

Beyond fear and safety: revenge travel and international tourists' intentions in the post-crisis era

Ahmad Salman, Alexander Trupp, Marcus L. Stephenson and Ling Foon Chan

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the evolving travel intentions of tourists in the aftermath of the relaxation of international mobility restrictions in 2022. It aims to understand how the concept of “revenge travel” – travelling with the intent to make up for lost time during crisis periods – impacts tourists’ travel intentions in the post-crisis era.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a quantitative approach, the study uses Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Data were collected through a survey of 320 respondents in 2022. This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of travel intentions, including motivations, perceptions of destination safety and the influence of revenge travel.

Findings – The findings reveal that revenge travel is a significant predictor of travel intentions post-crisis. The results indicate that tourists are less concerned with health and safety and are more driven by the desire to compensate for lost travel opportunities. This shift suggests that travel intentions in the post-crisis era are not predominantly fear-induced. The study also offers insights into how these intentions can inform the recovery and sustainable planning of the tourism industry.

Originality/value – This paper recognises the impact of revenge travel on travel intentions following the lifting of crisis-related mobility restrictions. It provides novel insights into tourists’ post-crisis travel behaviour, extending the understanding of travel motivations in extraordinary circumstances. The findings are valuable for tourism practitioners and researchers, offering guidance for future tourism development and marketing strategies within a post-crisis context.

Keywords Travel intention, Revenge travel, Destination safety, Travel motivation, Post-lockdown

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Various crises have had social and economic repercussions worldwide, influencing numerous sectors, including tourism (Nicola et al., 2020). Most governments established unprecedented quarantine and border control measures to contain the spread of the virus (Refaat & Arafa, 2022). Subsequently, the international tourism industry was significantly affected, creating increased unemployment, business closures, and economic losses (Jin, Bao, & Tang, 2022; Samdin, Abdullah, Khaw, & Subramaniam, 2021). In the early stages of the pandemic, over 90% of all destinations experienced complete or partial international travel restrictions and various lockdowns (Trupp & Dolezal, 2020). By mid-2022, most Southeast Asian countries, notably Malaysia, began to ease restrictions. Yet, recovery has been slow in some regions, with Malaysia as a case in point.

In times of crisis, like the recent pandemic, tourist behaviour undergoes significant changes (Issabel et al., 2020). Academia has turned its focus towards understanding these shifts, with much emphasis on the multifaceted crises and their impact on tourism destinations (Neuburger & Egger, 2021; Rastegar, Seyfi, & Rasoolimanesh, 2021; Tiwari & Chowdhary, 2021). Concerns

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about destination safety and perceived risks prominently affect travel intentions, illustrating the complex interplay between crises and tourism dynamics (Fountain & Cradock-Henry, 2020; Rosselló, Becken, & Santana-Gallego, 2020). Therefore, tourists' perception of safety and risk can impact their travel intention, especially when those risks are associated with tourism destinations (Fountain & Cradock-Henry, 2020; Rosselló et al., 2020).

Amid these complexities, scholars have contemplated the future direction of tourism (Salman, Kamerkar, Jaafar, & Mohamad, 2022). Studies suggest prospects for more sustainable tourism activities and products (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). Key among emerging phenomena is "revenge travel", a term describing the surge in tourism as a compensatory behaviour for the extended period of travel restrictions and lockdowns (Kim, Seo, & Choi, 2022; Wassler & Fan, 2021; Yao, Zhao, Ren, & Jia, 2023; Zhang, Lingyi, Peixue, Lu, & Zhang, 2021). Accordingly, people travel to make up for the lost time and missed social interactions during the crisis (Shir-Wise, 2022). Revenge travel could thus be perceived as a socio-economic condition whereby individuals travel extensively due to long-term confinement in the home environment. Revenge tourists take up opportunities to participate rigorously in travel, spending significantly on tourism experiences and consumption (Abdullah, 2021; Oktaviani & Sutisna, 2021). Hence, this study focuses on exploring the revenge travel-mediated effect, aiming to fill a significant research gap in understanding post-pandemic and post-crisis travel motivations and intentions. Despite the growing interest, empirical studies, as highlighted above, specifically addressing revenge travel motivations in the post-pandemic context, are limited. This research addresses this gap, offering insights into the drivers of this unique travel behaviour as the world recovers from the crisis. Understanding travellers' intention to visit a destination in the post-crisis era is crucial for the global tourism industry's full recovery and future (Matiza, 2020; Rastegar et al., 2021; Seyfi, Rastegar, Rasoolimanesh, & Hall, 2021).

More information is required concerning the travel intentions of potential tourists in the post-crisis period. While studies have explored the effects of the pandemic on the tourism industry (Gretzel et al., 2020; Salman et al., 2022; Yeoman, 2020), it is still unclear what would motivate people to travel after a major crisis, especially when travel mobility was restricted for a long time. Such studies are most relevant when conducted during early reopening phases when the rebound of travel is actually happening, rather than at times of lockdowns or border closures where travel is only imagined. Despite extensive research on the pandemic's immediate effects, there remains a critical gap in understanding how these factors shape travel intentions and tourist motivations in the ongoing post-pandemic recovery phase (Carvache-Franco, Alvarez-Risco, Carvache-Franco, Carvache-Franco, & Del-Aguila-Arcentales, 2022; Saxena, Kumar, & Kumar, 2021; Wut, Ng, Lee, & Xu, 2022).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding the evolving travel behaviours and motivations has become imperative. This study employs the conceptual model developed by Salman et al., (2024). This model captures the interplay between travel motivation, destination safety, and revenge tourism – a phenomenon emerging prominently in the post-pandemic era – and aligns with this study's aim to examine the nuanced motivations driving post-pandemic travel intentions. Hence, the purpose of this study is twofold: Firstly, to empirically validate the model developed by Salman et al. (2024), which assesses how factors such as travel motivation and destination safety influence tourists' intentions to visit a specific place within 12 months following the lifting of pandemic-related lockdown restrictions; secondly, it examines the indirect impacts of revenge travel on travel intentions. By focusing on the mediating effects of travel motivation and destination safety, the study seeks to uncover how revenge travel shapes future travel behaviour as a response to prolonged movement restrictions. The model's originality concerns two dimensions:

1. its examination of the factors that predict travel intention during the ongoing recovery period following the easing of lockdown restrictions; and

2. its assessment of the indirect impact of revenge travel on travel intentions through the mediation of travel motivation and destination safety factors.

Accordingly, the study employed a quantitative study via a self-administered questionnaire distributed to 320 respondents. Distinct from existing literature that predominantly addresses the pandemic's immediate impacts, this research delves deeper into the behavioural shifts that characterise revenge travel in urban areas in the post-pandemic era. Our research is focused on Georgetown (Penang), which is characterised as a city of gastronomy (Khoo & Badarulzaman, 2014) and an urban heritage destination (Kahn, 1997). Hence, city tourism practitioners can utilise these insights to develop strategic initiatives aimed at revitalising urban tourism and enhancing visitor experiences in a post-pandemic era. This research thus serves as a critical resource for urban planners and tourism developers seeking to understand new tourist behaviours.

2. Literature review

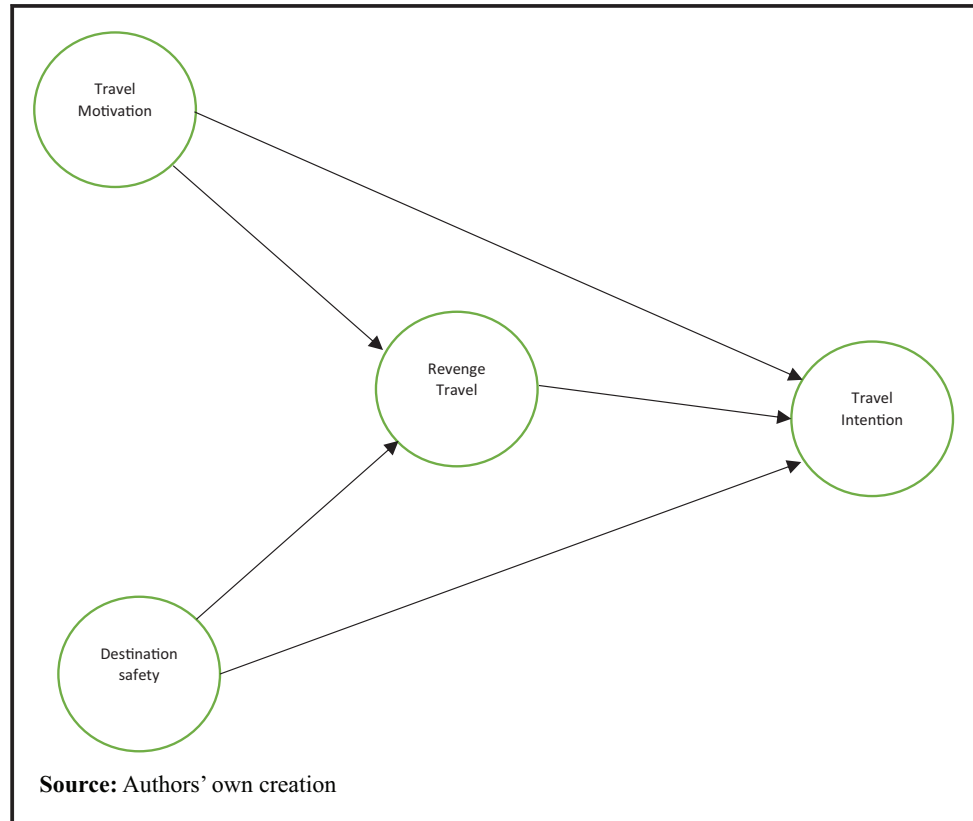
2.1 Underpinning theories

This study is underpinned by two theoretical frameworks: the "risk perception theory" (RPT) (Slovic, 1987) and the "theory of planned behavior" (TPB). These theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourists' travel intentions in the post-lockdown era.

The "risk perception theory" (RPT) (Slovic, 1987) comprehends how individuals perceive and assess risks associated with various activities or situations, influencing their decision-making processes. In the context of this study, RPT can be employed to examine the potential role of destination safety in shaping tourists' risk perceptions and, subsequently, their travel intentions. The "theory of planned behavior" (TPB), an extension of the "theory of reasoned action" (TRA), indicates that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control govern the intentions of human beings that propel individual behaviour. TPB is commonly used to describe and envisage behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Chaulagain, Pizam, & Wang, 2021) and has also been extensively applied in hospitality and tourism studies, especially relating to the field of consumer behaviour (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020), heritage tourism (Rao, Qiu, Morrison, & Wei, 2022); travel decision-making and destination choice (Lam & Hsu, 2006), the impacts of risk and ambiguity on travel decision-making (Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010), and the effect of public environmental facilities on tourists' environmentally responsible behaviour (Wang, Zhang, Sun, Chen, & Yang, 2020). Behavioural intention is the likelihood that a person will act on a specific behaviour or the degree to which a person has established a deliberate plan to perform (or refrain from) a future activity. In this study, travel intent represents behavioural intention. This study strategically emphasises the aspect of behavioural intentions. This focus is grounded in the direct observability and measurability of travel behaviour within the post-crisis context of this research. This study's emphasis on behavioural intentions aligns with their immediate relevance to actual travel decisions, a crucial aspect in understanding tourist behaviour during recovery phases. This focused approach is dictated by the study's scope. Furthermore, the key objective was to explore behavioural relations in this specific context rather than to extend the theories that have been extensively covered in past studies.

The research model (Figure 1) used in this study combines "risk perception theory" (RPT) and "theory of planned behavior" (TPB) to create a multifaceted understanding of post-crisis travel intentions. RPT contributes by emphasising the significance of perceived destination safety in shaping travel decisions, aligning with the model's factors. Finally, TPB integrates these elements by suggesting that attitudes towards both revenge travel and destination safety are shaped by subjective norms and behaviour, which are pivotal in forming travel intentions. By integrating these two theories, our study offers a multi-dimensional perspective on post-crisis

Figure 1 Graphical model



travel intentions. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing these intentions, from personal motivations to perceptions of safety and feasibility. Moreover, it mirrors the methodology used in studies such as [Chi and Phuong \(2022\)](#), where travel motivations, alongside other constructs like time perspective and city image, are integrated to explore tourist intentions on urban tourism. As represented in [Figure 1](#), our model adeptly captures the dynamic interaction of motivational, perceptual, and behavioural elements in determining tourist behaviour in the nuanced post-crisis landscape.

2.2 Travel motivation

Travel motivation refers to the underlying reasons or factors that drive an individual's desire to travel to a particular destination ([Khan, Chelliah, & Ahmed, 2019](#); [Salsabila & Alversia, 2020](#)), influenced by such factors as personal interests, cultural experiences, relaxation, adventure, and socialisation. On the other hand, however, travel intention is the likelihood that a person will visit a particular location within a given timeframe ([Nguyen Viet, Dang, & Nguyen, 2020](#); [Woodside & Lysonski, 1989](#)). Research has ascertained that travel motivation influences visitor behaviour and travel intention ([Khan et al., 2019](#)). Since the 1970s, there has been a plethora of research on what motivates people to travel, with studies focusing on the factors of tourism motivation ([Dann, 1977](#)), hierarchical needs arrangements and travel careers ([Pearce & Lee, 2005](#)), hedonistic and spurious experiences ([Boorstin, 1992](#)), and the search for authentic encounters and experiences ([MacCannell, 1973](#)). Researchers recognised many forms and dimensions of motivations, including exposure to foreign cultures, intellectual development, exploration of new destinations and leisurely experiences ([Wang, Lai, & Wong, 2022](#)). Tourism motivation has been understood in relation to specific types of tourists. For instance,

backpackers have been categorised into “self-actualisers”, “destination experience seekers” and “social searchers” (Chen, Bao, & Huang, 2014). Moreover, other notable travel motivations have been identified which relate to such destination attributes as the role of the climate, wildlife and natural environment, as well as the significant social motivation to visit friends and meet new people (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic affected tourists and their motivation to travel (Io & Peralta, 2022). An emerging body of research attempted to understand the relationship between tourists’ motivations and travel intentions in the post-COVID-19 context (Rousan, Siddiqui, & Bano, 2023; Zheng, Luo, & Ritchie, 2021). As noted above, travel motivations represent the underlying factors that drive individuals to travel, while travel intentions refer to the likelihood of individuals acting upon their motivations to visit a destination. Varadzhakova et al. (2021) found that tourists’ travel intentions, which are influenced by their motivations, differ across countries and nationalities. For instance, they found that Azerbaijani respondents had stronger intentions to travel post-lockdown, indicating stronger motivations to travel internationally, whereas Bulgarian respondents intended to travel domestically, suggesting their motivations were more focused on local destinations.

Furthermore, recent research by Gan, Zheng, Li, Li, and Shen (2023) highlights the link between travel motivation and intention. Gan’s (2023) research investigates the influence of motivation on behavioural intentions in health and wellness tourism, emphasising the role of perceived value. It underscores the direct positive prediction of behaviour intentions driven by tourism motivations. Similarly, Teng, Wu, and Lee, (2023) and Sreen, Tandon, Jabeen, Srivastava, and Dhir (2023) demonstrate that travel motivations significantly impact travel intentions, affirming the proposed relationship in diverse tourism settings. These studies analyse how diverse motivational variables, whether driven by individual values, personality characteristics, or perceived value, fundamentally shape the travel intentions of differing traveller groups.

Nonetheless, empirically based assertions concerning post-lockdown travel intentions are still inconclusive. The shift in travel behaviour patterns and attitudes and ongoing health concerns make comprehending tourists’ visit intentions challenging. These factors introduce new variables and uncertainties that can significantly influence decision-making processes (Rastegar et al., 2021; Refaat & Arafa, 2022). Tourists may prioritise safety measures, potential health risks, and destination-specific pandemic responses, which were less prominent in their pre-pandemic travel considerations (Zheng et al., 2021). However, it is essential to understand tourists’ travel intentions in the post-lockdown era, especially in an endeavour to work towards a speedy tourism industry recovery. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected the tourism industry, leading to a shift in tourists’ attitudes and behaviour towards travel. To predict tourists’ travel intentions in the post-COVID-19 era and facilitate the recovery of the tourism industry, this study aims to examine the relationship between travel motivation and travel intention. Understanding this relationship is crucial because it sheds light on how various factors influencing motivation can affect tourists’ intentions to travel, which can help industry stakeholders create strategies that effectively cater to travellers’ evolving needs and preferences. This examination leads to the formation of the first hypothesis:

H1. Travel motivation affects tourists’ travel intention.

2.3 Destination safety

Recent research suggests that travellers’ perceptions of risks and hazards associated with a destination influence their travel intention (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Fountain & Cradock-Henry, 2020; Promsivapallop & Kannaovakun, 2017). Thus, it is anticipated that individuals will select destinations based on safety considerations, which will be a crucial factor in influencing tourists’ decision-making and destination choice in the post-pandemic

era (Abraham, Bremser, Carreno, Crowley-Cyr, & Moreno, 2020; Osti & Nava, 2020). Governments have implemented measures to enhance destination safety, including contact tracing apps and reinforcing safety procedures, especially to comply with destination safety and security policies (Gretzel et al., 2020). These safety measures are seen to directly impact tourists' travel intentions, playing a role in their decision-making process and destination choice. Safety incidents such as natural disasters and human-induced tragedies are not destination-specific since a single incident might affect how an entire nation or region is perceived (Ukpabi, Olaleye, & Karjaluto, 2021). Therefore, destination safety is anticipated to remain a significant consideration for travellers in the post-pandemic era. Understanding destination safety measures is of vital importance to understanding tourists' travel intentions, leading to the second hypothesis:

H2. Destination safety affects tourists' travel intention.

2.4 Revenge travel

The concept of revenge travel stems from the notion of vengeance. It can refer to revenge spending, which transpired in China during the 1980s when there was a boom in consumer demand following years of economic struggle during the Cultural Revolution (Shadel, 2020; Zaman, Raza, Abbasi, Aktan, & Farías, 2021b). Revenge tourism or revenge travel has become a buzzword in 2021 and relates to tourists' pent-up leisure and travel demand due to quarantines, lockdowns, and other travel and mobility restrictions (Zaman et al., 2021a, 2021b; Vogler, 2022). Studies conducted during lockdowns show that many people wish to travel again once restrictions are lifted (Cretu et al., 2021). Fear of missing out on travel opportunities due to potential lockdowns also contributes to this surge of post-pandemic traveling (Liu & Wang, 2024). Social interaction was highly missed during times of lockdown (Shir-Wise, 2022). Respondents who were previously infected show a higher tendency to travel (Boto-García & Leoni, 2022). Abdullah's (2021) study found that people are more likely to travel after the pandemic to make up for the lost time when they were not allowed to do so, indicating that understanding the revenge travel factor can help to comprehend tourists' intentions. Girish (2021) stated that people engage in revenge travel due to negative emotions. Kim et al., (2022) suggested utilising the notion of "compensatory travel" as it refers to the "latent demand and travel intention led by the need to compensate for hardship, stress, and deficiency caused by COVID-19" (p. 1905).

Increased tourism demand and people's desire to travel again may also be driven by the savings people accumulated during the lockdown period. Consequently, travel could become more frequent and more luxurious. Even though recent studies have explored revenge travel, this concept has not been tested as a mediator between travel motivation, destination safety, and travel intention. The indirect effects of revenge travel on the relationship between these variables have yet to be identified. Moreover, while push-pull forces can explain travel motivation, the connection between the two is still weak. This is evidenced by the relatively low R^2 value, a measure of the fit of a model (Salsabila & Alversia, 2020), which makes mediation feasible. Therefore, since international travel restrictions are reducing, this study uses revenge travel to understand the causal (direct and indirect) effects of revenge travel on tourists' intention to travel. This form of travel can have a significant impact on tourists' travel intentions and therefore lead to the following propositions of the study:

H3. Revenge travel affects tourists' travel intention.

H3a. Revenge travel mediates the relationship between travel motivation and travel intention.

H3b. Revenge travel mediates the relationship between destination safety and travel intention.

2.5 Study area: a glimpse of Penang Island and George Town

Penang Island, located in Malaysia, has significantly contributed to the country's tourism industry for many years, with an average of 4.07 million visitors annually before the COVID-19 pandemic (Omar, Paisar, & Mohamed, 2017). The island's rich history and cultural attractions have made it a popular destination for tourists and its capital city, George Town, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. In addition, Penang Hill, one of the most visited tourist destinations on the island, has been recognised as a biosphere reserve by the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme (Salman, Jaafar, Mohamad, & Khoshkam, 2022). Despite the impact of the pandemic on tourism, the opening of Malaysia's borders for international travel led to the return of international tourists (The Sun, 2023). With its diverse offerings, including leisure, business, beach, heritage, and gastronomic tourism opportunities (Khoo & Badarulzaman, 2014; Khan et al., 2019), Penang Island is ideal for studying tourists' post-lockdown travel motivations and intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

A quantitative research approach using a self-administered questionnaire was deployed in this study. The questionnaire utilised constructs adapted from previous literature sources, which focused on the following areas: travel motivation, travel intention, destination safety, and revenge travel. Established scales were adapted in the field of tourism to measure the variables used in the study: travel motivation (Wang et al., 2022; Carvache-Franco et al., 2022); travel intention (Benslimane & Semaoune, 2020); destination safety (Zaman et al., 2021a, 2021b; Carvache-Franco et al., 2022); revenge travel (Zaman et al., 2021a, 2021b). International tourists were targeted as the respondents of this study, which took place from September to November 2022 – the year Malaysia reopened its borders for international tourism. The questionnaire was handed out to tourists visiting Penang, whom were provided with explanations concerning the nature of the study and questionnaire. Respondents were approached at international tourist hotspots in Penang, including Georgetown, Penang Hill area and Batu Ferringhi. On a scale ranging from one to five, with one indicating “strong disagreement” and five indicating “strong agreement”, participants were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement on each topic.

G*power analysis was utilised to determine the minimum sample size required to test model associations at a significance level of 0.05 and an effect size of 0.15 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The minimum sample size indicated by G*power was 119. However, the data was obtained from 320 respondents by convenience sampling to ensure a high level of representativeness, an increase in statistical power in the research and more credible results. This sample aligns with a study by Kock and Hadaya (2018), which recognises that for variance-based structural equation modelling, a sample size of 250 exceeds most recommendations.

3.2 Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS to summarise the demographic characteristics of the participants, including their age, gender and education level. At the same time, PLS-SEM was employed to evaluate the measurement and structural model because it may be applied to test reflecting, formative, and mixed reflective-formative models [1] (Hair, Matthews, Matthews, & Sarstedt, 2017). Ensuring the uniformity of the reflecting structures of the variables was of fundamental importance. Both the structural and measurement models were used to evaluate the model's predictability, validity and reliability. Pilot testing was conducted with a small sample of participants ($n=20$) to assess the survey items' clarity, relevance and consistency. Items that did not meet the predetermined criteria for validity and reliability were removed from the final survey instrument.

4. Results

Table 1 indicates the demographic overview of the participants. Of the 320 respondents who responded to the survey, 144 (45%) were male, and 176 (55%) were female. Around 57.2% of the participants were aged between 26 and 35, 23.4% (36–45 years), 11.6% (18–25 years) and 6.9% (46–55 years). Moreover, this was the first trip since the lockdown for most respondents (74.4%), while some respondents (25%) had already visited Malaysia pre-COVID-19. Correspondingly, 244 respondents (76.25%) indicated that the travel purpose was for leisure (including festivals, honeymoons, outdoor activities, and hiking). In comparison, 27 respondents (8.44%) indicated that the purpose of travel was for business, 18 respondents (5.63%) came for education and research purposes, 14 respondents (4.38%) came to visit family, 7 respondents (2.19%) came for events (weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) and 10 respondents (3.13%) came for other purposes such as medical treatment and sports activity. Additionally, 135 (42.2%) respondents preferred travelling alone, 91 (28.4%) preferred travelling with friends, 63 (19.7%) preferred travelling with family and only 31 (9.7%) preferred travelling in a group.

The analysis below was completed using “partial least squares structural equation modelling” (PLS-SEM), an appropriate technique for examining multiple variables in a single data set and testing new relationships between these variables (Zaib Abbasi et al., 2022). The primary emphasis was on ensuring the reliability of the reflective structures of the variables. The structural and measurement models were evaluated for their predictability, reliability and validity.

Table 1 Overview of respondents’ demographics

<i>Respondents information</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	45
Female	55
<i>Age</i>	
18–25	11.6
26–35	57.2
36–45	23.4
46–55	6.9
56–65	0.6
more than 66	0.3
<i>First trip to Malaysia</i>	
Yes	74.4
No	25.6
<i>Travel purpose:</i>	
Leisure	69.4
Business	4.7
Hiking	2.5
Other	23.4
<i>Tourists region</i>	
Middle East/Africa	10.94
Asia	43.44
Americas	5.94
Europe	39.69
<i>Travel with:</i>	
Alone	42.2
Family	19.7
Friends	28.4
Group (team)	9.7
Source: Authors’ own creation	

4.1 Assessment of measurement model

The measuring model was examined to determine the dependability and validity of the constructs (see Table 2). Firstly, factor loadings were assessed for all items, and all values were found to be greater than the minimum threshold value of 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Although outer loadings greater than 0.70 are desired (Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010), social science researchers commonly receive outer loadings under 0.70. Therefore, instead of immediately discarding any indicators, the impact of the item's removal on composite reliability, substance, and convergent validity must be investigated. Items with outer loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 are generally only subject to removal if doing so enhances composite reliability or "average variance extracted" (AVE) above the advised range (Vinet & Zhedanov, 2011). In the current study, removing the item with a value less than 0.7 would not have significantly increased composite reliability and AVE because the construct values were already above the recommended threshold. Hence, no items were excluded from further analysis in the study. Cronbach Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) should be greater than 0.7 to establish reliability (Ali, Rasoolimanesh, & Cobanoglu, 2019). For this study, Cronbach Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) were above the threshold values of 0.7. Also, AVE was measured to check for convergent validity, and its value was higher than the minimum threshold of 0.5 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019), thus establishing convergent validity, as highlighted in Table 2.

For establishing discriminant validity, HTMT ratio is used (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The threshold value of HTMT should be below 0.85. For this study, Table 3 shows that the HTMT ratio values were below 0.85, highlighting that the study has no discriminant validity issue.

4.2 Assessment of the structural model

The structural model illustrates the relationships between constructs of the proposed study model. This study's evaluation of the hypotheses is presented in Table 4. The data demonstrate that revenge travel considerably impacts tourists' travel intentions. Furthermore, the results also

Table 2 Measurement model results

Variables	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Tourist motivation	TM1	0.732	0.811	0.863	0.512
	TM2	0.642			
	TM3	0.777			
	TM4	0.752			
	TM5	0.710			
	TM6	0.673			
Destination safety	DS1	0.890	0.891	0.922	0.705
	DS2	0.881			
	DS3	0.913			
	DS4	0.840			
	DS5	0.645			
Revenge travel	RD1	0.689	0.798	0.856	0.501
	RD2	0.609			
	RD3	0.729			
	RD4	0.807			
	RD5	0.779			
	RD6	0.609			
Travel intention	TI1	0.805	0.786	0.860	0.608
	TI2	0.833			
	TI3	0.798			
	TI4	0.672			

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 3 Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	DS	RT	TI	TM
DS				
RT	0.327			
TI	0.159	0.61		
TM	0.206	0.436	0.595	

Notes: DS = Destination Safety; RT = Revenge Travel; TI = Travel Intention; TM = Travel Motivation

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 4 Structural model assessment: hypothesis testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	SD (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	p values	R ²	Q ²	Result
DS → RT	0.274	0.277	0.061	4.519	< 0.01	0.219	0.192	Supported
TM → RT	0.393	0.402	0.051	7.698	< 0.01			Supported
RT → TI	0.372	0.374	0.055	6.759	< 0.01	0.366	0.237	Supported
DS → TI	0.111	0.114	0.06	1.861	> 0.05			Not supported
TM → TI	0.501	0.507	0.047	10.668	< 0.01			Supported
TM → RT → TI	0.146	0.150	0.03	4.933	< 0.01			Supported
DS → RT → TI	0.102	0.104	0.029	3.470	< 0.01			Supported

Notes: DS = Destination safety; TM = Travel Motivation; RT = Revenge Travel; TI = Travel Intention

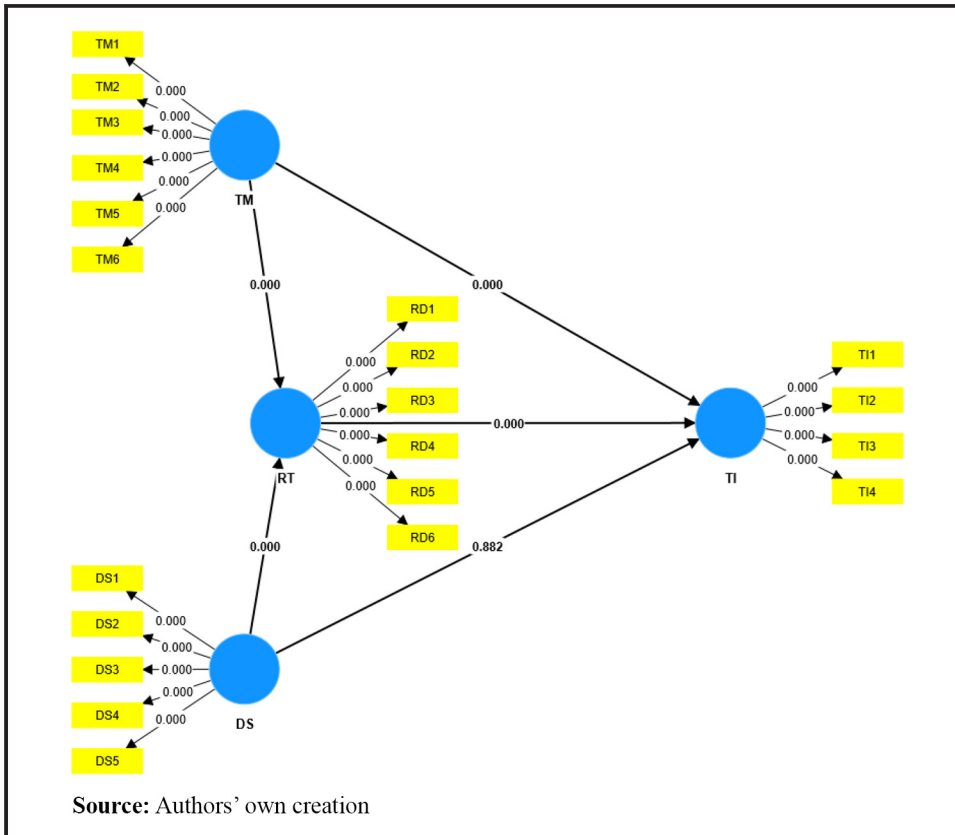
Source: Authors' own creation

positively indicated the support for “travel motivation” (TM) on “travel intention” (TI). However, destination safety was observed to have no significant relationship with travel intention; hence H_2 is rejected. All other hypotheses in this study had a significant positive association with travel intention. After testing the direct relationships, mediation was tested. The product coefficient approach (indirect effect) was employed to test the potential mediation effects, and bias-corrected bootstrap “confidence intervals” (CIs) were employed to determine the significance of indirect effects. The data presented in Table 4 provides empirical evidence for the mediation of revenge travel between tourist motivation and destination safety on travel intention. The indirect results showed that the beta value for both hypotheses, $H_{3a} = 0.146$ and $H_{3b} = 0.102$, are significant with t -values $t = 4.933^{**}$ and $t = 3.470^{**}$. The indirect effects at 95% confidence interval BC (LL = 0.096 and UL = 0.213) and (LL = 0.050 and UL = 0.165) did not straddle a zero, indicating a complementary partial mediation of travel motivation on travel intention through revenge travel (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The results revealed a significant indirect result of revenge travel on tourists’ travel intention in the post-lockdown period.

Additionally, R-square (R^2) was analysed in this study. R^2 greatly depends on the field of research. According to Cohen (1988), the values of 0.02, 0.13, and 0.26 are respectively weak, moderate and substantial. In addition, Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, (2011) observed that R^2 values of 0.20 are regarded as significant in certain research fields. The R^2 values of the endogenous variables in this study ranged from 0.219 (“acceptable”) to 0.366 (“high”). Similarly, the Q^2 values were 0.192 for revenge travel and 0.237 for travel intention. Therefore, the findings are deemed satisfactory and meaningful because the values are greater than zero (Hair et al., 2019), as further illustrated in Table 4 and Figure 2 below.

The Smart PLS 4 analysis, also demonstrates that revenge travel is the main cause of travelling. At present, revenge travel notably influences tourists’ travel intentions, followed by travel motivations. Hence, the data shows that revenge travel is a consequence of the pandemic. Nonetheless, such travel motivations as the desire to experience culture, relaxation, and adventure also play a significant role in tourists’ travel intention in the post-lockdown era.

Figure 2 Structural model



5. Discussion

The study's results help to understand what factors play a role in tourists' travel intention after a recent crisis event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant positive relationship was observed between travel motivation and travel intention. Tourists were highly motivated to travel after the restrictions of the pandemic were relaxed; therefore, their travel intention was also high. This finding also corroborates with [Varadzhakova et al., \(2021\)](#) study of Azerbaijan respondents. Past studies on travel motivation in the pre-crisis era also highlighted a similar relationship between travel motivation and tourists' travel intentions ([Fontaine, 1993](#); [Pearce & Lee, 2005](#); [Yousaf, Amin, & Antonio, 2018](#)). Additionally, motivation plays a crucial role in shaping travel behaviour ([Seyanont, 2017](#)).

However, the pandemic undoubtedly had a variety of effects on tourists. Interestingly, destination safety, traditionally a critical factor in tourists' travel intentions, did not exhibit a significant relationship in the post-crisis context. The results of this research thus differ from past studies before the pandemic ([Qi, Gibson, & Zhang, 2009](#)) and during the peaks of crisis cases ([Kim et al., 2022](#)). Such studies showed how destination safety factors such as risk, notably socio-psychological risk, have a negative impact on travel intention. [Seyanont's \(2017\)](#) study found that tourism authorities and other stakeholders' effective communication about destination safety is essential to travel intention. This could be due to extended lockdowns and restrictions imposed due to the pandemic. These restrictions may have impacted individuals' travel behaviour and intention, leading to a deviation from the past findings. Still, recent studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the increased importance of health and safety concerns ([Zheng et al., 2021](#)).

The findings within the Georgetown, Penang context reveal that tourists display a very limited concern for health safety measures when making travel decisions. This underscores a development wherein destinations like Penang, characterised by low risks of political conflict or health crises, witness tourists prioritising alternative factors. Notably, urban cultural attractions and recreational experiences, especially in relation to urban heritage and food, appear to outweigh stringent health protocols in influencing tourists' destination choices for city tourism. Tourists appear to be strongly interested in returning to urban areas. The initial tourism focus during the pandemic on rural areas with less crowded places may not have lasted that long, indicating a shift back towards urban destinations as travellers seek out diverse experiences and vibrant cultural city life. One possible explanation is the shift in tourist priorities after the pandemic. After prolonged lockdown periods and travel restrictions, the overriding desire for leisure and change could outweigh safety concerns, a sentiment not as prevalent in pre-pandemic times. People have been worried about safety issues during the height of the pandemic and may wish to forget these concerns while travelling, indulging in more extensive and hedonic trips again, which can thus lead to revenge travel. Consequently, to comprehend the complete picture, this study explored the significance of revenge travel with tourists' travel intentions in the post-crisis period.

Revenge travel was observed to have a significant positive relationship with tourists' travel intentions. Tourists missed travel experienced during the pandemic and plan to make up for their missed travel during the lockdowns and border closures. Even the indirect effect of revenge travel was significant when tested with travel motivation and destination safety on tourists' intention. Related studies by [Abdullah \(2021\)](#) and [Zaman et al. \(2021a, 2021b\)](#) suggested that revenge travel will likely emerge after the pandemic as a response to people's fatigue with lockdowns and restrictions. Findings clearly show that the pandemic has a positive relationship with revenge travel. [Wang and Xia \(2021\)](#) and [Fang, Lu, Wang, and Lai, \(2023\)](#) recently explored revenge travel. They found that nostalgia was generated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which helped consumers survive the distress associated with the pandemic era and simultaneously nurture the yearning for leisure travel.

This study collected data soon after the international tourism entry restrictions were lifted in Penang, Malaysia. The results highlight that revenge travel is a potential outcome as countries have begun to ease lockdowns and is also an essential insight in the context of China's intended revival of outbound tourism. [Choudhary and Manda \(2021\)](#) reported indications of an increase in revenge travel, as evidenced by flight and hotel booking data, despite the restrictions imposed during that time. Their findings suggest a trend towards resuming tourism activities, particularly domestic travel. [Zaman et al., \(2021a, 2021b\)](#) also highlighted similar results and conceptualised revenge travel in correlation with cognitive motives for post-crisis tourism. Hence, the results of their study predicted the rise of revenge travel as soon as crisis restrictions were eased. Whilst the pandemic and crisis in hospitality and tourism present opportunities to create a more sustainable way of travelling ([Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020](#)), the current data suggests otherwise by providing evidence which shows that people wish to travel indiscriminately.

These findings reinforce the theory of planned behaviour, illustrating how the level of control over travel behaviour is influenced by the presence and intensity of COVID-19 restrictions. When the restrictions are either lifted or eased, the level of perceived control increases. This likely fuelled the observed surge in revenge travel. Regarding the pandemic, the reopening of borders and relaxation of travel restrictions may have given people the impression that they now have greater choice over their behaviour, which can result in revenge travel. Such developments also indicate that tourists' behaviour has changed. Moreover, individuals' need to participate in risk-reduced behaviour was of no real concern to the tourist respondents as they were not focused on any significant need nor intention to seek experiences or circumstances which emphasised health safety and minimum risk.

Subsequently, the study's results highlighted that people's travel intentions were not fear-induced, which contrasted with the results of [Zheng et al. \(2021\)](#) study. Thus, the study results provide evidence that tourists' travel intentions have been affected by crisis such as COVID-19 and that they want to travel without restrictions. This research delivers new knowledge by examining the behaviour of tourists after the lockdown.

6. Implications

The research holds significance in both theoretical and practical dimensions, adding valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge on post-crisis and post-pandemic tourism. This contribution is particularly noteworthy in the context of Malaysia, a nation that reopened its borders to international travel later than several other major tourism destinations.

6.1 Theoretical implications

This study enriches the theoretical discussion of post-crisis and post-pandemic tourism, specifically focusing on the urban tourism destination such as Georgetown (Penang), Malaysia. There are three theoretical implications identified. Firstly, this study aids in understanding the travel intentions of foreign tourists and, to the best of the authors' knowledge, represents one of the initial investigations into tourists' travel intentions following the complete reopening of international tourism in Southeast Asia. Consequently, this study marks a step in addressing the literature gap related to exploring tourists' travel intentions in the post-lockdown period. This research contributes to grasping the travel intentions of foreign tourists in the aftermath of the full reopening of international tourism in Southeast Asia.

Secondly, in contrast to earlier studies that focused on the direct connections between revenge travel and travel intention, this study delves into the indirect relationship between them. Previous research primarily highlighted the immediate impact of travel motivation, destination safety, and revenge travel on travel intention, while our present study surpasses this by scrutinising the indirect link between revenge travel and tourists' travel intention in the post-lockdown era. An indirect relationship denotes the influence of revenge travel on travel intention through various factors, including travel motivation and destination safety. The study identifies revenge travel as a crucial push factor, impacting travel intentions in the post-lockdown era, both directly and indirectly through factors such as travel motivation and destination safety. In the context of PPT revenge travel thus acts as a push factor, stemming from internal motivations like the desire for freedom, the need to escape the monotony of past lockdown experiences, and the aspiration to compensate for lost time and missed experiences. However, factors such as attractive deals or incentives offered by tourism operators can further stimulate this type of travel. Moreover, the observed interest in returning to urban areas amid the pandemic highlights the resilience of urban tourism and its enduring appeal to travellers. This challenges previous assumptions about the decline of urban tourism in times of crisis. Consequently, the study contributes to the evolving literature on revenge and compensatory travel amid the COVID-19 pandemic ([Kim et al., 2022](#); [Zhang et al., 2021](#)) and mega-crisis events.

Thirdly, the study advocates for reassessing conventional travel motivation models in the face of crisis conditions. By furnishing a framework for comprehending the repercussions of revenge travel, it emphasises the imperative for flexible theories capable of accommodating abrupt changes in tourist behaviour, particularly within the context of mega-crisis events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study enriches the theoretical discussion of post-crisis tourism research, particularly in Southeast Asia, serving as one of the critical inquiries into tourists' travel intentions after the comprehensive reopening of international tourism. These insights further advance the existing knowledge, given that much of the previous

research occurred at the pandemic's peak, marked by stringent restrictions and primarily focused on domestic rather than international tourists. The study underscores that international tourists' motivations moved quickly "beyond fear and safety", emphasising the dynamic nature of tourist intentions and behaviour. This shift is important for comprehending the recovery of the global travel industry.

6.2 Practical implications

The practical implications of this study address the evolving behaviour and expectations of tourists in a changed post-crisis environment, particularly in Malaysia. Firstly, following the dynamic of revenge travel, destinations should anticipate a potential surge in tourism demand by assessing and adapting their existing infrastructure and amenities. This proactive approach is crucial to ensure that destinations can effectively meet the increasing demand for services and align with the evolving needs of tourists, including those seeking revenge travel experiences. From a practical standpoint, this research sheds light on the evolving behaviour and expectations of tourists in an altered environment following a crisis. Developing targeted marketing campaigns that resonate with the unique desires of tourists is also crucial. This involves creating tailored promotional materials and experiences that align with the identified post-pandemic preferences.

Secondly, despite the reduced emphasis on destination safety from an international tourists' point of view, destinations should not underestimate the importance of maintaining a secure environment. This emphasis is crucial for fostering trust among tourists, promoting repeat visits, and generating positive word-of-mouth, ultimately contributing to the enduring consumption of tourism over the long term. Although destination safety did not emerge as a significant concern, the limited attention to this factor could be attributed to "restriction fatigue" or a general desire to break free from the monotony imposed by previous travel limitations. While such attitudes are understandable to some extent, destinations must still prioritise health and safety for both visitors and residents. It is crucial to emphasise the need for destinations to communicate effectively about their commitment to health, safety, and environmental sustainability. Clear communication can alleviate concerns and build confidence among tourists.

Thirdly, the findings of the study act as empirical anchors for crafting crisis-response scenarios, assisting stakeholders in executing data-driven strategies and interventions in line with observed post-crisis behaviours. Stakeholders can leverage this data-driven approach to implement strategies and interventions aligned with observed post-crisis behaviours, ensuring a more effective and adaptive response to the evolving dynamics of tourism.

Fourthly, the compelling evidence supporting the concept of revenge travel poses a challenge to the principles of sustainable tourism. This study underscores the significance of striking a balance between tourism expansion and considerations for sustainability. Destinations and pertinent stakeholders, including public sector bodies, the tourism industry, residents and tourists, must safeguard their environmental and sociocultural resources, steering clear of the negative impacts associated with (mass) tourism, as extensively documented in pre-pandemic times. Governmental bodies should encourage industry stakeholders to explore and promote sustainable tourism certifications and practices. Certifications can act as a guideline for destinations and businesses to align with sustainable principles.

Finally, the findings offer insights for urban and city tourism strategists. By demonstrating how revenge travel significantly influences travel intentions, this study provides a basis for targeted marketing and strategic planning aimed at attracting tourists whose motivations are shaped by a desire to reclaim lost experiences. For instance, city tourism boards can devise campaigns that spotlight open spaces and unique urban experiences that appeal to revenge travelers' emotional and experiential desires. Furthermore, the diminished concern for destination safety among tourists underscores the necessity for cities to re-evaluate their

safety communications strategies. Emphasising a return to normalcy and the availability of enriching urban experiences could be pivotal in reassuring tourists and stimulating visitation. Moreover, the observed interest in returning to urban areas highlights the need for ongoing investment in sustainable urban tourism mobility and infrastructure.

7. Conclusions

7.1 *Key findings*

The study aimed to understand tourists' travel intentions in a changing environment. Therefore, tourist travel motivation, destination safety and revenge travel were considered for this study. Travel motivation has a significant positive relationship with travel intention, while destination safety was observed to have no significant relationship with travel intention. Interestingly, the relationship between destination safety and travel intention was observed to change after the crisis restrictions were lifted. Moreover, revenge travel was found to have a significant positive relationship with travel intention.

Based on the findings of this study, revenge travel provided complementary mediation between travel motivation and travel intention. Tourists' pent-up leisure and travel demand intensified due to quarantines, lockdowns and other travel and mobility restrictions imposed since March 2020. Thus, as the results indicate the upsurge of revenge travel, it is recommended that destinations, as well as the travel and hospitality industries, gear up to respond to swift demand spikes. At the same time, efforts for more sustainable tourism and degrowth (Higgins-Desbiolles & Everingham, 2024) need to be strengthened. As travel resumes, destinations may confront familiar challenges of overtourism or mass tourism, where the exploitation of natural, economic and sociocultural resources may lead to local resistance. While the revenge travel phenomenon can be seen as an opportunity to boost tourism consumption, it is crucial to strike a balance between capitalising on the increased travel intent and ensuring the sustainability of tourism.

7.2 *Limitations and future research*

While this study provides valuable insights into current travel dynamics after lockdowns imposed by crisis contexts, it has four notable limitations. First, the data was gathered from tourists coming to Penang (a single destination); therefore, it is suggested that further investigation should be carried out in different tourist destinations to understand better revenge travel dynamics from a comparative perspective. Second, it is also recommended to do a time series analysis to understand whether the revenge travel trend is temporary or long-term in nature and form. Third, more factors of travel intention should be explored and tested to understand tourists' intentions better, such as destination accessibility, travel attitudes and destination choice, with a focus on destination image and reputation. Fourth, since this research shows only quantitative results, it would be interesting to explore tourists' intentions through qualitative-based interviews to understand their mindsets in greater depth. Finally, while this research provides valuable insights into travel intentions after the crisis restrictions are lifted, it does not include an analysis based on gender, ethnicity, age, and education which is a limitation that restricts the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could enhance the understanding of post-lockdown travel behaviour by incorporating perspectives based on these variables gendered perspectives.

Note

- 1 We utilized the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach for this study, using the Smart PLS 4 software. This method is particularly appropriate for exploratory research and in cases where data may not follow a normal distribution. It is crucial to note that Smart PLS 4 software is designed to handle and address issues of non-normality. Moreover, no missing data were reported.

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