

# SIGNIFICANCE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES ON TOURISM INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

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**ABSTRACT:** According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) organization, its annual research in 2015 shows that tourism industry in Malaysia has direct contribution to the gross domestic products (GDP), employment, exports and investments. On top of that, Malaysia is rich with diverse natural attractions which contribute to Malaysia tourism industry. Nevertheless, risk such as crime, health and safety issues affect the tourism industry Malaysia, such as SARS virus outbreaks in 2003 and kidnapping cases in coastal areas of eastern Sabah in 2015. Using a survey and index approach, the study was took place in Malaysia and it is found out that the Global Peace Index for Malaysia was dropped to 29th in 2013 compared in 20th place in 2012 and the main causes of changes in tourism sector in Malaysia was safety and security. Some case studies will be used in the research to study in depth from specific events such as the case on attack on Thailand, China and other countries in order to generalize the issue in safety and security of the tourism industry. This research will be enriched in more detailed methods in enhancing a better safety and security for the tourism industry in Malaysia.

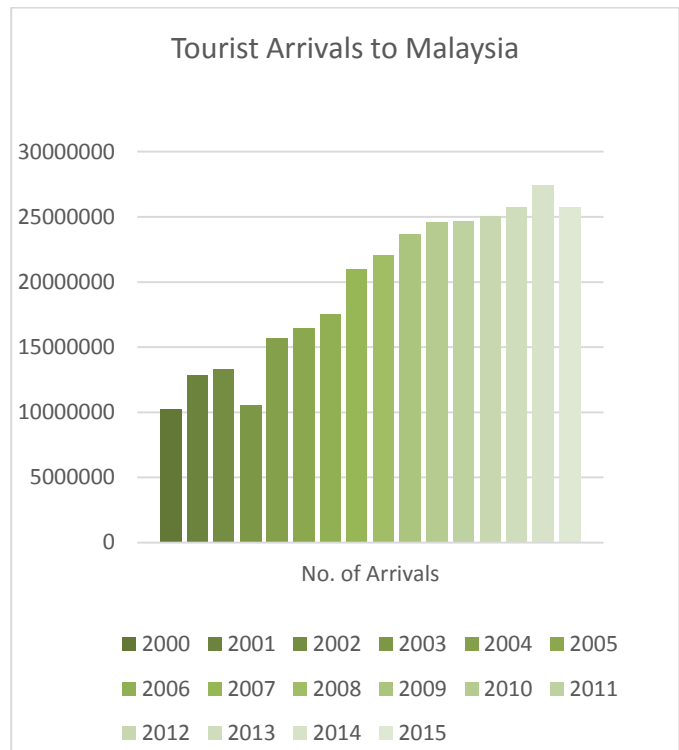
**Keywords:** Safety, Security, Tourism, Malaysia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the 1950s, there were approximately 25 million tourists around the world, however when the year reached by 2000, this had increased to 700 million [1]. Over the last 50 years, rapid expansion and globalization had been going on in the tourism industry. The tourism industry is a major global industry that links tourists to diverse places to which they choose to travel. Today’s technology creates more opportunities for tourism in many countries. The widespread use of the internet for tourists to make bookings for their vacation and for travel agents as their promotional tourism marketing tool has greatly increased the development of tourism.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [2], the average annual growth for international tourist arrivals was 4 percent for the world, while South-East Asia was 5 percent. As the world tourism went global, the effect of tourism to total contribution to GDP has greatly increased from 1995 to 2015. The tourism impact on economic and socio development in South-East Asia has an enormous contribution in the GDP, employment, visitor exports and investment [3]. Gunduz and Hatemi [4] also stated that the tourism industry is a world source of invigorating economic growth, in contain of exports, taxes, income, and employment [5].

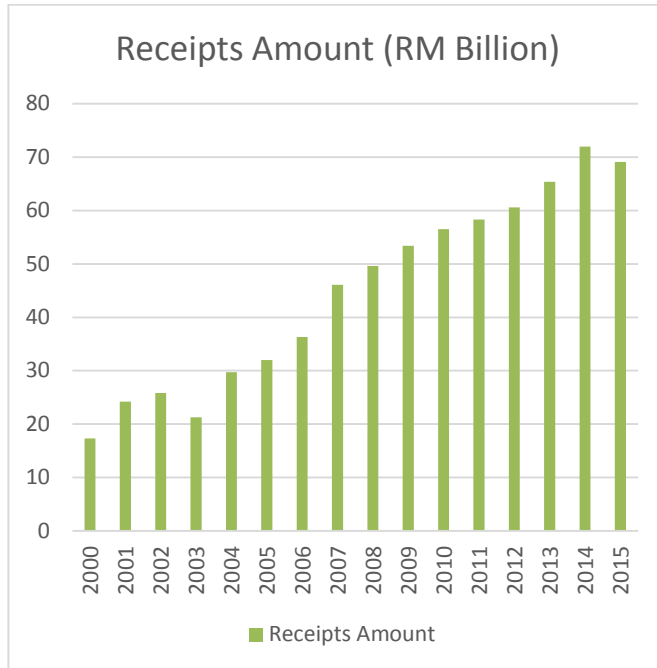
Besides that, United States Institute of Peace Organization in 2009 reported that tourism has several advantages over other industries, whereby tourism is directly benefits the locals that provide goods as it is consumed at the start of production; it also provides an opportunity to those countries that are limited in resources but wealth in culture, history and heritage to use these characteristics as their source of income; tourism can be served different and interconnected industries which create a network of diverse operations. Lastly, tourism encourage the usage of multiple-use infrastructure such as roads, health care facilities and sports centers.



Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2016  
Fig (1) Tourist Arrivals to Malaysia

Tourism industry in Malaysia started to emerge in the 1960s as one of the new contribution to economic growth, however the development was rather slow. Nevertheless, Mohd. Ayob and Masron [6] clarified that tourism sector has become as one of the main source to Malaysia’s incomes. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak also claimed that tourism industry stands at the sixth largest contributor for the year 2014 GDP in Malaysia, whereby it is important to sustain the development on the economy and

society. Despite the tragedies of Malaysian air crash in the year 2014, the tourism industry in Malaysia still managed to attract 27.44 million tourists with RM72 billion in tourist receipts. The tourism industry impact on the employment rate in Malaysia also increased due to strategic tourism plans were introduced in the market such as the Kuala Lumpur Tourism Master Plan 2015-2025 [7].



Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2016  
Fig (2) Receipts to Malaysia

## 2. SAFETY AND SECURITY IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

Safety is an essential component in all tourist destinations which includes transport routes, zoos, parks, restaurants, rest rooms, hotels, malls or religious places to tourists [8]. Safety can also be seen as the nature of the physical environment (such as mountain climbing or beach surfing), the chances of involving in a criminal activity (such as pickpocketing or stealing), the possibility of a tourist being attacked. In particular, tourism tends to gain the media attention easily, thus if the safety image of the destination in tourist-generating regions are affected, this eventually results the tourism activity to be affected. If any civil unrest culminated in violence of a destination happened to be in the media coverage, the number of tourists and receipts will decrease. Regardless, safety or security, both are important in facilitating the tourism industry. Hence, some authors tend to use the single word surety from the combination of safety and security [9]. Another statement by Tarlow [10] is that surety in tourism does not only affect a vacation, but also the industry. Surety in tourism is a point where safety, security, reputation and economic viability meets together. Besides that, surety is also meant to decrease the possibility of a negative event to occur.

Zainal [11] strongly claimed that the safety and security has been identified as one of the indispensable factor in boosting the tourism activities in the new millennium. Ever since the

tragedy of September 11th, it is believed that the tourism industry has not been taking seriously in improving the safety and security [12] although the safety and security issues in tourism were known through the evolution of the mass tourism in the early of 1950s [13]. As tourism went global, tourism is not anymore a narrow social stratum, the scope of tourism will cover more regions of the world and will increase in rapid development of the transport. These reasons show that safety and security issues need to gain more attention as tourism itself has become one of the main sources of the world economy. The main five forces that affect the tourism industry in this new era have been identified: crime, terrorism, food safety, health issues and natural disasters [6,8,12]. Tourism studies also shown that visitors are exposed to various degrees of risk and destination option is not merely based on price and destination image, but also the personal safety and security received by the visitor [14]. In this paper, safety and security in Malaysia tourism industry will be more focus on the crime and health issues.

## 3. CRIME ISSUES IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

Many authors argued that the absence of crime was important for the tourism sector in any country [15]. Crime is defined as an action or behavior that qualifies as crime by the order of law [16]. A crime may occur in different locations and different situations, such as crimes committed by local residents against tourists, crimes committed by tourists against local residents, crimes committed by tourists against other tourists and planned crimes against tourism entities [17]. However, crime committed against tourists shall only be studied in this paper. Furthermore, incidents that are related to crime can be in the form of: Larceny, Theft, Robbery, Rape, Murder, Piracy and Kidnapping. Tourism is high in visibility and ubiquity, tourism related crimes are usually highly published in the publicity. This will cause the tourists doubt to visit countries which had high crime rates. Thus, this results the tourism industry activities to be affected.

The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC US State Department) [18] reported that the overall crime rate for Malaysia is pretty high. It was also reported that there was an increase in crime in Kuala Lumpur in 2014, which included several assaults and robberies, that there were times involving weapons. The most common crimes committed against foreigners and expatriates in Malaysia are purse snatching, petty theft, pickpocketing, residential burglaries, credit card fraud and automobile theft. Residential burglaries are becoming a more common crime in Malaysia. A U.S citizen was killed in a home burglary accident in 2013.

There were also local taxi drivers in Kuala Lumpur city that have been involved in crime against foreign tourists and local residents. It is true that some of the taxi drivers in Malaysia are detouring and overcharging the tourists. The U.S government under the Chief of Mission authority is prohibited from traveling to the coastal regions of Sabah due to security concerns. The areas covered are Lahad Datu, Semporna, resort islands of Sipadan, Lanyakan, Mabul, Pom Pom, Kapalai, Ligitan, Selingan and Matakang. These restricted areas had a very high risk in crime. The Star [19] reported that the Britain had made a travel alert to British citizens about the high terror threat level in east coast Sabah.

Furthermore, in February 2013, a new crisis was forced to face by Malaysia when there were more than 100 of armed groups that suspects as the militant have landed in Lahad Datu which is known as the Royal Army of Sulu Sultanate [6]. Later in November 2013, there were two Taiwanese were killed in Pom Pom resort in Semporna by Filipino gunmen. This incident is related to the illegal Homestays and illegal workers in the east coast Sabah as the state takes no compromise approach to ensure the safety and security for the tourists. These incidents brings threat to the tourism destination image.

**Table 1: Classification Crime in Tourism**

Crimes committed by	Against whom	Examples of crime	Aim of the crime
Tourists	Other tourists, local people or tourism personnel	Robbery, pickpockets	Usually economical or social gain
Locals	Tourists	Assaults, petty theft, cons, crimes of distraction	Usually economical gain
Tourism Industry	Visitors	Fraud, business misrepresentation	Economical gain
Organized crime	Tourism Enterprise	Terrorism	Social gain

Source: Tourism/visitor crime taxonomy (Tarlow, 2006; Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006, 4)

Crime issues in Thailand had also affected the tourism destination image. According to Barnes [20], there is a drop in international arrivals of 30 percent. One of the most common crime issues in Thailand is the gem scam. This scam is aim at tourist, when the tourist met a nice local near a tourist attraction. The scam is set up with different kinds of con artists. It is started with the tourist sitting in a tuk-tuk, and then the driver of tuk-tuk claimed that he or she is specialized in bringing tourists around the city. On the way to see gem, there will be another con artist appear from nowhere, where it can be a young man, older man or a another tourist telling the victim the same thing as the driver said about the gem. This issue has brought Thailand’s tourism destination image a huge effect, whereby there were a lot of tourists avoid taking a tuk-tuk. In 2014, the two British backpackers were being murdered hit the world headlines [21]. It was also reported that Thailand has the second highest amount of deaths of British in 2014 after Spain. Thailand was also ranked low on a list of safety and security in Asia Pacific according to the World Economic Forum’s Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2015.

On the other side of the globe, at the East Asia such as China, portrays a lower crime rate than Malaysia<sup>12</sup>. Violent crimes against tourists are rare in China. However, crime does happens in Chinese urban areas and in the rural areas. Crime against tourists are more common in large cities and tourist destinations, as these places attract thieves and pickpockets. Places such as expatriate bar, nightclub areas in Beijing and

Shanghai as well as shopping areas in Shenzhen are frequent in attacks and robberies of foreigners. Petty thefts and sexual harassment tend to occur in overnight trains and buses. The most isolated areas in China will be those poorly policed areas and there is a high possibility to be attacked by the armed bandits.

In South Africa, an African continent that boasts numerous tourist attractions named Cape Town. Cape Town’s popularity in tourism has resulted in steady growth of Western Cape tourism industry over the years. Nevertheless, South Africa had been known as an unsafe place to visit and according to the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) statistics, South Africa has extremely high rates of crimes [22] observed that South Africa had the most number of recorded robbery and violent theft. A study done by Donaldson and Ferreira [24], which the crime and safety issues in South Africa are still affecting the destination image of South Africa and this problem creates an issue to the economic activity associated to FIFA 2010 World Cup.

**4. HEALTH ISSUES IN TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Health hazards are more susceptible to people during travelling [12]. Health hazards such as foodborne and waterborne diseases, vector-borne diseases dengue, pandemic flu, SARS, Chikungunya, Ebola and Zika. Besides, the medical facilities in some rural areas are poorly facilitated and trained which has also become an issue to the tourism industry. In Malaysia, due to constant humid climate itself, there is a presence of mosquitoes throughout the year. Therefore, the most common health issue will be dengue fever. Dengue is associated with the changes in the climate conditions [25]. This can be observed in the coastal area or low-lying areas swamped by rising sea levels. The Star Online [26] reported that low-lying coastal town of Sibul, Sarawak has been breaching the outbreak levels of dengue infection for more than a year. A study conducted by Mavalankar et al. [27], Chikungunya and dengue fever bring negative impact to Gujarat, Malaysia and Thailand tourism industries. The study showed that the estimated tourism revenues in the three destination decreased about 4 percent; at least US\$8 million for Gujarat, US\$65 million for Malaysia and US\$363 million for Thailand.

Pandemic flu, such as the influenza H1N1 (swine flu) has also affected tourism industry badly. According to Lean et al. [28], the outbreak of influenza H1N1 and SARS had badly affected the short term growth in tourism and economic. In Mexico, Monterrubio [29] had done a research on short-term economic impacts of the influenza A (H1N1) epidemic on the Mexican tourism industry. It was found that many international travel and tourism companies cancelled their trips to Mexico during the flu outbreak. There were about US\$5000 million and 150 thousand jobs at risk in the Mexico tourism industry. In India, there was an outbreak of swine flu in March 2012 which caused some of the visitors to be infected with the flu and died.

In 2003, the newly discovered recognized disease in Asia was the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The disease started in Guangdong Province, China, and eventually it spread to other parts of the country and then to the world. The

World Health Organization (2003) reported that there were more than 8090 cases which includes 774 deaths. In a short period of time, this disease had already relatively damaged the China's economy and affecting its tourism industry [12]. According to Kuo et al. [30], using the ARMAX procedures, the results show that there is a significant damage on international tourism demand using the single datasets in SARS-affected countries. The Malaysia National Economic Action Council reported that the international tourism arrivals dropped about 30 percent and the hotel occupancy countrywide rate fell about 30 percent to 50 percent year on year, at the end of April 2003 reported by the Asia Recovery Information Centre.

The out-break Ebola virus disease also affected the tourist flow to Africa countries, although only cases reported happened in West Africa. A study states that "travelers fearful of Ebola are avoiding Africa or cancelling long-planned safaris, creating dire consequences for the economy in Africa" [31]. This had created a negative impact towards the employment in the tourism sector [32].

### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey is employed in this study to deal with the research questions appropriately and hypothesis setting is applied to test the model. It also investigates the relationship between perceived safety, tourists' motivation and tourists' satisfaction.

A total of 400 questionnaires will be distributed among tourists in Malaysia using convenient sampling. On-site surveys will be administered among tourists in high traffic areas in the Klang Valley and Penang Island. Structural equation modeling will be applied to analyse the data.

### 6. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the tourists' perception of safety and the motivation to visit Malaysia. The relationship between perceived safety and satisfaction will be analysed. The mediation of the tourists' motivation between perceived safety and tourists' satisfaction will also be investigated. Hence, the proposed framework of the study is as below:

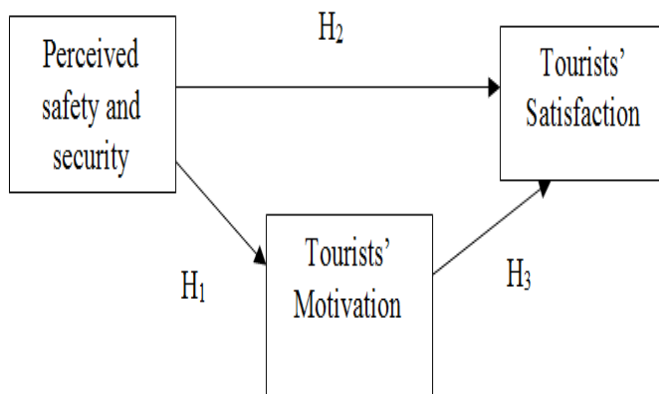


Fig (3) Conceptual Framework

### DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

This study proposed three hypotheses as follow:

H1: High levels of safety in terms of crime and health faced by tourists in Malaysia positively influences the tourists' motivation.

H2: High levels of safety in terms of crime and health faced by tourists in Malaysia positively influences the tourists' satisfaction.

H3: Tourists' motivation mediates the relationship between perceived safety in terms of crime and health and tourists' satisfaction.

### 8. CONCLUSION

Safety and security issues not only affected the tourism industry, but also the country's destination image, economic and finance industry. Responsible organizations should enforce the safety and security policies to prevent the issues from occurring. It is every nation to take serious actions in maintaining the tourism industry, especially in terms of the safety and security challenges. Social media in this globalization can boost a tourism industry and as well as to discourage the tourism industry. Travelers will tend to visit a country that make them feel safe and secure, and in this case media will be the main influence in their decision planning of their trips. Crime rates, terror attacks and health hazards should be enhanced through different kinds of surveillance system at all international entry points into the country and preparations have been made to handle potential impact to the country.

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