchasing insurance and preparing medical kits before travel. One respondent appropriately summarised this perspective during the interviews, stating:

"Younger and vaccinated people may seem to have better immunity than older vaccinated people, which seems like they have a lower tendency to contract the COVID-19 virus. But COVID-19 has been mutating so much that I cannot keep track of how many versions there are now. I think everyone is at the same risk."

However, these findings contradict with an observed theme in Study 1, where younger, vaccinated tourists, particularly those traveling alone or in small groups, perceived themselves as being at lower risk compared to older tourists, who were believed to have weaker immune systems. The standard deviations (0.50 to 1.65) suggest varying degrees

of optimism bias, indicating that while some respondents exhibit higher optimism, others are more cautious, which may explain the mixed findings in this construct.

4.3.2. Measurement Model Evaluation

4.3.2.1. Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR)

All constructs in this study were measured using reflective indicators. Table 4.5 presents the measurement model results. Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) are used to measure internal consistency reliability. Most of the constructs can be evaluated for internal consistency reliability, except categorical constructs like demographic questions.

For the majority of constructs in Table 4.5, both CA and CR values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating that internal consistency has been achieved (Hair et al., 2017). However, Optimism Bias (OB) shows much lower CA and CR values, falling below the threshold. This suggests that the items in the scale are not well correlated and may not effectively measure the same underlying construct.

This result for OB was somewhat anticipated, as discussed in the earlier section on measurement item review. The concerns regarding the reliability test threshold stem from the limited number of measurement items included in the scale, which may have constrained its ability to demonstrate adequate internal consistency.

Upon closer examination, it was observed that the sentence tone structure of OB3 is opposite to that of OB1 and OB2. Consequently, OB3 was removed, and CA and CR were recalculated. However, since only two items remained, this proved insufficient to meet several restrictive assumptions, including unidimensionality, uncorrelated errors, and tau-equivalence. As a result, the values of CA and CR remained low. This outcome aligns with Rammstedt & Beierlein's (2014) assertion that two measurement items are insufficient to achieve internal consistency. Therefore, it must be concluded that the current measurement items for OB are inadequate, and the construct must be removed from further analysis. Future research should consider developing more accurate and comprehensive measurement items for OB to ensure robust internal consistency and construct validity.

4.3.2.2. Outer Loadings

Outer loading refers to the correlation between an observed indicator and its corresponding latent construct in a reflective measurement model. It indicates how well an indicator represents the construct. Outer loading values range from -1 to 1, with higher absolute values reflecting stronger correlations and a better representation of the construct. Indicators with outer loadings below 0.4 are generally considered weak and may be removed from the model as they do not significantly contribute to the construct's measurement (Hulland, 1999). In this study, all outer loadings are much higher than 0.4, show that indicators have a strong association with their respective constructs.

4.3.2.3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Another important measure, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), is commonly used to assess the convergent validity of a construct in a structural equation model. An AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates good convergent validity, suggesting that the construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. Majority of the constructs in this study have AVE values exceeding the threshold of 0.50, except for Generic Risk Perception (GPR) at 0.483 and Optimism Bias (OB) at 0.426. The AVE value for GPR is close to the acceptable threshold, suggesting it can remain in the model without significant concern. However, the AVE value for OB is notably lower. Combined with its low Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) values, this indicates that the measurement items for OB fail to explain at least 50% of the variance in the construct, making the measurement items included insufficiently explain the construct and cannot achieve internal consistency. This inadequacy suggests that the included measurement items are insufficient to effectively capture the construct and fail to achieve internal consistency. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that OB should be excluded from the model.

Construct	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Generic Risk Perception (GRP)	GRP1	0.550	0.909	0.923	0.480
	GRP2	0.782			
	GRP3	0.760			
	GRP4	0.777			
	GRP5	0.726			
	GRP6	0.542			
	GRP7	0.619			
	GRP8	0.656			
	GRP9	0.739			
	GRP10	0.691			
	GRP11	0.647			
	GRP12	0.739			
	GRP13	0.747			
Risk Perception related to Infectious Disease (RPID)	RPID1	0.391	0.735	0.827	0.4999
	RPID2	0.847			
	RPID3	0.617			
	RPID4	0.848			
	RPID5	0.738			
Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism (IDCM)	IDCM 1	0.836	0.921	0.934	0.587
	IDCM2	0.850			
	IDCM3	0.758			
	IDCM4	0.811			
	IDCM5	0.726			
	IDCM6	0.728			
	IDCM7	0.705			
	IDCM8	0.716			
	IDCM9	0.739			
	IDCM10	0.777			
Psychological Resilience (PR)	PR1	0.753	0.860	0.899	0.641
	PR2	0.780			
	PR3	0.837			

Construct	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
	PR4	0.798			
	PR5	0.832			
Destination Image (DI)	DI1	0.843	0.873	0.908	0.664
	DI2	0.842			
	DI3	0.800			
	DI4	0.804			
	DI5	0.785			
Nostalgia (N)	N1	0.707	0.881	0.910	0.628
	N2	0.828			
	N3	0.824			
	N4	0.786			
	N5	0.774			
	N6	0.827			
Optimism Bias (OB)	OB1	0.640	0.485	0.685	0.426
	OB2	0.772			
	OB3	0.522			

Table 4.5. Measurement Model Evaluation

4.3.2.4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

In addition to reliability and convergent validity, discriminant validity is assessed to ensure that constructs intended to be distinct are indeed distinct from one another. One method for evaluating discriminant validity is the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). HTMT measures the similarity between constructs and is considered a more reliable method for assessing discriminant validity compared to traditional approaches like the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 4.6 presents the HTMT results for this study, with all values falling below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Kline, 2016). This indicates that the constructs exhibit good discriminant validity. The result suggests that each construct measures a distinct concept, which is a crucial requirement for the validity of the structural model.

	IDCM	DI	N	RPID	GRP	PR	N x RPID	N x GRP	N x PR
IDCM									
DI	0.638								
N	0.539	0.517							
RPID	0.735	0.501	0.582						
GRP	0.421	0.353	0.455	0.767					
PR	0.387	0.390	0.317	0.278	0.144				
N x RPID	0.145	0.185	0.239	0.311	0.142	0.026			
N x GRP	0.060	0.152	0.227	0.165	0.098	0.057	0.750		
N x PR	0.146	0.230	0.080	0.050	0.092	0.179	0.188	0.103	

Table 4.6. Discriminant Validity (HTMT) Result

4.3.3. Structural Model Evaluation

Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the Optimism Bias construct was removed due to issues related to internal consistency, as indicated by low Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE values. As a result, the hypotheses involving Optimism Bias were no longer viable for further testing. The remaining hypotheses now focus on the constructs that demonstrated sufficient reliability and validity, including:

- H1: Higher levels of generic risk perception are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.
- H2: Higher levels of risk perception related to infectious disease are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.
- H3: Higher levels of generic risk perception are positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.
- H4: Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.
- H5: Higher levels of generic risk perception are negatively associated with destination image.
- H6: Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is negatively associated with destination image.
- H7: The use of coping strategies is positively associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.
- H8: Higher levels of psychological resilience are positively associated with a more favourable destination image.
- H9: Psychological resilience mediates the relationship between risk perception and destination image, such that higher resilience reduces the negative impact of perceived risks on destination image.
- H10: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between generic risk perception and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.
- H11: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between risk perception related to infectious disease and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.
- H12: Nostalgia moderates the relationship between psychological resilience and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia strengthen the positive effect of resilience on destination image.

These revised hypotheses now focus on the relationships between generic risk perception (GRP), risk perception related to infectious diseases (RPID), coping strategies related to infectious disease (IDCM), psychological resilience (PR), destination image (DI), and nostalgia (N) as a moderator. After excluding Optimism Bias, which functioned as a moderating variable, nostalgia stands as the only moderator in the model. The following

sections will detail the structural model evaluation to assess the relationships between the remaining constructs.

The structural model was evaluated based on the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2017). The first step in this evaluation was to assess any potential multicollinearity concerns by examining the inner variance inflation factor (VIF) values of the model. Multicollinearity occurs when there is a high correlation between predictor variables, which can distort the estimates of relationships between constructs (Hair et al., 2017). To address this, a threshold of 5 is commonly used, where any VIF value above 5 suggests potential multicollinearity issues. The results presented in Table 8.8 show that all inner VIF values fall well below this threshold, indicating that there are no significant multicollinearity concerns in the model. This suggests that the constructs in the model are not highly correlated with each other, allowing for a more accurate assessment of their relationships and ensuring the robustness of the model's results (Hair et al., 2017).

The second evaluation involves assessing all hypothesised relationships by examining the path coefficients and corresponding p-values, as recorded in Table 4.8. A p-value less than 0.01, 0.05, or 0.10 indicates that the path relationship is significant at the 1%, 5%, or 10% level, respectively. In this study, the significance of each path is evaluated to test the validity of the hypotheses.

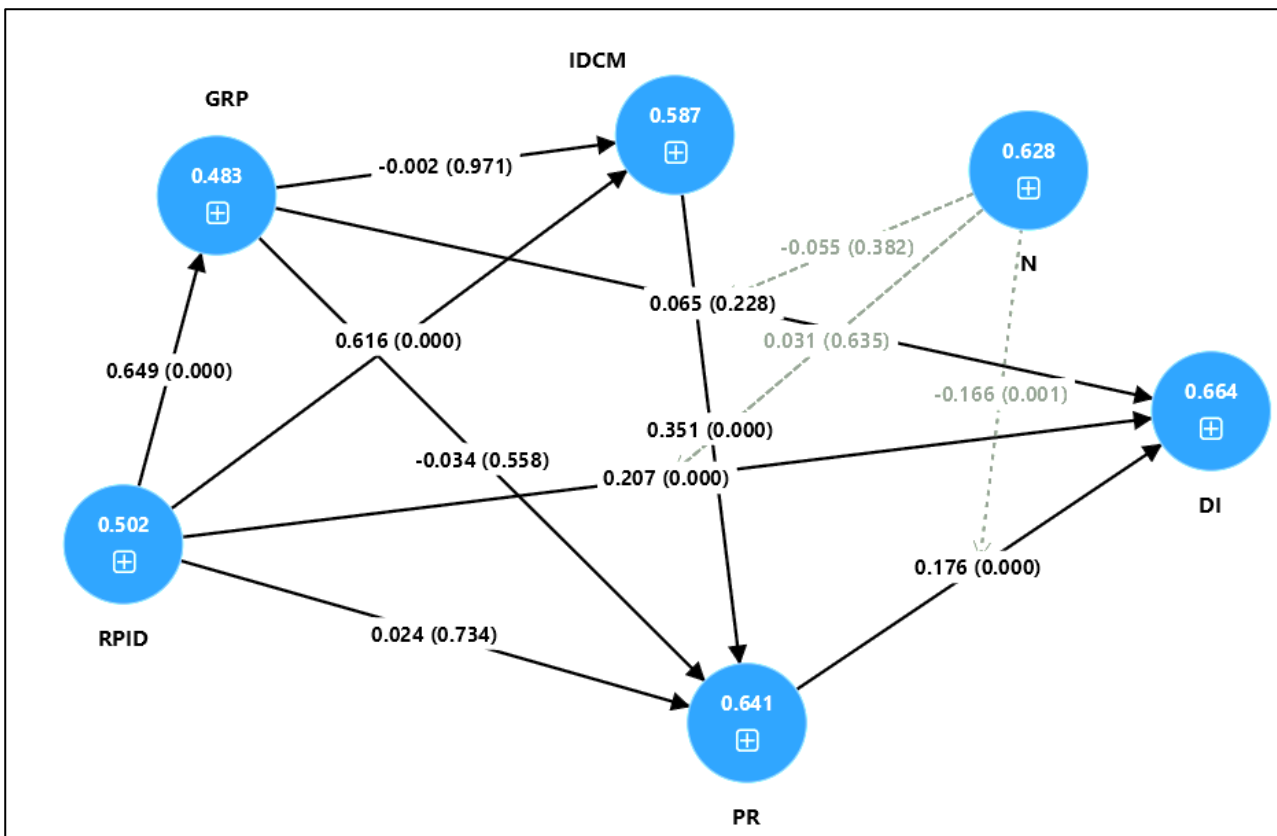


Figure 4.5. Structural Model Evaluation

4.3.3.1. Direct Effects

	VIF	Path coefficients	P values	Result
Direct Effect				
GRP -> IDCM	1.728	-0.002	0.971	H1 not supported
RPID -> IDCM	1.728	0.616	0.000***	H2 supported
GRP -> PR	1.728	-0.034	0.558	H3 not supported
RPID - PR	2.339	0.024	0.734	H4 not supported
GRP -> DI	1.784	0.065	0.228	H5 not supported
RPID -> DI	2.034	0.207	0.000***	H6 supported
IDCM -> PR	1.609	0.351	0.000***	H7 supported
PR -> DI	1.174	0.176	0.000*	H8 supported

Note: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 4.7. VIF and Structural Model Result on Direct effects

Hypothesis 1 suggests that higher levels of GRP are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies (IDCM) among tourists. However, the path coefficient for this relationship is -0.002 ($p = 0.971$), which indicates an insignificant negative association. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is not supported by the data, suggesting that generic risk perceptions do not significantly influence tourists' adoption of coping strategies. This lack of a significant relationship may imply that while tourists acknowledge various risks related to travel, such as financial concerns, general hygiene, or service quality, these concerns do not necessarily drive them to adopt coping strategies. In other words, tourists may be aware of these risks, but they do not perceive them as immediate threats requiring action to cope.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that higher levels of risk perception related to infectious disease (RPID) are positively associated with the adoption of coping strategies (IDCM). The result for this hypothesis was significantly different from Hypothesis 1. The path coefficient for this relationship is 0.616 ($p < 0.000$), a strong positive association was found, supporting Hypothesis 2. This indicates that tourists who perceive a higher risk related to infectious diseases are more likely to engage in coping strategies, such as increased precautionary measures or avoidance behaviours.

The findings suggest that generic risk perceptions, such as concerns about financial risk, general hygiene, or destination service quality, do not significantly influence tourists' decisions to adopt coping strategies. However, specific concerns related to infectious diseases, such as the fear of contracting COVID-19, significantly motivate tourists to take precautionary actions. This observation is consistent with insights from Study 1 and the mini-depth interviews, where tourists emphasised that their preparations for international travel were primarily driven by concerns over infectious disease risks, rather than more general health risks. On the other hand, the significant positive relationship between infectious disease risk perception and coping strategies highlights the importance of addressing tourists' concerns about specific, high-priority health risks, such as viral infections, as a key driver of protective behaviours during travel. This finding is consistent with existing literature (e.g. Lee et al., 2012; Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017; Han et al., 2022), which indicates that health risk perception (such as COVID-19 virus risk) significantly influences tourists to adopt problem-focused coping strategies to manage the risk.

For example, tourists reported ensuring that their travel insurance included coverage for COVID-19, carrying medicines to treat COVID-19 symptoms, and packing a COVID-19 test kit. These actions were primarily aimed at mitigating the risk of contracting or spreading infectious diseases, particularly COVID-19 virus, reflecting a stronger concern for specific health threats compared to general risks like food safety or hygiene. Therefore, the insignificant result for generic risk perception suggests that general concerns are less likely to prompt tourists to adopt coping strategies.

Hypothesis 3 examines the association between GRP and the development of psychological resilience (PR). The path coefficient for this relationship is -0.034 ($p = 0.558$), indicating an insignificant negative association. As the result, Hypothesis 3 is not supported by the data, suggesting that generic risk perception does not significantly influence the development of psychological resilience in tourist. This result implies that while tourists may recognise and be aware of various risks associated with travel, these perceptions do not appear to play a significant role in fostering psychological resilience. This finding suggests that psychological resilience, which refers to the ability to adapt and recover from challenges, may be shaped by factors beyond general risk concerns. Instead, resilience may be more closely related to specific experiences, coping mechanisms, or individual traits, rather than to a broad perception of risk.

Hypothesis 4, which suggests that higher levels of RPID are positively associated with the development of PR. The path coefficient for this relationship is 0.024 ($p = 0.7345$), indicating an insignificant positive association. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is not supported by the data, suggesting that RPID does not significantly influence the development of PR in tourists. Although the result shows a slight positive association, the path coefficient is very small, and the p-value (0.7345) exceeds the common threshold for significance (typically $p < 0.05$). This means that, contrary to expectations, tourists' concerns about infectious diseases, such as the fear of contracting viruses like COVID-19, do not appear to significantly contribute to the development of psychological resilience. One possible explanation for this finding is that while concerns about infectious diseases may influence tourists' behaviours, these concerns do not directly translate into enhanced psychological resilience. Resilience may be influenced by other factors, such as tourists' personal coping strategies, past experiences, or their ability to adapt to challenges, rather than just their perception of health risks.

The findings from Hypotheses 3 and 4, which suggest that neither GRP nor RPID have a direct significant impact on the development of PR, contradict existing literature that highlights a positive relationship between risk perception and resilience. Previous studies often describe risk perception as a catalyst for building psychological resilience, even in tourism industry. For example, research by Lee et al. (2012), Luthar et al. (2000) and Han et al. (2022) emphasise that higher levels of perceived risks, such as health threats, encourage individuals to develop resilience through proactive behaviours, such as learning about protective measures or maintaining a positive mindset in the face of uncertainty. These studies argue that increased risk perception motivates tourists to engage in behaviour that enhance their ability to adapt to challenges.

However, the results from this study suggest a more nuanced relationship between risk perception and psychological resilience. While the literature supports the idea that risk perception drives resilience-building behaviours, the findings here indicate that the direct

influence of risk perception, whether generic (GRP) or related to infectious disease (RPID), on psychological resilience may not be as strong as anticipated. Instead, this non-significant relationship may point to the possibility that coping mechanisms, such as the adoption of specific precautionary measures, could mediate the relationship between risk perception and resilience. In other words, tourists may not directly build resilience from simply perceiving higher risks; instead, they may first engage in coping strategies that help them adapt to challenges, and it is through these behaviours that resilience is developed. This divergence from the literature suggests that while risk perception may prompt tourists to prepare for potential risks, it could be their coping strategies that more directly influence their psychological resilience. Therefore, coping mechanisms may play a mediating role, bridging the gap between risk perceptions and resilience. This insight contributes a novel perspective to the current understanding of resilience in tourism, suggesting that coping strategies could be the key factor enabling tourists to develop resilience, rather than risk perception alone.

Hypothesis 5 examines the relationship between GRP and destination image (DI). The path coefficient for this relationship is 0.065, with a p-value of 0.228, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant. As a result, Hypothesis 5 is not supported by the data, suggesting that generic risk perceptions do not significantly influence tourists' perceptions of a destination's image. This finding is somewhat surprising, as existing literature suggests that general risk perceptions, such as concerns about safety, infrastructure, and environmental factors, often play a crucial role in shaping tourists' destination image. For instance, some scholars argue that when tourists perceive a destination as risky, they are more likely to form a negative image of that destination (Jahari et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022). In contrast, the findings from this study indicate that general risk perceptions, such as those associated with broader concerns about a destination, do not appear to have a strong influence on how tourists perceive the destination's overall image.

Hypothesis 6 investigates the relationship between RPID and DI. The path coefficient for this relationship is 0.207, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant positive association. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is supported by the data, suggesting that higher levels of risk perception related to infectious diseases are positively associated with a more negative destination image. This significant positive relationship aligns with existing literature, which suggests that health-related risks, particularly those associated with infectious diseases like COVID-19, can significantly alter tourists' perceptions of a destination. The past research shows that heightened concerns about health risks often lead to more negative perceptions of destinations. When tourists associate a destination with high health risks, they are more likely to view that destination unfavourably, which can deter travel intentions and hinder tourism recovery efforts.

Similarly, the qualitative insights from Study 1 and the mini-depth interviews reinforce this finding, with respondents expressing greater concern about destinations' ability to mitigate health risks, such as those posed by COVID-19, than about other general safety issues. Tourists noted that they prioritised destinations perceived to have robust health measures, including high hygiene standards, accessible healthcare infrastructure, and effective crowd control, as these measures reduced their perceived likelihood of contracting infectious diseases. In contrast, destinations perceived as lacking in these areas were viewed less favourably, regardless of their prior popularity or other appealing attributes. These preferences reflect a broader post-pandemic trend where tourists evaluate destinations through a health-conscious lens, giving precedence to personal safety and well-being.

This finding is consistent with previous studies, which indicate that when tourists perceive a destination as risky, they are more likely to develop negative perceptions about that destination, leading to reluctance in choosing it for travel (Han et al., 2022; Jahari et al., 2021). Such negative perceptions can significantly hinder tourism recovery efforts, as destinations that are seen as insufficiently addressing health safety concerns may struggle to regain tourist confidence and attractiveness. Conversely, destinations that are perceived as prioritising the health and safety of all, including foreign tourists, are deemed more attractive and appealing, even if other aspects of the destination might previously have been considered less desirable.

The findings highlight a critical distinction between GRP and RPID, as demonstrated in the comparison analysis of Hypotheses 1 and 2. While generic risks may be acknowledged, they appear to have a limited impact compared to the stronger and more immediate concerns related to infectious diseases. This distinction emphasises the unique role that health-related risks play in shaping tourists' perceptions and reactions. Consequently, this finding calls for a revision of measurement items to better capture the heightened emphasis on health risks compared to other types of risks, reflecting the shift in tourists' risk perceptions since the pre-pandemic period.

Hypothesis 7 proposed a positive relationship between IDCM and the development of PR among tourists. The results, with a path coefficient of 0.351 and a highly significant p-value of 0.000, strongly support the hypothesis, indicating a robust association between coping strategies and the enhancement of psychological resilience. This finding aligns with the existing literature, which highlights the importance of problem-focused coping strategies in fostering resilience (Graven et al., 2014; Biggs et al., 2017). As discussed in Chapter 6.3 and 6.7.5, the measurement items predominantly reflect problem-focused behaviours, and the findings demonstrate that these strategies cultivate a sense of preparedness. By equipping tourists to handle potential adversities effectively, such behaviours directly contribute to resilience-building. The qualitative insights from Study 1 and the mini-depth interviews further support these findings. Tourists consistently reported that thorough research, learning, and mental and physical preparation enabled them to feel ready to face challenges during international travel. A particularly compelling response emerged from a mini-depth interview when a participant was asked, "*Seeing the questions asked between coping mechanisms and psychological resilience, which one comes first? Why?*" The respondent stated:

"We become resilient through all sorts of learning, we learn how to protect ourselves during those 2 years of lockdown, we become more resilient in dealing with COVID-19. When we can travel again, like now, we need to learn again how to manage the situation if we are at foreign country. So, I think we learn before we think we are ready (resilient)."

This response captures the iterative relationship between learning and resilience, reinforcing the notion that coping mechanisms, particularly those involving actionable strategies, lay the foundation for psychological resilience. Moreover, the significant relationship between IDCM and PR suggests the potential for mediation effects, wherein IDCM may serve as a bridge between risk perceptions and resilience.

Hypothesis 8 suggests that higher levels of PR are positively associated with a more favourable DI. The path coefficient of 0.176 ($p < 0.000$) strongly supports this hypothesis, showing that psychological resilience significantly shapes positive perceptions of travel destinations.

The findings suggest that resilient tourists are more likely to consider a wider variety of destinations, extending beyond local options or countries with safety protocols similar to their own. This highlights that psychological resilience enables tourists to embrace travel opportunities more freely, without being overly constrained by perceived safety standards. Furthermore, resilience allows tourists to focus on the appeal of a destination itself, rather than being preoccupied with concerns over health or safety risks. In essence, psychological resilience empowers tourists to view destinations more positively, fostering an optimistic and open-minded approach to travel even in the times of uncertainties. The result from Study 1 aligns with these observations, indicating that resilient tourists are better equipped to handle uncertainties and maintain positive perceptions of destinations, even in the face of potential risks. This finding addresses a significant research gap identified by Prayag et al. (2020) and Han et al. (2022), who highlighted the need for studies exploring the influence of psychological resilience on destination image.

4.3.3.2. Mediation Effects

Initially, based on the list of hypotheses, only one mediation analysis was planned to assess the role of psychological resilience (PR) as a mediator between risk perceptions (GRP and RPID) and destination image (DI). However, during the process of analysing the direct effects between the constructs, it became apparent that another mediation might be present, specifically, the potential mediating role of coping mechanisms (IDCM) between risk perceptions (GRP and RPID) and PR.

Hypothesis	Total Effect		Direct Effect		Indirect Effect	
	β	p-value	β	p-value	β	p-value
H9: GRP -> PR -> DI	0.074	0.166	0.079	0.135	-0.006	0.543
H9: RPID -> PR -> DI	0.249	0.000***	0.206	0.000***	0.007	0.557
GRP -> IDCM -> PR	-0.032	0.611	-0.035	0.551	0.003	0.878
RPID -> IDCM -> PR	0.251	0.000***	0.041	0.563	0.210	0.000***

Table 4.8. Mediation Effect Result Table

Hypothesis 9: Mediating Role of Psychological Resilience (PR)

The mediation analysis aimed to evaluate the mediating role of PR in the relationship between risk perceptions (GRP and RPID) and DI as outlined in Hypothesis 9. Given the presence of two distinct types of risk perception constructs in this study separate analyses were conducted to evaluate the mediating role of PR for each construct.

The first analysis examined the mediating role of PR in the relationship between GRP and DI. The results (Table 4.8) revealed an insignificant indirect effect of GRP on DI through PR ($\beta = -0.006$, $p = 0.543$). This suggests that PR does not significantly mediate the relationship

between GRP and DI. Additionally, the total effect of GRP on DI was also insignificant ($\beta = 0.074$, $p = 0.166$), so was the direct effect ($\beta = 0.079$, $p = 0.135$) with the inclusion of PR as mediator. These findings imply that GRP does not meaningfully influence DI, either directly or indirectly through PR.

The second mediation analysis assessed the mediating role of PR in the relationship between RPID and DI. The results showed an insignificant indirect effect of RPID on DI through PR ($\beta = 0.007$, $p = 0.557$). However, the total effect of RPID on DI was significant ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0$), similar goes to the direct effect ($\beta = 0.206$, $p < 0$) with the inclusion of PR as mediator. These findings indicate that while PR does not mediate the relationship between RPID and DI, RPID exerts a significant direct influence on DI. This exemplifies a case of no mediation, where the indirect effect is insignificant, but the direct effect remains strong.

The results suggest that PR plays a limited role as a mediator between risk perceptions and DI, thereby not supporting Hypothesis 9. In the context of GRP, PR does not significantly mediate the relationship, as both the indirect and total effects were insignificant. This implies that for generic risk perceptions, PR is not a critical factor in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations. Conversely, for RPID, although PR does not act as a mediator, RPID itself has a significant direct effect on DI, which also shown in direct effect analysis in the earlier section. This highlights the importance of infectious disease-related risk perceptions in influencing destination image. Even in the absence of mediation, RPID remains a key factor in shaping tourists' views of travel destinations.

Mediating Role of Infectious Disease Coping Mechanism (IDCM)

The mediation analyses further examined the role of IDCM (coping mechanisms) as a mediator between risk perceptions (GRP and RPID) and psychological resilience (PR). Separate analyses were conducted for each type of risk perception construct to evaluate the mediating effects of IDCM.

The first analysis evaluated whether IDCM mediates the relationship between GRP and PR. The results revealed an insignificant indirect effect of GRP on PR through IDCM ($\beta = 0.003$, $p = 0.878$), indicating that the mediation pathway is not supported. Furthermore, both the total effect ($\beta = -0.032$, $p = 0.611$) and the direct effect ($\beta = -0.035$, $p = 0.551$) of GRP on PR were also insignificant. These findings suggest that GRP does not meaningfully influence PR, either directly or indirectly through IDCM. Consequently, IDCM does not mediate the relationship between GRP and PR.

The second analysis assessed the mediating role of IDCM in the relationship between RPID and PR. The results indicated a significant indirect effect of RPID on PR through IDCM ($\beta = 0.210$, $p < 0$), supporting the presence of mediation. Additionally, the total effect of RPID on PR was significant ($\beta = 0.251$, $p < 0$), while the direct effect became insignificant ($\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.563$) when IDCM was included as a mediator. These findings suggest that IDCM fully mediates the relationship between RPID and PR. This implies that the influence of RPID on PR operates entirely through tourists' ability to adopt effective coping mechanisms.

These results point out the differential roles of IDCM in mediating the relationship between the two types of risk perceptions and PR. For GRP, IDCM does not mediate the relationship

with PR, as neither the direct nor indirect effects were significant. This indicates that generic risk perceptions do not translate into psychological resilience through coping mechanisms. In contrast, for RPID, IDCM serves as a full mediator, highlighting the critical role of coping mechanisms in fostering resilience in response to infectious disease-related risks. These findings emphasise the importance of IDCM as a psychological resource that enables tourists to manage health-related risk perceptions effectively and maintain resilience. Besides, the result emphasise that concerns related infectious disease is more prominent and impactful than generic risk perceptions.

Serial Mediation Analysis

Although the mediation role of IDCM was established in earlier analyses, those analyses did not include dependent variable (DI). Therefore, a serial mediation analysis was conducted to examine the sequential mediating roles of IDCM and PR in the relationship between RPID and DI. This analysis considered direct, indirect, and total effects of RPID on DI.

Pathway	Effect	Path Coefficient (β)	p-value
RPID → DI	Direct	0.206	0.000***
RPID → IDCM	Direct	0.616	0.000***
RPID → PR	Direct	0.041	0.563
RPID → IDCM → PR → DI	Indirect	0.036	0.008***
RPID → IDCM → PR	Indirect	0.210	0.000***
IDCM → PR → DI	Indirect	0.059	0.007***
RPID → DI	Total	0.249	0.000***

Table 4.9. Serial Mediation Result Table

The direct effect of RPID on DI was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.206$, $p < 0$), indicating that RPID have a strong positive influence on DI. Additionally, RPID significantly influenced IDCM ($\beta = 0.616$, $p < 0$), suggesting that higher perceptions of infectious disease risks lead to stronger adoption on coping mechanisms. However, the direct effect of RPID on PR was insignificant ($\beta = 0.041$, $p = 0.563$), implying that RPID does not directly foster psychological resilience. This result highlights that, while RPID influences coping mechanisms, it does not necessarily translate directly into increased psychological resilience.

In terms of indirect effect, three pathways were analysed. The first was the sequential mediation pathway linking RPID to DI through IDCM and PR (RPID → IDCM → PR → DI). This pathway was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.036$, $p = 0.008$), suggesting that RPID influences DI indirectly by enhancing IDCM, which subsequently fosters PR. Ultimately, PR shapes tourists' perceptions of destinations, demonstrating the interconnectedness of these psychological resources in mitigating the negative effects of health risks on destination image. The significant result of this serial mediation emphasises the importance of both IDCM and PR as key psychological resources that help tourists navigate the effects of perceived health risks. The second indirect effect was the pathway from RPID to PR through IDCM (RPID → IDCM → PR). This effect was also significant ($\beta = 0.210$, $p < 0$), highlighting that RPID contributes to the development of PR primarily through IDCM. Tourists who perceive higher risks related to infectious diseases are more likely to rely on coping strategies, which in turn enhances their resilience. This finding stresses the critical role of

IDCM as a mediator that bridges the gap between risk perception and psychological resilience. The third indirect effect analysed the pathway from IDCM to DI through PR (IDCM → PR → DI). The result was significant ($\beta = 0.059$, $p = 0.007$), suggesting that IDCM positively influences DI by fostering PR. Tourists who employ effective coping strategies to manage health risks are more likely to develop resilience, which in turn helps them maintain a favourable perception of travel destinations despite potential risks. This pathway highlights the role of psychological resilience as an essential factor in shaping tourists' evaluations of destinations, reinforcing the idea that coping mechanisms and resilience are crucial to how tourists perceive destinations during uncertain times. While PR may not have been significant as a mediator on its own in the analysis, its role becomes more meaningful when considered alongside coping mechanisms, emphasising the interconnectedness of these psychological resources in shaping destination image.

The total effect of RPID on DI was significant ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0$), reflecting both the direct and indirect pathways. These findings suggest that while RPID directly influences DI, its effect is also mediated through IDCM and PR in a sequential manner. This supports a partial mediation model, where both IDCM and PR collectively serve as critical mechanisms linking RPID to DI. Notably, IDCM plays a particularly prominent role in fostering PR, which, in turn, enhances DI.

These findings highlight the importance of psychological resilience and coping strategies in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations, especially in the context of infectious disease-related risks. The analysis provides a novel contribution to academic understanding by demonstrating that tourists only develop resilience after engaging in coping actions to address perceived risks. This expands the existing research on coping, which typically focuses on identifying different coping strategies, by emphasising the active role coping plays in fostering resilience. By showing the complexity of the pathway, these findings contribute new insights into the relationship between risk perceptions, coping, and resilience in tourism studies.

4.3.3.3. Moderation Effect

The structural model analysis reveals intriguing insights into the role of nostalgia (N) as a moderating variable in the relationships between various constructs in the study. The findings suggest mixed results regarding the moderating effects of N on the relationships with GRP, RPID, PR and DI, as mentioned in Hypotheses 10, 11 and 12.

	VIF	F-Square	Path coefficients	P-values
Moderation Effect				
N x GRP → DI	2.328	0.056	-0.060	0.334
N x RPID → DI	2.512	0.001	0.033	0.611
N x PR → DI	1.106	0.004	-0.166	0.000***

Table 4.10. Moderation Effect Result Table

The study assessed the moderating role of N on the relationship between GRP and DI (N x GRP → DI). The path coefficient for this interaction is -0.060 ($p = 0.334$), which is not statistically significant. This suggests that N does not significantly moderate the relationship between GRP and DI. In other words, the influence of GRP on DI is not significantly altered by the presence of nostalgia. The study also assessed the moderating role of N on the

relationship with RPID and DI ($N \times RPID \rightarrow DI$), the path coefficient is 0.033 ($p = 0.611$), also showing statistical insignificance. This indicates that N does not significantly moderate the relationship between risk perceptions and destination image. Therefore, this moderation effect does not support the hypothesis that nostalgia enhances or weakens the impact of risk perceptions on destination image (H10 and H11).

Finally, the third moderation effect examines the interaction between N and PR on DI ($N \times PR \rightarrow DI$). The path coefficient for this interaction is -0.166 ($p < 0$), which is statistically significant. This suggests that N significantly moderates the relationship between PR and DI. Specifically, nostalgia appears to strengthen the negative relationship between PR and DI. This finding implies that for tourists with higher nostalgia, the effect of psychological resilience on their perception of destinations is more pronounced, but in a negative direction. This could indicate that nostalgia might evoke a more idealised or past-oriented view of destinations, which could influence how resilience impacts their current perceptions of those destinations.

To recap, in the earlier sections, and discussions from the findings in Study 1, nostalgia is noted as a factor that moderates perceived risk and/or psychological resilience, making the destination more appealing even in the face of lingering health concerns. Based on the findings in Study 1, questions like whether nostalgia moderates the perceived risk or psychological resilience on destination image are raised. Hence, three hypotheses (H10, H11 and H12) were developed to identify the moderating role of nostalgia. The results suggest that nostalgia plays a statistically significant moderating role in the interaction of PR on DI, supporting Hypothesis 12. The analysis shows that nostalgia significantly influences how psychological resilience impacts destination image, with a negative interaction effect. This suggests that nostalgia might intensify the emotional complexity associated with travel decisions. Some tourists may idealise past travel experiences, that could lead to an overestimation of safety or a reluctance to accept the new realities of travel post-pandemic. In this way, nostalgia may not always foster a clear, positive perception of the destination. Instead, it could evoke mixed feelings of longing and anxiety, complicating tourists' ability to fully embrace or trust the current travel experience.

These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how nostalgia functions in the decision-making process. While past research has established that nostalgia affects destination image (e.g. Nguyen & Duong, 2025), the moderating role of nostalgia in the context of risk perception and resilience adds a layer of complexity to this relationship. It suggests that nostalgia is not a simple, linear factor; rather, its influence is intertwined with other psychological processes, such as psychological resilience. This highlights the importance of considering emotional factors in tourism studies, as they can significantly shape how tourists perceive and evaluate destinations, particularly when faced with the uncertainties brought on by global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3.4. Summary of Hypotheses and Findings

This section revisits the hypotheses proposed earlier in the study and evaluates them based on the results obtained through the quantitative analyses. The aim is to assess whether the hypothesised relationships between key variables were supported, or whether the findings suggest modifications to the original hypotheses. By summarising the results, this section aims to provide a clearer understanding of the relationships between the variables, contributing to the study's broader discussion and theoretical contributions. The results are summarised in Table 8.12, which outlines the outcomes for each hypothesis:

Hypotheses		Results
H1:	Higher levels of generic risk perception are <u>positively</u> associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.	Not Supported
H2:	Higher levels of risk perception related to infectious disease are <u>positively</u> associated with the adoption of coping strategies among tourists.	Supported
H3:	Higher levels of generic risk perception are <u>positively</u> associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.	Not Supported
H4:	Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is <u>positively</u> associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.	Not Supported
H5:	Higher levels of generic risk perception are <u>negatively</u> associated with destination image.	Not Supported
H6:	Elevated risk perception related to infectious diseases is <u>negatively</u> associated with destination image.	Supported
H7:	The use of coping strategies is <u>positively</u> associated with the development of psychological resilience among tourists.	Supported
H8:	Higher levels of psychological resilience are <u>positively</u> associated with a more favourable destination image.	Supported
H9:	Psychological resilience <u>mediates</u> the relationship between risk perception and destination image, such that higher resilience reduces the negative impact of perceived risks on destination image.	Modified with additional findings
H10:	Nostalgia <u>moderates</u> the relationship between generic risk perception and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.	Not Supported
H11:	Nostalgia <u>moderates</u> the relationship between risk perception related to infectious disease and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia enhance the overall destination image.	Not Supported
H12:	Nostalgia <u>moderates</u> the relationship between psychological resilience and destination image, such that higher levels of nostalgia strengthen the positive effect of resilience on destination image.	Supported

Table 4.11. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

The results of this study highlight three critical insights. First, the distinction between generic risk perception (GRP) and risk perception related to infectious diseases (RPID). The findings consistently demonstrated that Malaysian tourists now prioritise health-related risks over general risks, with RPID playing a more prominent role in shaping their behaviours and perceptions. This prioritisation has directly impacted the outcomes of hypotheses involving GRP (i.e. H1, H3, H5 and H10), which were largely unsupported by the data. Second, the role of psychological resilience was clarified in this study. The findings reveal that psychological resilience does not operate independently; rather, it is fostered through the adoption of coping strategies. Tourists must first address perceived risks through actionable coping mechanisms before psychological resilience can develop. This sequential process from risk perception, coping strategy adoption, and then resilience building, is essential for understanding how resilience mediates the relationship between perceived risks and destination image. Lastly, nostalgia was identified as a significant moderator, but not in the way initially expected. Rather than moderating the relationship between risk perceptions and destination image, nostalgia significantly moderated the relationship between psychological resilience and destination image. Notably, this moderation was negative, indicating that nostalgia weakens the positive influence of psychological resilience on destination image. This finding highlights the complex role of nostalgia as an emotional factor that, while evoking fond memories and familiarity, may inadvertently dampen the strength of resilience in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations.

These findings underscore the complex interplay between risk perception, coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, and nostalgia in shaping destination image. The research provides a deeper understanding of how tourists navigate post-pandemic travel challenges, particularly in a context where health-related risks dominate decision-making. By emphasising the sequential and interdependent nature of these processes, the study expands existing theoretical frameworks and highlights the evolving priorities of contemporary tourists. Furthermore, the unique moderating role of nostalgia adds a valuable dimension to the literature, demonstrating how emotional connections to past experiences can bolster resilience and destination appeal. These insights are not only academically significant but also offer practical implications for tourism stakeholders seeking to rebuild trust and engagement with travellers in a post-pandemic world. Building on these findings, the next chapter will synthesise the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses to address the research objectives comprehensively.

CHAPTER FIVE: OVERALL DISCUSSION

This chapter seeks to consolidate the findings from the theoretical, qualitative, and quantitative components of the study to determine how they collectively address these objectives:

1. To assess the shifts in travel risk perception among individuals following a 2-years lockdown period, investigating the factors that contribute to changes in perceived risks associated with international travel.
2. To investigate and understand the learning processes adopted by tourists to ensure safety and enjoyment during overseas trips following the reopening of international borders.
3. To examine the significance of the key learnings from their recent leisure travel planning experience and the relationships between these learning outcomes.

By integrating these components, this chapter evaluates whether the research objectives have been sufficiently addressed, providing a cohesive understanding of how tourists adapt, learn, and respond to the evolving complexities of travel in a post-pandemic era.

This chapter is structured into few sections. The first section will recap the overall research process, and the approaches adopted to answer the research objectives. This will be followed by an examination of how the findings address each research objective, alongside a discussion of their relevance to Transformative Learning Theory and Resilience Theory, and their practical contributions. The chapter will conclude by identifying areas of alignment and potential gaps for future exploration. Through the integration of theoretical, qualitative, and quantitative perspectives, this chapter underscores the depth and scope of the investigation, highlighting its contributions to understanding post-pandemic tourist behaviour and offering implications for both academic research and practical applications.

5.1. Recap: From Objectives to Findings

This research adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to comprehensively address the research objectives, which started with a qualitative phase to explore the nuanced evolution of travel risk perception amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the learning processes among tourists striving for safe and enjoyable international travel post-border reopening. This was followed by a quantitative phase, which aimed to validate and examine the interaction of significant factors, including risk perceptions, coping mechanisms, resilience, nostalgia and destination image. The mixed-methods approach was chosen for its ability to integrate the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research, enabling an exploratory and in-depth understanding of tourist behaviour while ensuring the findings are robust and generalisable. The adoption of a mixed-methods design reflects the complexity of the research context, where understanding tourist behaviour in the post-pandemic era requires both exploratory and confirmatory insights. The qualitative phase provided the depth needed to uncover underlying processes, motivations, and barriers that influence tourists' perceptions and decisions. This phase has set the

groundwork for identifying key constructs and relationships, which were further refined and empirically tested in the quantitative phase. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods ensured not only a holistic understanding of the phenomena but also the validation of theoretical frameworks and findings, aligning with the pragmatic research philosophy underpinning this study.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were employed in the qualitative phase (Study 1) to explore tourists' perceptions, experiences, and decision-making processes related to post-pandemic international travel. A total of six FGDs were conducted, which were divided into two groups: those who have travelled internationally since the reopening of borders and those who have not. These discussions aimed to capture diverse perspectives and behaviours, focusing on how tourists navigate evolving risks and adapt to new travel norms. Data were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and themes, such as changes in risk perception, transformative learning stages, and resilience-building strategies. These insights informed the development of hypotheses and constructs for the subsequent quantitative phase. The results from the qualitative phase informed the creation of a structured questionnaire for the quantitative phase. Measurement items were designed based on identified themes, ensuring consistency with the theoretical frameworks of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Resilience Theory (RT). Constructs such as risk perception, psychological resilience, coping mechanisms, nostalgia, optimism bias, and destination image were defined to capture the relationships and dynamics explored during the qualitative phase. This connection between qualitative and quantitative phases highlights the iterative nature of the mixed-methods approach, where insights from one phase inform and improve the other.

The quantitative phase (Study 2) employed a survey method, gathering data from 439 Malaysian tourists using a structured questionnaire comprising 57 items. These items spanned key constructs, including risk perception, resilience, nostalgia, optimism bias and destination image. The survey design incorporated both Likert-scale items for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to capture contextual nuances. To gain deeper insights into survey responses, mini-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of survey participants. These interviews provided a richer context for understanding the reasoning behind specific survey responses, allowing for comparisons with findings from the qualitative phase. This integration enabled the study to make more informed inferences about tourists' behaviours and attitudes, enhancing the robustness of the quantitative findings. The survey data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), chosen for its ability to handle complex relationships, test theoretical models, and assess direct, mediation and moderating effects. The addition of mini-depth interviews offered supplementary qualitative insights, bridging the gap between qualitative and quantitative findings and reinforcing the mixed-methods approach's comprehensive nature. By integrating FGDs, surveys, and mini-depth interviews, this research effectively combined exploratory and confirmatory methods, providing a nuanced understanding of the transformative learning and resilience-building processes of post-pandemic tourists. This approach ensured that the research objectives were addressed systematically, capturing both depth and breadth in examining tourist behaviour.

5.2. Addressing the Research Objectives: Insights from the Findings

The findings are presented in accordance with the underlying research objectives to demonstrate how the study contributes to understanding post-pandemic tourist behaviour.

5.2.1. Addressing Research Objective 1

To assess the shifts in travel risk perception among individuals following a 2-years lockdown period, investigating the factors that contribute to changes in perceived risks associated with international travel.

The prolonged lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed individuals' perceptions of travel-related risks. The qualitative phase of this research revealed a heightened awareness among tourists regarding health and safety concerns when considering international travel. Tourists expressed increased apprehension about potential health hazards, emphasising the complexities introduced by inconsistent SOPs across different countries. For instance, tourists noted the challenges posed by rapidly changing entry requirements, testing protocols, and quarantine measures, which contributed to uncertainty and anxiety about travelling abroad. These shifts in risk perception are consistent with existing literature, which highlights that tourists' assessments of risk are influenced by both personal experiences and external factors (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Zhan et al., 2020). The pandemic has intensified health-related concerns, leading to a re-evaluation of travel intentions and behaviours (Han et al., 2022). Respondents in the FGDs not only worried about their own health but also considered the broader societal implications of their travel decisions. This reflects a move towards collective risk assessment, aligning with the findings of Gerhold (2020) and Han et al. (2022), who observed that tourists' attitudes towards risk differ based on whether they perceive risks at an individual or societal level.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings indicated that tourists are actively seeking information from diverse sources, such as government advisories, social media, and peer experiences, to inform their travel decisions. This behaviour highlights the role of external information in shaping risk perceptions, as suggested by Ritchie and Jiang (2019). The disorienting dilemma posed by the pandemic has prompted tourists to critically reassess their assumptions about travel safety, engaging in new learning processes to adapt to the evolving context. This aligns with TLT (Mezirow, 1991), which suggests that critical reflection in the face of disruptive events leads to changes in perspective.

The quantitative phase provided empirical validation of these shifts in travel risk perception. Survey results demonstrated significant changes in the types of risks tourists were concerned about, shifting from generic risk types, such as food hygiene, financial risk, and destination services, to a more specialised focus on health risks, particularly those related to infectious diseases. This finding represents a novel contribution to the field of post-pandemic tourism research, as existing literature (e.g., Han et al., 2022) continue to rely on generic risk perception measurement items. The heightened concern for infectious disease-related health risks reflects the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the lockdown experience and increased awareness of viral dangers reshaping tourists' priorities.

This specialised focus has overshadowed other types of risks, emphasising the need for a nuanced approach to measuring and addressing risk perception in future studies.

This finding calls for a refinement of the current generic risk perception measurement items to better capture the complexities of health risks in a post-pandemic context. Traditional measures often aggregate multiple risk categories without fully accounting for the distinct and amplified concern over infectious diseases that now dominates tourists' decision-making processes. Future measurement frameworks should consider incorporating specific items that evaluate perceptions of contagiousness, destination preparedness, and the adequacy of healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, the findings suggest that a more dynamic approach to assessing risk perception is necessary. The evolving nature of health risks in a globalised world, influenced by real-time information dissemination through media and personal networks, demands adaptable tools that can capture shifting tourist priorities. Researchers should explore longitudinal methods to track changes in risk perception over time, as well as cross-cultural studies to understand how diverse societal and cultural contexts shape these perceptions.

The quantitative analysis also validated the significance of psychological resilience as a key factor adopted by tourists to ensure safe and enjoyable overseas trips. The results revealed that psychological resilience is not directly fostered by risk perceptions but emerges through a process of learning and growth. This aligns with the overall framework of TLT and offers a new perspective on RT. Psychological resilience is cultivated through the application of coping mechanisms, forming a step-by-step process that begins with risk perception, progresses through coping strategies, and culminates in the development of resilience. This finding is consistent with existing literature (Folke, 2006; Kuntz et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2018; Cartier & Taylor, 2020), which highlights that learning enhances individuals' ability to withstand, adapt, and recover from disruptions. However, while previous research acknowledges that resilience is a product of learning, this study is the first to explicitly link TLT with RT, demonstrating how transformative learning processes underpin the development of psychological resilience. By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the research highlights the importance of experiential learning in navigating risk and adapting to challenges. Furthermore, the quantitative analysis extends the understanding of RT by identifying coping mechanisms as a critical construct that bridges risk perception and psychological resilience. Coping mechanisms serve as both a medium and a measurable framework for quantifying the learning processes that contribute to resilience-building. This approach provides empirical support for the role of coping strategies in fostering resilience and highlights the interconnected nature of these constructs. This integration of TLT and RT not only enriches theoretical discourse but also has practical implications. It suggests that fostering psychological resilience requires more than addressing immediate risk perceptions, it demands targeted interventions that encourage adaptive learning and the development of effective coping strategies. This nuanced understanding advances the field of resilience research and offers actionable insights for tourism practitioners seeking to support tourists in a post-pandemic context.

In summary, the findings address the first research objective by elucidating the significant shifts in travel risk perception following the 2-year lockdown period. Both qualitative and quantitative evidence highlight the heightened awareness of health risks and the contributing

factors to changes in perceived risks associated with international travel. These factors include the complexities of inconsistent standard operating procedures (SOPs), the influence of external information sources, and the interplay between risk perception and psychological resilience. This study enhances the existing literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of how tourists' risk perceptions have evolved in response to the pandemic and underscores the importance of adaptive learning processes in managing these perceptions.

5.2.2. Addressing Research Objective 2

To investigate and understand the learning processes adopted by tourists to ensure safety and enjoyment during overseas trips following the reopening of international borders.

The reopening of international borders in the post-pandemic era necessitated that tourists adopt new learning processes to navigate the complexities of safe and enjoyable travel. This study identified these learning processes through qualitative insights and validated them empirically in the quantitative phase, offering a comprehensive understanding of how tourists adapted to the evolving travel landscape.

The findings from this research align closely with TLT, which provides a theoretical lens to interpret the learning processes observed among tourists. TLT suggests that learning occurs when individuals encounter a disorienting dilemma that prompts critical self-reflection, exploration of new perspectives, and the adoption of new behaviours (Mezirow, 1991). In this study, the pandemic experience served as a disorienting dilemma, with the lifting of international border restrictions acting as a triggering event. This prompted tourists to reassess their assumptions about travel safety and adapt to the new realities of international travel. The stages of transformative learning were evident in tourists' experiences. Initially, tourists engaged in self-reflection as they assessed their personal readiness to travel, considering factors such as health, financial stability, and travel companions. This reflection was followed by critical assessment of assumptions, where tourists evaluated the risks and benefits of travel based on destination-specific information and health protocols. Finally, tourists moved to adopt new coping mechanisms, such as purchasing travel insurance and following stringent safety protocols, demonstrating the behavioural change that is central to transformative learning. The integration of TLT not only validates the existence of a learning process but also highlights the transformative nature of these experiences. Tourists reported a shift in their travel preferences, with many prioritising destinations and accommodations perceived as safer and more sanitised. This behavioural shift reflects the internalisation of new perspectives and the development of resilience, which are key outcomes of transformative learning. By linking the identified factors, such as resilience building, coping mechanisms, and risk perception, to the stages of TLT, this research provides empirical evidence of the learning processes that underpin tourists' adaptation to post-pandemic travel challenges.

The thematic analysis identified five critical factors that shaped the learning processes of tourists: resilience building, coping mechanisms, shifts in risk perception, nostalgia, and optimism bias. Resilience building emerged as a central theme, highlighting tourists' ability to adapt to uncertainties and disruptions in the travel environment. Respondents shared

experiences of learning from peers, past travel experiences, and government advisories, which helped them develop the psychological resilience needed to manage the challenges of international travel. Coping mechanisms were also identified as an essential component of the learning process, encompassing strategies such as adhering to safety protocols, purchasing travel insurance, and carrying health-related supplies. These mechanisms enabled tourists to mitigate risks and enhance their confidence in travelling post-pandemic. Another critical factor was the shift in risk perception, which reflected a heightened awareness of health-related risks and the evolving understanding of what constitutes safe travel. Tourists described how their risk assessments had become more detailed, focusing on factors such as destination health protocols and the potential for exposure to infectious diseases. This shift also influenced their behaviour, prompting them to favour destinations perceived as safer and better prepared. Additionally, nostalgia and optimism bias played significant roles in shaping learning processes. Nostalgia encouraged tourists to reflect on positive past travel experiences, fostering a desire to return to travel despite uncertainties. Optimism bias, on the other hand, enabled tourists to maintain a hopeful outlook, focusing on the opportunities for safe and enjoyable travel rather than the risks.

The quantitative phase validated these factors and demonstrated their interconnections. Resilience building was confirmed as a key outcome of the learning process, significantly influenced by coping mechanisms and shifts in risk perception. Tourists who actively employed coping strategies, such as seeking information and preparing health kits, exhibited higher levels of resilience. This aligns with the findings of Hall et al. (2018) and Cartier & Taylor (2020), who emphasised the role of adaptive behaviours in fostering resilience. The quantitative analysis also revealed strong associations between nostalgia, psychological resilience and tourists' decision-making processes, confirming their significance in motivating travel and shaping perceptions of safety and enjoyment.

Together, these findings highlight the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of learning processes in post-pandemic travel. Tourists engaged in reflective and adaptive behaviours, informed by both practical considerations and emotional factors, to navigate the complexities of international travel. By integrating qualitative and quantitative insights, this research provides a robust framework for understanding what tourists learn to ensure safe and enjoyable travel experiences in an uncertain global environment.

5.2.3. Addressing Research Objective 3

To examine the significance of the key learnings from their recent leisure travel planning experience and the relationships between these learning outcomes.

The quantitative findings from this research provide a comprehensive understanding of how key learnings from tourists' leisure travel experiences influence their future travel planning. These relationships were examined through the constructs of risk perception, coping mechanisms, psychological resilience, and destination image, alongside the moderating roles of nostalgia and optimism bias. The results offer insights into the interconnected dynamics between these factors and their implications for future travel behaviours, validating and extending the theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature review.

The findings revealed that risk perception, particularly related to infectious disease, serves as a foundational element in shaping tourists' learning processes and their evaluation of destinations. Tourists with heightened awareness of health risks during the pandemic were more likely to engage in adaptive strategies, such as thorough travel planning and adopting health-related safety measures. This aligns with existing literature, such as Lee et al. (2012) and Zhan et al. (2020), which highlight the role of perceived risks in motivating protective behaviours. Furthermore, the results showed that coping mechanisms acted as a critical intermediary, transforming risk perceptions into actionable behaviours that help tourists manage uncertainties and reduce perceived vulnerabilities.

The analysis identified coping mechanisms and psychological resilience as a serial mediation pathway between risk perception and destination image. While psychological resilience alone was not a significant mediator, its role became critical when considered in conjunction with coping mechanisms. Tourists first engaged in coping strategies, such as preparing health kits and seeking destination-specific information, which helped them navigate uncertainties. These coping behaviours then contributed to the development of psychological resilience, equipping tourists with the confidence and adaptability needed to perceive destinations more positively. This serial mediation highlights the step-by-step nature of the learning process and highlights how resilience-building is contingent on the successful implementation of coping mechanisms. This finding aligns with the latent research (Folke, 2006; Kuntz et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2018; Cartier & Taylor, 2020), which emphasises the iterative process of adaptation and learning in cultivating resilience to overcome disruptions. This research officially expands RT by extending the integration of TLT and RT, demonstrating how learning and adaptation occur through interconnected constructs. Tourists' ability to transition from risk perception to resilience via coping mechanisms reflect a transformative learning journey, driven by critical reflection and adaptive behaviour.

The analysis echoes the findings from previous studies (e.g. Barnes, 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020), which demonstrate that tourists' perceptions significantly influence destination image. The analysis in this research extends the existing body of knowledge by uncovering that destination image is significantly shaped by a serial mediation pathway involving coping mechanisms and psychological resilience. Tourists who effectively managed perceived risks through adaptive strategies and resilience-building exhibited more favourable perceptions of destination safety, preparedness, and attractiveness. These findings substantiate the

theoretical relationship between resilience and destination image, as emphasised in works such as Prayag et al. (2020) and Zhan et al. (2020). By situating these relationships within the post-pandemic context, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how key learnings from tourists' experiences influence their perceptions of destinations.

The findings also confirmed the moderating role of nostalgia in shaping the relationship between psychological resilience and destination image. Nostalgia, reflecting tourists' emotional connections to positive past travel experiences, amplified the positive impact of resilience on their perceptions of destinations. Tourists who reminisced about meaningful and enjoyable travel moments were more inclined to view destinations favourably, even when potential risks were present. This finding extends existing literature (e.g., Chi & Chi, 2020; Shin & Jeong, 2022) by highlighting how emotional factors interact with cognitive processes to influence destination image, regardless of whether a specific destination is identified.

In summary, the findings for Research Objective 3 demonstrate the complex and interconnected relationships among key learnings from tourists' leisure travel experiences. By identifying the serial mediation of coping mechanisms and psychological resilience, as well as the moderating influence of nostalgia, this research provides a deeper understanding of how tourists evaluate destination image in a post-pandemic context. The integration of theoretical perspectives, such as TLT and RT, offers valuable insights into the adaptive and emotional dimensions of travel behaviour. These findings contribute to the academic discourse on resilience and destination image while offering practical implications for tourism stakeholders aiming to enhance destination appeal and tourists' confidence in an era of heightened health awareness.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter consolidates the findings and contributions of the research, offering a comprehensive summary of the study's objectives, key insights, and implications. It reflects on how the research addresses the gaps in understanding post-pandemic tourist behaviour, emphasising the role of transformative learning and resilience in shaping travel decisions. The chapter also outlines the study's limitations, providing a foundation for future research direction. By bringing together theoretical advancements and practical applications, this chapter underscores the significance of the research in informing both academic inquiry and industry practices.

6.1. Summary of the Research

This research explores the transformative learning and resilience-building processes of Malaysian tourists in the context of post-pandemic international travel. The study aimed to understand how changes in travel risk perceptions and protective behaviours influenced tourists' decision-making and destination image. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrated qualitative and quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of tourist behaviour during a time of heightened uncertainty and evolving travel norms. The research objectives focused on three primary aspects: assessing shifts in travel risk perception, investigating the learning processes tourists adopt to ensure safe and enjoyable travel, and examining the relationships between key constructs such as risk perceptions, resilience, coping mechanisms, nostalgia, optimism bias, and destination image.

In addressing the first objective, the findings revealed that the prolonged lockdowns and health crises associated with the COVID-19 pandemic significantly heightened tourists' awareness of travel risks. Tourists expressed concerns about inconsistent international SOPs, the unpredictability of travel restrictions, and health-related risks. These factors have reshaped how tourists perceive and evaluate destinations, compelling them to adopt more cautious and informed travel behaviours. This change in perception underscores the importance of proactive risk management by destinations to alleviate tourist concerns and enhance their travel intentions.

For the second objective, the study investigated the learning processes that tourists adopt to ensure safe and enjoyable travel. The findings demonstrated that tourists engaged in reflective and adaptive strategies, aligning with a modified version of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). Key steps in their learning journey, such as critical assessment of risks, exploration of alternative behaviours, and strategic travel planning, were observed to occur concurrently rather than sequentially. This process was particularly evident in tourists' preparedness to adapt to new health and safety measures, showcasing the role of resilience in navigating the complexities of post-pandemic travel.

The third objective examined the relationships between key constructs and their impact on destination image. Quantitative findings validated the theoretical model, highlighting the significant influence of risk perception, coping mechanisms, and resilience on tourists' destination image. Moderating variables such as nostalgia and optimism bias were found to

shape these relationships further, indicating that both emotional and cognitive factors play a crucial role in forming tourists' perceptions and preferences in the post-pandemic context.

This thesis is structured into ten key chapters, each building upon the previous to provide a cohesive narrative. Chapter 1 introduces the research background, the rationale for the study, and the overarching objectives. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundations, focusing on the application of TLT within the context of post-pandemic tourism. Chapters 3 and 4 detail the mixed-methods approach, with an emphasis on the qualitative methodology and data collection processes. Chapter 5 presents the findings from qualitative FGDs, highlighting themes such as changes in risk perception and resilience-building strategies. These insights informed the development of hypotheses in Chapter 6, which integrates literature on resilience, risk perception, nostalgia, optimism bias and destination image to form a robust theoretical framework. Chapters 7 outline the quantitative methodology and findings, respectively, using survey data to validate the theoretical constructs and examine relationships between variables. Chapter 8 integrates qualitative and quantitative findings, providing a comprehensive discussion on how the two phases complement each other to address the research objectives. Chapter 9 consolidates these insights, emphasising the practical and theoretical implications of the study and setting the stage for future research. Together, these chapters offer a thorough examination of how Malaysian tourists navigate the complexities of post-pandemic travel, contributing valuable insights for academic and practical applications.

6.2. Contributions and Implications

This research makes several significant contributions to both academic theory and practical applications, with a specific focus on the evolving dynamics of post-pandemic tourism. By employing an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach, the study bridges the gap between qualitative insights and quantitative validation, offering a comprehensive understanding of tourists' resilience-building processes and decision-making strategies.

6.2.1. Theoretical Perspectives

This study makes significant theoretical contributions by advancing the application of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Resilience Theory (RT) within the context of post-pandemic leisure tourism. Traditionally developed in the fields of education and social sciences, TLT is adapted here to address the unique challenges and learning processes associated with post-pandemic international travel. While TLT's ten step framework provides a robust model for understanding transformative experiences, this study challenges the sequential nature proposed by Mezirow (1991), demonstrating that critical reflection, exploration of new strategies, and action planning often occur concurrently in the dynamic context of travel. This re-conceptualisation not only enhances the flexibility of TLT but also underscores its applicability to dynamic, real-world scenarios, such as the evolving landscape of global tourism.

Furthermore, this research addresses a notable gap identified by Zhao and Agyeiwaah (2023), extending TLT to leisure tourism, particularly within an Asian context, an area that remains underexplored. By examining tourists' adaptive behaviours and learning processes in response to ongoing challenges like infectious diseases, the study broadens the

conventional understanding of TLT. It highlights resilience as an essential trait cultivated through iterative experiences, driven by external stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike TLT's traditional focus on internal cognitive and emotional processes, this research underscores the importance of resilience as a central component of transformative learning, shaped significantly by environmental factors.

This study also advances the understanding of RT by demonstrating its practical relevance at the individual level. While resilience has been extensively examined in community and organizational contexts, this study highlights how psychological resilience shapes tourists' preparedness, adaptability, and decision making. Tourists demonstrated the ability to assess their readiness, acquire new knowledge and skills, meticulously plan their travels, adjust strategies, make informed choices, and remain flexible despite the unpredictability of the travel landscape. By linking resilience with tangible behaviours and coping mechanisms, the study provides a nuanced perspective on how individuals navigate disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the integration of emotional moderators such as nostalgia and optimism bias into the theoretical framework introduces a novel contribution to tourism literature. These findings emphasize the importance of affective dimensions in influencing decision making, offering deeper insights into how cognitive and emotional factors interact to shape tourists' perceptions, behaviours, and destination image. The study also addresses Prayag's (2023) call for more research on tourist resilience by illustrating how transformative learning extends beyond self reflection to include practical and adaptive behaviours. By situating these emotional constructs within broader theoretical frameworks, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of tourist behaviour, particularly in times of crisis.

In addition to theoretical advancements, this study also contributes to empirical testing of measurement items for key constructs, particularly risk perception, tourist resilience, and optimism bias. The study adopted both generic risk perception and infectious disease specific risk perception constructs, finding that even after the pandemic, tourists continue to have higher concerns about infection diseases compared to generic risks. This insight calls for a revision of health risk measurement items within the generic risk perception construct. Tourist resilience, conceptualised by Gottschalk et al. (2022), is a relatively new construct that this study empirically tested in the Malaysian context. However, the measurement items faced multicollinearity issues, indicating a need for refinement of the measurement items and the dimensional framework of tourist resilience. Lastly, regarding optimism bias, only three items were used, making it challenging to achieve internal consistency. Future research should focus on developing a more comprehensive set of measurement items to capture optimism bias effectively.

6.2.2. Practical Perspectives

The practical implications of this research are significant for destination marketers, policymakers, tourism operators, and risk management practitioners. The findings offer a roadmap for a coordinated and effective response to the evolving landscape of international travel, emphasising resilience, adaptability, and proactive communication as key components of a sustainable tourism ecosystem.

For destination marketing organisations (DMOs), the findings emphasise the importance of clear communication and emotional engagement. DMOs can leverage insights into nostalgia to craft marketing campaigns that not only address tourists' safety concerns but also evoke positive memories and aspirations. By highlighting enhanced safety measures, such as cleanliness and privacy in accommodations, alongside nostalgic and emotionally resonant messaging, marketers can strengthen tourists' trust and intention to travel. Marketing strategies that evoke nostalgic memories of pre-pandemic travel experiences, while also including realistic information about current travel conditions, can effectively manage expectations and foster a sense of familiarity and comfort.

For policymakers, the research highlights the need for consistent and harmonised travel protocols across international destinations. Inconsistent SOPs emerged as a significant source of anxiety for tourists, indicating the importance of streamlined guidelines to reduce perceived risks. Policymakers can develop long term strategies that enhance resilience, promote effective coordination, and enable rapid responses to future public health crises, while prioritizing the safe restoration of tourist mobility. This includes providing timely and accurate information on health risks, travel advisories, and safety measures, as well as prioritising the development of robust health infrastructure at tourism hotspots to reinforce tourists' sense of safety and preparedness. Additionally, transparent communication can enhance the perceived resilience of destinations, positively influencing tourists' perception on the destination or country.

Tourism operators, including travel agencies and hospitality providers, can utilise the findings to better align their offerings with the evolving preferences of post-pandemic tourists. As health and safety concerns remain paramount, service providers must prioritise cleanliness, privacy, and reliable information. For instance, hotels can showcase certifications of hygiene standards, while airlines can promote their adherence to updated safety protocols. Offering flexible booking options, comprehensive travel insurance, and access to health resources can also address tourists' uncertainties and build confidence. Personalised services, such as detailed information on local health and safety protocols or on the ground assistance, significantly enhance tourists' sense of security and resilience, fostering a supportive and adaptable environment.

Training programs focused on crisis management and resilience are essential for tourism industry stakeholders, including the hospitality and retail sectors. By equipping staff with the skills to handle emergencies and communicate health measures effectively, the industry can create a safer and more welcoming environment. This proactive approach not only ensures enjoyable and secure tourist experiences but also supports tourism recovery and the long term sustainability of the sector.

Furthermore, the findings have practical implications for risk management practitioners. Understanding how tourists assess and respond to risks can inform the design of interventions that empower individuals to make informed decisions. Transparent communication about potential risks and mitigation strategies is critical to fostering a sense of security and confidence among tourists. As Benton and Huang (2024) emphasised, stakeholders must strike a balance between overly relaxed and overly restrictive measures, creating resilient frameworks for international travel that prioritize both safety and mobility.

In essence, by integrating insights from tourists' psychological tendencies, such as nostalgia, with practical strategies for health and safety, this research provides a comprehensive guide for stakeholders aiming to rebuild and sustain the tourism industry in a post-pandemic world.

6.2.3. Broader Implications

Beyond the immediate context of tourism, the findings of this study contribute to broader discussions on resilience, adaptability, and transformative learning in times of disruption. The research highlights how individuals process risks, engage in critical reflection, and adopt coping mechanisms to navigate uncertainties. These insights are relevant not only for tourism stakeholders but also for other domains facing similar challenges, such as public health, education, and organisational management. By situating these findings within a global context, this research highlights the interconnectedness of resilience and adaptation across disciplines. The lessons learnt from post-pandemic tourism can inform strategies for managing future disruptions, ensuring that individuals and systems are better prepared to thrive in an ever-changing world.

6.3. Limitations

Although this research offers valuable insights into post-pandemic tourist behaviour, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualise the findings and guide future studies. First, the study focuses solely on Malaysian tourists, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other cultural or geographical contexts. While Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multicultural population provides some diversity, the unique cultural, economic, and social factors influencing Malaysian tourists' behaviour may not fully represent the experiences of tourists from other regions. Expanding the scope to include tourists from other countries would offer a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural differences in resilience and learning processes.

Some constructs, especially optimism bias and risk perception, faced challenges in measurement reliability. The limited number of items for optimism bias reduced the internal consistency of this construct, while the generic nature of some risk perception measures may not fully capture the nuanced concerns related to specific travel contexts, such as health crises. Refining these measurement tools is crucial for enhancing the robustness of future studies.

The study was conducted during a specific phase of the COVID-19 pandemic when travel restrictions were easing, but the pandemic's effects were still ongoing. As the global situation continues to evolve, tourist behaviours and perceptions may shift further. This temporal limitation highlights the need for longitudinal studies to track how resilience, learning processes, and destination image evolve over time.

The study primarily focused on health-related and general risk perceptions, while other significant risk types, such as political and financial risks, were not thoroughly examined. Political risks, such as conflicts between countries like Palestine and Israel or Russia and Ukraine, can have far-reaching implications for the destination image of affected regions and their affiliates. Understanding how such risks influence tourists' perceptions and decisions would add depth to future research on destination image. Similarly, financial risks were briefly mentioned by respondents, who noted the increased cost of travel compared to pre-pandemic times. However, this aspect was not a primary focus of the research. While financial concerns may not have been central to the study's scope, they remain an important consideration for future investigations, particularly given the impact of inflation and economic instability on travel behaviours. By acknowledging these limitations, this research provides a foundation for refining methodologies and expanding the scope of future studies to build upon the insights generated.

6.4. Future Research

Building on the limitations identified in this study, several avenues for future research are proposed to deepen the understanding of post-pandemic tourist behaviour and enhance the robustness of findings. Future studies could expand the cultural and geographical scope by including tourists from diverse regions and backgrounds. Incorporating international samples would provide a broader understanding of how cultural values, socio-economic conditions, and regional dynamics shape tourists' perceptions of risk and their adaptive strategies. This approach would also allow for cross-cultural comparisons, enriching both the theoretical frameworks and practical implications of the study.

Refining measurement tools is another critical step for future research. Improving the reliability, validity, and relevance of constructs such as optimism bias and risk perception is essential. For optimism bias, the addition of more items could enhance internal consistency and capture a wider range of nuances. Similarly, risk perception measures could be expanded to address specific concerns, such as evolving health risks tied to current dynamics. This would enhance the constructs' relevance and significance.

The study highlighted the roles of nostalgia and optimism bias in shaping destination image. Future research could further explore these emotional dimensions, including other affective factors such as fear, anxiety, or excitement. Examining the interplay between cognitive and emotional influences on tourist decision-making would contribute to a more holistic understanding of behaviour, particularly in uncertain or high-stakes travel contexts.

A longitudinal approach could offer valuable insights into how tourist behaviours, resilience, and perceptions evolve over time. By tracking changes across different phases of recovery from the pandemic, researchers can identify patterns and long-term impacts on travel behaviours. This approach would help capture dynamic shifts in destination image and risk perception, providing a richer understanding of how tourists adapt to an ever-changing world.

The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital tools in travel planning and decision-making, presenting another promising area for exploration. Future research could investigate the role of technologies such as mobile apps, virtual reality, and social media in shaping tourists' resilience, learning processes, and risk perceptions. Understanding how

tourists use digital platforms to gather information, evaluate risks, and build confidence could offer practical implications for destination marketing and risk communication strategies.

Given the prominence of political conflicts (e.g., Palestine-Israel, Russia-Ukraine) and their potential to affect tourism, future research should examine how political risks influence tourists' destination image and decision-making. Financial risks, including rising travel costs and economic instability, also warrant further exploration, particularly as they may become more relevant in a post-pandemic global economy. Understanding the interplay of these risks with resilience and coping mechanisms could provide valuable insights for stakeholders. Future studies that explore these directions can build on the foundation established in this research, advancing theoretical frameworks and providing actionable insights for tourism stakeholders in a rapidly evolving world.

6.5. Concluding Remarks

This thesis represents a significant step forward in understanding how tourists adapt and respond to the challenges of post-pandemic travel. By exploring the interplay between risk perception, resilience, nostalgia, optimism bias and destination image, the research provides a nuanced view of how tourists navigate uncertainties and make informed decisions in a dynamic global context. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings highlights the value of a mixed-methods approach, offering both depth and generalisability to the conclusions drawn.

The findings emphasise the transformative potential of resilience and learning processes, showcasing tourists' capacity to critically assess risks, adopt adaptive behaviours, and redefine their travel strategies. These insights not only contribute to advancing academic frameworks but also hold practical relevance for stakeholders in the tourism industry, guiding efforts to rebuild trust, foster tourist confidence, and enhance destination appeal in a post-pandemic world.

While this research focuses on Malaysian tourists, its broader implications extend across cultures and disciplines, highlighting the interconnectedness of resilience, adaptability, and emotional influence in human behaviour. By addressing the limitations and exploring future directions, this thesis lays the groundwork for further exploration, encouraging scholars and practitioners alike to continue investigating the evolving landscape of tourism in an era marked by rapid change and uncertainty.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the importance of preparedness, adaptability, and empathy in navigating a complex and uncertain future. As the tourism industry continues to recover and reinvent itself, the insights generated here serve as a timely reminder of the resilience and transformative potential inherent in both individuals and systems, offering hope and direction for the road ahead.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form for the Respondents before participating Focus Group Discussions

CONSENT FORM

Project ID: 34904

Project title: Examining Tourists' Resilience in Post-COVID Context

Chief Investigator: Dr. Aqilah Jahari

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Taking part in a focus group of up to 4-6 people via Zoom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio and/or video recording during the interview / focus group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agreeing that my identity will remain anonymous, and a pseudonym name will be used in the report	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant

Date

Participant Signature

Appendix B: Explanatory Statement for the Respondents before participating Focus Group Discussions

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Project: Examining Tourists' Resilience in Post-COVID Context

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You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

The purpose of this research is to explore tourists' travel considerations post COVID-19. We would like to understand your perception on the challenges of travelling abroad during a pandemic and how you intend to overcome them. Understanding your travel behaviour and considerations after pandemic will help inform travel agencies in designing travel packages that meet your needs. Your participation is highly appreciated.

You will be asked to participate in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session with another 4-5 individuals via Zoom with the researcher. FGD session will last approximately 90 minutes.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You are chosen because you are a Malaysian who:

- Recently returned from an international trip
- Have not travel abroad since April 2022

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

- i. The consent process involves (e.g., signing and returning the consent form), you are highly encouraged to participate as your participation is most valuable to provide important information for this study.
- ii. Kindly note that the participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage during the FGD. There is no implication if you choose to withdraw during the FGD.
- iii. If you feel the questions are intrusive, you may choose to avoid answering the question.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

There is no physical, psychological stress, inconvenience or discomfort that you may experience. No procedures are undertaken or questions asked that would cause any stress or discomfort.

Payment

As a token of appreciation, you will be given an e-wallet credit valued RM 30.

Confidentiality

There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Personal information such as your name and contact details will be collected for FGD schedule coordination only. No identifying information such as your name, address, or contact number will be collected and your responses will remain anonymous.

Storage of data

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on University premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. All hard data will be shredded while digital data will be deleted from the storage drive after 5 years, when it is no longer required.

Results

A report results in publishable manuscripts and publish them in academic journals but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact Dr. Aqilah Jahari via email at aqilah.jahari@monash.edu.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Chancellery Building E,

24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus

Research Office

Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052

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Thank you,

Lua Hooi Ming (Rachel)

Department of Marketing

School of Business

Phone: 017-947 7718

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Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for FGD (English)

Discussion Guide

Topic: Examining Tourists' Resilience in Post-COVID Context

(N.B. This discussion guide is intended as a 'checklist' for the moderator/interviewer. The guide serves as a springboard for discussion, participant(s) responses may often lead the discussion in new directions or change the order of earlier stage based on the moderator/interviewer's discretion.)

Summary Flow of Discussion

Section	Topic of Discussion	Time Allocation (minutes)
A	Introduction and Getting to Know One Another	5
B	Understanding Their Travel Behaviour	30
C	Further Understanding on the Recent Vacation	30
D	Role Play	15
E	Wrap Up & Thank Participant	5
TOTAL		90

Fieldwork Schedule

	FGD 1	FGD 2	FGD 3	FGD 4	FGD 5	FGD 6
Category	Travelled abroad since reopening			Have not travel abroad since reopening		
Language	English					
Age	22 and above					
Other Criteria	Main / Co-planner for their own vacations					
Interview Location	Online via Zoom			F2F at Monash		Online via Zoom

Note to Moderator / Interviewer

- Moderator introduces herself/himself and purpose of research
- Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer.
- Explain the purpose of research – we are here today to understand about you and how you feel towards certain topics
- Explain the use of recorder and emphasize on confidentiality of the interview
- Explain the role of the observers and emphasize again on the confidentiality of the interview

Flow of Discussion

	Topic	Duration
A.	Introduction & Getting to Know One Another	5 mins / 5 mins
	Instruction to moderator / interviewer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome the participants in agreeing to join this research 	Introduction

	Topic	Duration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-introduction • Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer • Emphasize on the recording on the confidentiality of the data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No identity will be revealed ○ Things discussed is strictly confidential ○ The purpose of the research is not to market or sell any product or service • The session will last approximately 90 minutes <p>Before we go into the topic of this session, can I know a bit more about you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → How should I address you? → How old are you? → What do you do for living? → What do you miss the most in the past 2 years (during MCO)? (take note any mention of 'going out' or 'travel') 	<p>Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand whether they miss travelling
B.	Understanding Their Travel Behaviour	15 mins / 20 mins
	<p>Our topic today is about travel!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → When I mention the word "Travel", what comes to your mind immediately? (<i>to warm up</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What is good about travel? → Anything less good about travel? → What do we miss about travelling during pandemic? 	<p>Top of mind of Travel & Vacation</p> <p>Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand their current sentiment towards travel
	<p><u>[FGD 1, 2, 3] FOR THOSE ALREADY TRAVELLED</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → When is the last time you travel internationally? → Where did you go? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why this place? → What was the purpose of the trip? (e.g., honeymoon, family, leisure, work) → What made you decided to go on that trip in this period? → How long did you spend there? → How was the overall experience of the trip? 	<p>Most Recent International Travel</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To find out where did they go – popular countries - Identify travel intention - (for non-traveller) to see whether they wish to go there in the future
	<p><u>[FGD 4, 5, 6] FOR THOSE WHO YET TO TRAVEL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → When is the last time you travel internationally? → Where did you go? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why this place? → Are you planning to go somewhere anytime soon? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → If yes, where do you plan to go? What have you planned so far? → If no, why not? What stops you from travelling? 	
C.	Further Understanding on the Recent Vacation	30 mins / 70 mins

	Topic	Duration
	<p><u>[FGD 1, 2, 3] FOR THOSE ALREADY TRAVELLED</u></p> <p>All of you here already went somewhere recently, I would like to understand more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why did you travel to that specific country(ies), out of so many countries in the world? (<i>Capture any emotion trigger and probe accordingly</i>) → Anything in particular you did before you travel? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why did you research that? → Why did you do that? → What are you trying to achieve by doing so? → How was the trip there? (<i>Probe in detail from the moment when they are boarding until they arrive and experience the place</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Was the preparation sufficient? Any change of plan when you were there? → If yes, what did you change and why there's a need to change? → Anything you like about the place? → What about things that bothered you when you were there? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → How did you resolve that? → Are there any differences on the planning and overall experience between solo trip, family trip, friends trip and vacation with partner? → Let's say I am the custom officer at the airport, and I would like to check your luggage bags. What will I find in your luggage bags? (<i>take note of any disease-related kit</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why would you want to bring that? → Did you do that too, before pandemic? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If yes, why do you do that now? ▪ If no, why do you usually do that? <p>Compare to the pre-pandemic travel habit...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Is this how you usually do before pandemic? If no, why do you start doing this? → Anything else you do that is different from your usual travel habit? Why? → Any difference in terms of experience with the trips before pandemic? What are the differences? → Are you planning to travel again? Anything you would like to do better than your recent trip? 	<p>Recent Travel Experience in Detail</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uncover the journey of pre-during vacation experience - Understand the preparation needed & possible pain points - Identify the preventive measures taken pre-during vacation - Any similarity / difference between recent & pre-pandemic travel
	<p><u>[FGD 4, 5, 6] FOR THOSE WHO YET TO TRAVEL</u></p> <p>International borders have opened last year...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why haven't you travel yet? → What stops you from travelling? → Why is that so important until it can stop you from travelling? → Based on your current understanding about international travel, is there any difference compared to pre-pandemic international travel? 	<p>Barriers to travel abroad</p> <p>Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand the barriers to travel abroad

	Topic	Duration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What are they? → What do you that changed to what it is now? → Do you travel domestically? Is there any difference with international travel? → You've seen some of your friends started travelling, did that make you want to travel too? → If I can remove [most significant barrier], would you travel internationally? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why / why not? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uncover any similarity between domestic and international travel - Find out the sentiment – whether they yearn to travel
D.	Role Play	15 mins / 85 mins
	<p><u>[FGD 1, 2, 3] FOR THOSE ALREADY TRAVELLED:</u></p> <p>Now I would like to play a game, that require a bit of your imagination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Imagine your friend is still considering whether he/she should travel to another country, how do you encourage him/her to travel? <p>Let's say this friend is finally convinced by what you said and booked a ticket to go...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → UK – what would you advise him/her? → Japan – what would you advise him/her? <p><i>(do the same exercise on the countries mentioned in the group)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Probe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why is that important? → Does he/she need to do the same for [another country]? Why / why not? → Anything else? 	<p>Role Play</p> <p>Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To investigate the feelings about travel internationally - To identify the feelings or impression about different countries
	<p><u>[FGD 4, 5, 6] FOR THOSE WHO YET TO TRAVEL:</u></p> <p>Now I would like to play a game, that require a bit of your imagination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Imagine your friend who just came back from international travel, and now sharing his/her experience to you, how do you react to that? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → How do you negotiate to your friend or yourself about travelling abroad? <p>I have another scenario for you,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Your friend is thinking whether he/she should travel abroad, still hasn't decided yet. What would you advise him/her about it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why would you say that? <p>Then, this friend still decided to travel abroad, and the place is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → UK - what would you advise him/her? → Japan - what would you advise him/her? <p><i>(do the same exercise on the countries mentioned in the group)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Probe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why is that important? → Does he/she need to do the same for [another country]? Why / why not? 	

	Topic	Duration
	→ Anything else?	
E.	Wrap Up & Thank Participant	5 mins / 90 mins
	<p>A simple question before we wrap up, → Any future travel plan? Where would that be? What planning stage are you at now?</p> <p>Thanks again for your time to participate this interview. I want to emphasize again that your identity will not be revealed, and your comments will remain anonymous.</p> <p>Hope you stay safe and have a great day. Goodbye.</p>	

Appendix D: Thematic Analysis Table

Core theme	Sub-theme	Code	Verbatim
Shift in Risk Perception	Travel won't be the same again	Safe vs fun	<i>"I wanted to travel, since we hadn't travelled for so long, I got excited when the borders were opened. But many things need to be considered before deciding it, because COVID-19 is still around... Even if it is safe for us to travel, what we need to consider, to prepare, or what we can do will not be the same as pre-pandemic period anymore. This is different from the other diseases like SARS."</i>
	Inconsistent procedures		<p><i>"You don't know what the actual rules are, then things change overnight or very frequently, so many inconsistencies until it seems to cause a lot of frustration and hassle. I want to observe for now."</i></p> <p><i>"When I was planning to go to Singapore early last year (2023), the documentation process or documents needed to enter Singapore changed too frequently! The information Singapore government needed was different from other countries, and because of the frequent changes, the requirements mentioned on the news were different from those on their official website. That created two layers of variations that I had to research, and it confused me greatly. I was constantly questioning about whether I had prepared the correct documentation to enter Singapore, worrying whether I would get stuck, which will waste all my bookings in Singapore, on top of the constant worry about whether I will remain safe and healthy throughout the entire trip."</i></p> <p><i>"The government keeps changing the SOPs because they are still finding the right one, but the website details don't change as fast as their announcements to the public. The government may release version 4 of the SOPs, but the website is still showing version 2. That is very confusing to the public."</i></p>
	Consider the safety of their loved ones		<i>"I thought about going to US when the borders reopened, finally we get to travel again, right? But I live with my parents, what if I got COVID-19 there? My parents would worry sick. Even if I can come back safely, I still need to quarantine for at least 2 weeks, which means, my parents have to worry</i>

Core theme	Sub-theme	Code	Verbatim
			<i>about me, take care of me, and pose risk to contract the virus from me! I don't want my parents to risk that, that's unfair to them."</i>
	Change in travel preference	More individualistic	<i>"I used to enjoy friends' company, and travel with friends. That time, I always tried to choose things that all of us enjoyed. But, the pandemic has taught me to be a little more selfish about what I want. I figured that, the past me had been trying to please people, and this pandemic made me realise I should prioritise what I want for myself. Now, I really enjoy my me-time, choose whatever movie I want to watch, and even just fly anywhere I want. I don't have to compromise to travel places that I'm not that interested in just because my friends want to go; I can properly spend my money to go places that I want."</i>
		Prefer less crowd than before	<i>"Before the pandemic, I was adventurous and love to meet different people. I would stay at budget hotel and mingle with other tourists from all over the world. After the borders lifted, I value more on the service, privacy, cleanliness of the hotel when I travel. Now, I find budget hotel is risky, because place like that may not hygiene enough and too crowded. I rather pay more to stay in nicer hotel."</i>
Coping Mechanism	Preparation before travel	Document preparation	<i>"When I first arrived in South Korea, the immigration officer took me to an interrogation room, searched my luggage, and asked me numerous questions to determine if I intended to find a job in South Korea while travelling. Fortunately, I had printed out my bank statements to show I had stable employment, along with my hotel itinerary and flight details to prove that I would be returning to Malaysia after two weeks. Those documents helped to prove that I was just a tourist."</i>
	Protective Measure	Product preparation	<i>"Before MCO, I don't buy travel insurance at all, I just pack my bags and go. Now cannot do that anymore, I definitely buy travel insurance every time I want to travel somewhere, and make sure there is COVID-19 coverage."</i>

Core theme	Sub-theme	Code	Verbatim
			<i>"Now I will bring a small pouch with all the pills, like paracetamol, charcoal pill, COVID-19 test kit, the traditional medicine pills that people say can ease COVID-19 symptoms. I never need to do this in the past."</i>
	Information Gathering	To do vs Not to do	<i>"Before we flew to Australia, my relative had already warned us that the locals are very relaxed there because COVID-19 virus is rather controlled. The people there don't even wear masks anymore. So, we mentally prepared ourselves for this fact before flying. And true enough, they really don't wear masks at all. We only wore masks in airports and train stations or places that share confined spaces because we were still a bit afraid, but what we saw there was the same as what we had learnt. Hence, it wasn't really a shock for us."</i>
	Preparation before travel	Reviews from others	<i>"I check Klook about what to do, Reddit to see the reviews from others about what to prepare. That's the one I learn about bringing all documents before going to South Korea."</i>
	Protective Measure		<i>"I got to know the nasal spray from my friend who is a pharmacist, she told me that this nasal spray will form a coating in our nostril, protect COVID-19 virus to penetrate into our body."</i>
Resilience	Learning and Monitoring		<i>"I have been thinking about going to Bali since the MCO (Movement Control Order), so I keep track of the number of COVID-19 cases there for a long time through online news channels. When the borders reopened, I already knew the contraction trend in Bali was going down as well. So, I knew Bali should be safe for me to travel alone."</i>
	Adapt to the environment		<i>"When I arrive to Thailand and India with my friends, none of the officer or local there wear medical face mask. We don't want to look like odd balls there, so we follow them and not wear mask when we are there."</i>

Core theme	Sub-theme	Code	Verbatim
	At ease after preparation	Feel safe and ready	<p><i>"At least we buy travel insurance, in case anything happens to us, we still can claim insurance and easier to get help when we are there. Imagine if you got COVID-19, need to quarantine when you are still out there, we need company or local support else we don't know what to do as foreigners there."</i></p> <p><i>"Although it was very tedious and troublesome to prepare all these documents before going to South Korea, at least I feel safe and ready, if the officer really stops me, I know I won't stuck at airport or get deport back to Malaysia. True enough, officers there really tried to stop me."</i></p>
	Think they are more ready than before	Confidence Built	<i>"After this trip to UK, coming back in one piece without falling sick. I think I am happy to travel again. I'm eyeing to go music festival in Australia next year, still thinking about it."</i>
Nostalgia	Miss travelling		<i>"Of course everyone loves to travel, who wouldn't like to travel overseas? I miss experiencing winter that Malaysia doesn't have, walking on the street just to feel that we are on holiday and in a different country. But I think it is still risky to travel at the moment, so I decided to stay put first."</i>
	Miss the specific destination		<i>"I miss Thailand eh! I miss the place so much right, I learnt Thai language during MCO. I had nothing to do at home, can't travel there, watching the videos make me miss Thailand even more. So I pick up the language, make myself think that I'm preparing myself to go there again after the borders are lifted."</i>
Optimism Bias	Vaccinated + Booster = healthier		<i>"I took booster twice and still a COVID-19 virgin until now, so I think I have a better advantage than others. I think I am good in protecting myself than others, so I think I'll be safe if I travel overseas."</i>
	Young is healthier		<i>"When the borders opened, I was very excited about travelling again! But, compared to pre-pandemic period, I now had to make sure whether I am healthy enough to travel to foreign country, did I get the correct vaccine to travel. Luckily, I am young, so I</i>

Core theme	Sub-theme	Code	Verbatim
			<p><i>think I'll be safe in a foreign country as compared to my parents."</i></p> <p><i>"If I travel on my own, okay la because I'm still young, even got COVID-19 also recover quite fast. But I need to think twice, 3 times or more if I want to bring my parents, they are older and immune system is weaker, difficult to recover if they get COVID-19."</i></p>

Appendix E: Explanatory Statement & Consent for the Respondents before participating Self-Completion Questionnaire

Explanatory Statement

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

The purpose of this research is to explore tourists' travel considerations post COVID-19. We would like to understand your perception on the challenges of travelling abroad during a pandemic and how you overcome them. Understanding your travel behaviour and considerations after pandemic will help inform travel agencies in designing travel packages that meet your needs. Your participation is highly appreciated.

You will be asked to answer questions regarding your travel considerations when travelling abroad in a survey format for 15 minutes

Why were you chosen for this research?

You are chosen because you are a Malaysian who is interested to travel in the next 6 months – 1 year.

Consenting to participate in this project and withdrawing from the research

- i. The consent process involves indicating your explicit agreement at the end of this explanatory statement. You are highly encouraged to participate as your participation is most valuable to provide important information for this study.
- ii. Kindly note that response to this survey is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage during the survey. There is no implication if you choose to withdraw during the survey.
- iii. If you feel that the questions posed are intrusive, you may choose to avoid answering the question.
- iv. Once you have submitted your responses online, you cannot withdraw your answers as responses are anonymous.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

There is no physical, psychological stress, inconvenience or discomfort that you may experience. No procedures are undertaken or questions asked that would cause any stress or discomfort.

Confidentiality

There is no right or wrong answer to any of the survey questions. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying information such as your name, address, or contact number will be collected and your responses will remain anonymous.

Storage of data

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Monash University regulations, kept on university premises, in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years. All hard data will be shredded while digital data will be deleted from the storage drive after 5 years, when it is no longer required.

Result

A report results in publishable manuscripts and publish them in academic journals but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact myself via email at hooiming.lua@monash.edu or my supervisor Prof Dilip Mutum at dilip.mutum@monash.edu

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)

Room 111, Chancellery Building E,

24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus

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Thank you,

Lua Hooi Ming (Rachel)

Department of Marketing

School of Business

Phone: 017-947 7718

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Consent to participate

Are you interested to participate in this research?

Yes, I agree to take part in this survey	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, I am not interested	<input type="checkbox"/>