



The Mediating Effect of Risk Perception on Factors Influencing International Tourists’ Intention to Travel to Malaysia

Mohd Yuhafidz bin Mohd Yusof*, Zaileen Elina binti Arifin, Nadzirah binti Nasir, Fazlin Shasha binti Abdullah

Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR University College, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the mediating role of risk perception in the relationship between past travel experience, sensation-seeking personality, and international tourists’ intention to visit Malaysia. Based on survey data from 384 respondents, results show that past travel experience and sensation-seeking personality significantly influence travel intention but have no effect on risk perception. Unexpectedly, risk perception demonstrates a positive association with travel intention, indicating that higher perceived risk does not necessarily discourage travel. The study contributes to tourism literature by highlighting the complex role of risk in decision-making and recommends improving destination safety, crisis preparedness, service quality, and communication strategies.

Keywords: risk perception, past travel experience, sensation-seeking personality, intention to travel

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has emerged as the primary source of employment and revenue for many nations, leading to a significant reliance on the sector (Clayton, 2014). As shown in Table 1, international tourist arrivals increased steadily from 1,044 million to a peak of 1,462 million from 2012 until 2024, while receipts grew from \$1,132 billion to \$1,480 billion. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, arrivals dropped drastically to 406 million in 2020 and remained low in 2021 (data unavailable) before rebounding to 960 million in 2022 and 1,300 million in 2023. Receipts followed a similar trend, falling to \$562 billion in 2020 and recovering to \$1,200 billion in 2022 and \$1,500 billion in 2023. By 2024, arrivals are estimated at 1,400 million, with receipts projected to reach \$1,600 billion, indicating a near full recovery to pre-pandemic levels.

Table 1. International Tourist Arrival and Receipts (2012 – 2024)

Year	International TouristArrivals (in million)	International TouristReceipts (in USD)
2024	1400	1600(estimate)
2023	1300	1500
2022	960(approx.)	1200(approx.)
2021	-	607
2020	406	562
2019	1462	1480
2018	1408	1454
2017	1333	1347



2016	1243	1250
2015	1197	1222
2014	1143	1281
2013	1097	1219
2012	1044	1132

Source: UNWTO (<https://www.unwto.org/global-and-regional-tourism-performance>)

Malaysia's tourism market has been expanding in recent years, with both inbound arrivals and outbound departures experiencing steady growth and expected to continue rising annually (<https://www.tourism.gov.my/>). Forecasts by Business Monitor International (BMI) suggest that visitor numbers from these regions will continue to grow steadily. While arrivals from other regions are also expected to rise, these markets remain susceptible to potential economic downturns that could impact travel demand. Both domestic and international tourists play a crucial role in sustaining the tourism industry, making it one of the key contributors to the economy (Mageswari et al., 2014) through foreign exchange earnings, attracting investments, and generating employment opportunities (Witt & Witt, 1995). The number of international tourist arrivals to Malaysia has shown an upward trend.

Table 2 presents data on tourist arrivals in Malaysia along with total earnings from 2006 to 2023. From 2006 to 2019, Malaysia's tourist arrivals increased from 17.55 million to 26.10 million, with tourism receipts rising from RM 36.27 billion to RM 86.14 billion. The highest number of arrivals was recorded in 2014 (27.44 million), while receipts peaked in 2019 (RM 86.14 billion). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a drastic decline, with arrivals dropping to 4.33 million and receipts to RM 12.69 billion. The situation worsened in 2021, with only 134,728 arrivals and RM 238.7 million in receipts. Recovery began in 2022, with 10.07 million arrivals and RM 28.23 billion in receipts, followed by 20.14 million arrivals and RM 71.31 billion in 2023, indicating a strong post-pandemic rebound.

Table 2. Arrival of tourists with a total earning assessment (2006-2023)

Year	Arrival of total tourists (inmillion)	Receipt (RM) billion
2006	17,546,863	36,271.7
2007	20,972,822	46,070.0
2008	22,052,488	49,561.2
2009	23,646,191	53,367.7
2010	24,577,196	56,492.5
2011	24,714,324	58,315.9
2012	25,032,708	60,556.7
2013	25,715,460	65,443.3
2014	27,437,315	71,998.8
2015	25,721,251	69,119.6
2016	26,757,392	82,098.2
2017	25,948,459	82,165.0
2018	25,832,354	84,135.2
2019	26,100,784	86,143.5



2020	4,332,722	12,688.2
2021	134,728	238.7
2022	10,070,964	28,228.3
2023	20,141,846	71,308.5

Source: Strategic Planning, Tourism Malaysia with the cooperation of Immigration Department, Malaysia

Data in Table 3 illustrates the contribution of travel and tourism to Malaysia's GDP from 2012 to 2024. The sector's contribution fluctuated over the years, peaking at 15.9% in 2019 just before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, its share declined but remained significant, dropping to 12.8% in 2021. A strong rebound followed, with contributions rising to 14% in 2022 and 15.1% in 2023. However, in 2024, the share decreased to 10.5%, not due to sectoral weakness, but because of higher overall GDP growth. Overall, the data underscores the tourism sector's resilience and vital role in Malaysia's economy, with notable volatility influenced by external factors such as global health crises.

Table 3. Malaysia Contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP

Years	GDP (%)
2024	10.5
2023	15.1
2022	14
2021	12.8
2020	14.1
2019	15.9
2018	13.3
2017	13.6
2016	13.9
2015	13.5
2014	14.3
2013	13.8
2012	12.9

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia

Problem Statement

The tourism industry is highly sensitive to risks at local, national, and global levels (Hasan, Ismail & Islam, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand what affects people's decisions to travel when risks are involved in order to build a more sustainable tourism industry. Moreover, past studies have looked at risk perception in areas outside tourism. For example, Taylor and Snyder (2017) studied how risk perception affects employee safety behaviour, while Tinoco et al. (2019) looked at how it influences the use of protective equipment. Others, like Jafari et al. (2019) and Hassan et al. (2020), focused on workplace accidents and public trust during COVID-19. Since risk perception involves many aspects (Sharifpour, 2012), this study takes a broader view to understand how it affects international tourists' travel decisions. While earlier studies focused on factors like motivation, satisfaction, destination image, place attachment, country image, and personal traits, they often looked at these factors in isolation. This research fills that gap by combining several factors and examining how risk perception



influences tourists' intentions. It specifically looks at how past travel experience and sensation-seeking personality affect the intention to visit Malaysia, with risk perception acting as a link between them.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Intention serves as a predictor of behaviour, as suggested by Fishbein and Azjen (1975), Hsu and Crotts (2006), Lenggogeni (2015). It refers to an individual's thoughts about the actions they plan to take in the future (Rhodes & Bruijn, 2013). In tourism research, travel intention refers to a tourist's cognitive and emotional readiness to visit a specific destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Ahn et al., 2013) and is typically assessed as a probability of future travel behaviour (Noh, 2006). Ahmad et al., 2024 further conceptualize travel intention as a future-oriented likelihood shaped by affective attachment and evaluative perceptions of a destination. Such intention has been shown to significantly influence destination choice and travel behaviour (Bae & Chang, 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020). Together, these perspectives highlight intention as a crucial psychological driver in the tourism decision-making process.

Behavioural intention is a foundational construct in tourism research, reflecting an individual's cognitive and emotional inclination to engage in a specific future behaviour. Swan (1981) conceptualized it as a person's planned or anticipated course of action, while Woodside et al. (1994) emphasized its probabilistic nature referring to the perceived chance that a tourist will visit a destination within a given timeframe. In contemporary tourism literature, behavioural intention is commonly understood as the willingness or motivation of tourists to visit a destination, shaped by psychological factors such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. For instance, Abdul Muhaemin and Gani (2024) define behavioural intention in the context of Islamic tourism as tourists' readiness to travel to Malaysia, driven by personal attitudes, social influences, and their perceived ability to make and execute the travel decision.

Travel intention, as a subset of behavioural intention, emerges prior to travel and is shaped by evaluative beliefs, perceived social norms, and situational constraints (Moutinho, 1987). Hennessey et al. (2010) further argue that the formation of intention results from a chain of psychological decisions influenced by individual attitudes and external pressures. This view aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which identifies attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control as key predictors of intention (Ajzen, 1991). Empirical findings support this framework in the Malaysian context: Abdul Muhaemin and Gani (2024) found that international visitors' intention to travel to Malaysia is significantly shaped by their attitudes, perceived social expectations, and their confidence in managing potential travel constraints.

Risk Perception

The tourism industry is highly susceptible to various forms of risk, including natural disasters, political instability, terrorism, health crises, and other human-made or environmental threats (Hasan, Ismail, & Islam, 2017; Williams & Balaz, 2013). These risks can severely impact destination image, tourist safety, and, ultimately, travel demand. In this context, risk perception defined as tourists' subjective evaluation of potential hazards or adverse consequences associated with a travel destination emerges as a key determinant of travel behaviour. It encompasses multiple dimensions, such as health, safety, environmental, and socio-political risks, all of which influence destination image and travel intentions (Carballo et al., 2021).

The tourism product, by nature, is intangible, inseparable, and perishable. These characteristics make risk an inherent part of the tourism experience. Unlike goods that can be tested before purchase, tourism requires a psychological leap of faith often associated with the expectation of pleasure and safety. When negative events such as riots, natural disasters, pandemics, or political conflicts occur, they generate negative perceptions that significantly deter tourists from visiting those destinations (Sönmez et al., 1999; Williams & Balaz, 2015; Raval & Fichadia, 2007).

Risk perception is not a new concept. It was first introduced by Bauer (1960) in the field of consumer behaviour and later applied to tourism decision-making in 1987. Since then, it has been examined across multiple disciplines, including psychology, geography, sociology, and political science. In tourism, it refers to tourists' intuitive judgments and emotional responses to perceived threats in the travel environment (Chen & Zhang,

2012a). Conceptually, it is the subjective expectation of potential loss, where individuals assess the probability and severity of uncertain outcomes (Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Dholakia, 2001).

Tourism-related risks are multidimensional, covering physical, financial, psychological, health, social, economic, and time-related threats, as well as opportunity loss. These perceived risks play a crucial role in shaping tourists' expectations, evaluations of service quality, and overall satisfaction (Karl & Schmude, 2017; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Tavitiyaman & Qu, 2013; Cui et al., 2016). Risk perception is also highly subjective and influenced by several factors, including the type of risk, destination attributes, tourist demographics (e.g., gender, cultural background, past experience), and the quality of destination management and crisis communication strategies (Carballo et al., 2021).

At its core, risk perception involves evaluating the probability and potential impact of adverse events such as illness, injury, or even death (Sjöberg et al., 2004). It reflects not only cognitive judgments but also emotional reactions such as fear and anxiety, which can significantly influence travel-related decision-making (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). For example, heightened risk perception may lead tourists to cancel or postpone trips, avoid certain destinations, or choose alternative, "safer" travel options.

Several psychological and contextual factors further influence how risk is perceived. Voluntariness is one such factor risks that are voluntarily assumed (e.g., adventure travel) are often perceived as less threatening than those imposed without choice (Renn, 1992). Perceived control also shapes risk assessments; individuals tend to feel less threatened by risks they believe they can manage (e.g., traffic) compared to those that feel uncontrollable, such as pandemics (Chen et al., 2020). The delay of consequences where negative effects appear long after exposure, such as in the case of radiation can also alter risk perception. Moreover, man-made risks are often perceived more negatively than natural ones due to their avoidability and perceived culpability. Media coverage plays a significant role in amplifying risk awareness and fear, particularly during crises. Over time, however, familiarity and habituation can reduce perceived risk, as individuals adapt to living with persistent threats (Hopkin, 2012).

Past Travel Experience

Past travel experience refers to the practical and accumulated episodes of travel that tourists have gained from previous trips. These experiences play a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions toward future travel. According to Jiang et al. (2022), the depth of past travel experience significantly moderates tourists' knowledge, risk perception, and travel decision-making processes. More extensive travel experience fosters greater confidence and resilience, positively influencing travel intention even in the face of perceived risks.

Travel experiences are multidimensional, commonly categorized into learning (acquiring new knowledge), enjoyment (seeking pleasure and joy), and escape (relief from routine life), all of which contribute to a more enriching and positive travel encounter (Kang & Gretzel, 2012). These experiences emerge through interactions with service providers, local communities, and fellow tourists, as well as through tourism products such as transportation, accommodation, and attractions. Emotions such as joy, love, and surprise along with cultural heritage and distinctive destination features, further enhance the overall experience (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015).

Importantly, past travel experience has been shown to influence satisfaction, revisit intention, and destination loyalty (Latiff & Ng, 2015). Attributes such as spontaneity, adventure, novelty, and relaxation contribute to the richness of a travel experience and ultimately shape tourist satisfaction. Empirical findings also indicate that incorporating past travel experience into travel behaviour models enhances their predictive power.

The Effect of Past Travel Experience on Risk Perception

Traveling to other countries can come with different risks, such as getting hurt, losing money, feeling stressed, or wasting time. How tourists see and react to these risks called risk perception is influenced by their past travel experiences, age, and how often they travel. Research shows that people who had bad experiences before, like

getting sick or facing political problems during a trip, often feel more worried and are less likely to travel again (Öhman, 2017; Bassil, 2014).

On the other hand, people with more travel experience usually feel more comfortable and confident when making travel decisions (Kinnunen, 2013). They tend to perceive lower levels of risk and rely less on external sources like news or social media when choosing a destination. In contrast, new or less-experienced travellers often depend heavily on second-hand information such as opinions from friends, media reports, or online content to assess safety and suitability (Teitler-Regev et al., 2015; Karl, 2018). This reliance on external sources is especially evident among younger generations. Supporting this, a recent study by Fauziyah and Sudradjat (2025) found that educational travel vlogs significantly influence Generation Z's intention to travel, helping reduce uncertainty and build trust in a destination. These vlogs serve as a substitute for direct experience, particularly for novice travellers who lack personal exposure, by providing virtual familiarity and lowering perceived risks.

The Effect of Past Travel Experience on Intention to Travel

Past travel experience significantly influences tourists' behavioural intentions and serves as a crucial information source for future travel decisions (Kim, 2014). Positive experiences, such as enjoyment, cultural immersion, and ease of travel, enhance revisit intentions, while negative experiences may deter future visits (Khasawneh & Alfandi, 2019; Zhang et al., 2016; Mazursky, 1989; Zeithaml, 1981; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a). Jiang et al. (2022) found that past travel experience significantly moderates the effects of knowledge, tourism self-identity, and perceived risk. Specifically, repeat visitors tend to exhibit greater perceived behavioural control, stronger alignment with subjective norms, and more positive attitudes toward travel factors that reinforce their intention to travel, even in uncertain or high-risk environments. Past travel experience consists of cognitive (learning, history, service) and affective (emotions like joy and excitement) elements, both of which shape tourists' decisions (Adhikari & Bhattacharya, 2015). Studies suggest that familiarity with a destination reduces perceived travel risks, increasing the likelihood of return visits (Lepp & Gibson, 2003). However, some tourists seek new experiences rather than revisiting familiar places (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013).

Past experiences also impact participation in tourism-related activities, such as sporting events, where previous engagement increases future participation (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Wu & Liu, 2017). In some cases, past experiences can discourage travel, particularly if tourists desire novelty or if experiences evoke negative emotions, as observed in dark tourism studies (Zhang et al., 2016). Familiarity with a destination moderates the effect of country image and attitudes on travel intentions, as demonstrated in research involving Tanzanian students visiting Korea (Kim & Kwon, 2018).

Furthermore, past experiences play a crucial role in destination loyalty, as satisfied tourists are more likely to return and recommend the destination (Um et al., 2006). Studies confirm that satisfaction fosters loyalty, emphasizing the need for tourism providers to enhance service quality and create valuable experiences (San Martin et al., 2013; Mendes & Oom, 2010). Tourists' attitudes and behaviours evolve based on their travel experiences, influenced by factors such as cultural exposure, language barriers, and interaction with locals (Tomljenovic, 2010; Ward & Berno, 2011; Yilmaz & Tasci, 2015). Negative experiences can reshape perceptions, reducing future travel intentions (Nyaupane et al., 2016). A study by Çelîk (2019) found that domestic tourists with no travel experience in a specific region held higher prejudices, while those with prior visits exhibited positive attitude changes. Ultimately, tourists' travel decisions are shaped by personal experiences, recommendations, and media portrayals, highlighting the significance of managing destination image and service quality (Yu et al., 2006).

Sensation-Seeking Personality

Psychographic factors such as personality, lifestyle, and motivations have long been recognized as key influences on tourist behaviour and travel intentions (Wu et al., 2011). Early foundational work by Cohen (1972) categorized tourists based on their preferences for novelty and familiarity into four types: drifters (high novelty, low familiarity), explorers (moderate novelty), individual mass tourists (moderate familiarity), and organized mass tourists (high familiarity, low novelty). Building on this concept, Plog (1974, 2002) introduced a psychographic model classifying tourists as psychocentric (risk-averse, favouring familiar destinations),

allocentric (adventure-seeking, drawn to novel destinations), and midcentric (exhibiting traits of both extremes). These models established the importance of personality and risk tolerance in travel preferences.

Later, Gretzel et al. (2004) expanded this perspective by proposing 12 distinct tourist types based on lifestyle and interests, emphasizing that motivations and personal values significantly influence destination choice. More recently, Wu et al. (2011) further affirmed that psychographic traits are strong predictors of travel intention, helping explain variations in tourist behaviour. The role of sensation seeking was highlighted by Japutra et al. (2021), who found that tourists with a high need for stimulation are more likely to travel to exciting, novel destinations and are also more inclined to recommend them to others.

Despite varying approaches to measuring psychographics, researchers commonly use Activity-Interest-Opinion (AIO) concepts to assess behaviour (Cahill, 2006; Samdin & Abdul, 2015). Psychographics also include personality, values, and lifestyles (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Different personality-based segmentation models exist, such as novelty-seeking groups (Weaver et al., 2009) and sensation-seeking traits (Zuckerman, 1979, 1984, 1990). The Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) was used to measure risk-taking tendencies in tourism (Pizam et al., 2004) but faced criticism for outdated language and forced-choice formats (Arnett, 1994; Qi et al., 2009). To address these issues, Hoyle et al. (2002) introduced the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS), a refined version with seven items to evaluate thrill-seeking behaviour more effectively.

The Effect of Sensation-Seeking Personality on Risk Perception

Sensation-seeking is a key personality trait that affects how people view travel risks. These individuals crave adventure and new experiences, so they tend to perceive travel dangers differently compared to more cautious people. While most tourists may avoid travel during crises like pandemics or political unrest, sensation seekers are often less affected by such concerns (Li et al., 2021). They're likely to use mental strategies like dismissing risks or seeking reassurance to ease anxiety and keep their travel motivation high.

Satar et al. (2023) found that sensation seekers are less influenced by fear-based media or cultural warnings. Instead, they focus on the excitement of travel and may downplay any potential risks. This mindset helps them maintain strong travel intentions even when others hesitate. In short, sensation-seeking reduces the impact of perceived risks on travel decisions making thrill-seekers more likely to travel in uncertain situations.

The Effect of Sensation-Seeking Personality on Intention to Travel

Personality, especially sensation seeking, plays an important role in shaping travel behaviour. High sensation seekers enjoy new, exciting, and sometimes risky experiences, making them more likely to choose adventurous trips (Pizam et al., 2001; Plog, 2002). In contrast, low sensation seekers prefer safe and familiar activities like shopping or cultural tours.

Research shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people reduced travel due to health risks. However, high sensation seekers often kept or even increased their travel plans, as they saw the risk as acceptable and were motivated by the desire for thrill and novelty (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Kim & Lee, 2021). These individuals tend to be less influenced by fear and more focused on the experience itself. Overall, sensation-seeking tourists are more willing to travel despite risks, which helps explain differences in travel intentions during uncertain times.

Risk Perception and Intention to Travel

Risk perception refers to how individuals judge the likelihood and seriousness of potential harm, particularly when making decisions in uncertain situations like travel. It is shaped by both rational thinking and emotional responses, such as fear or anxiety (Falahuddin et al., 2020; Wolff et al., 2019). During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, risk perception becomes especially important, as it directly influences tourists' willingness to travel and their choice of destination.

Recent studies highlight how perceived risk can reduce travel intention. Chan (2021) found that during the pandemic, tourists were more cautious and often avoided international travel, choosing safer alternatives such

as staycations or short local trips. This shows that high perceived risk especially related to health and safety can shift travel preferences significantly. Satar et al. (2023) emphasized that risk perception varies among individuals and can be influenced by personal traits, previous experiences, and media exposure. For example, tourists who frequently follow media updates may perceive greater risk, which lowers their intention to travel. Similarly, Falahuddin et al. (2021) explained that when travellers feel uncertain about safety, their perception of risk increases, leading to hesitation or cancellation of travel plans.

Although past research has explored various types of risks such as financial, physical, or social recent work suggests that perceived health risk has become a dominant factor post-pandemic. This shift highlights the need for destinations to rebuild trust by improving safety measures and communicating them clearly to potential tourists. In the Malaysian context, studies have been relatively limited, though some have addressed tourist risk perceptions in urban areas (Amir et al., 2012), coastal destinations (Yang et al., 2014), and rural islands (Supani & Abd Hamid, 2020). However, updated research is needed to understand how international tourists currently perceive risks when considering travel to Malaysia, especially in the post-COVID environment.

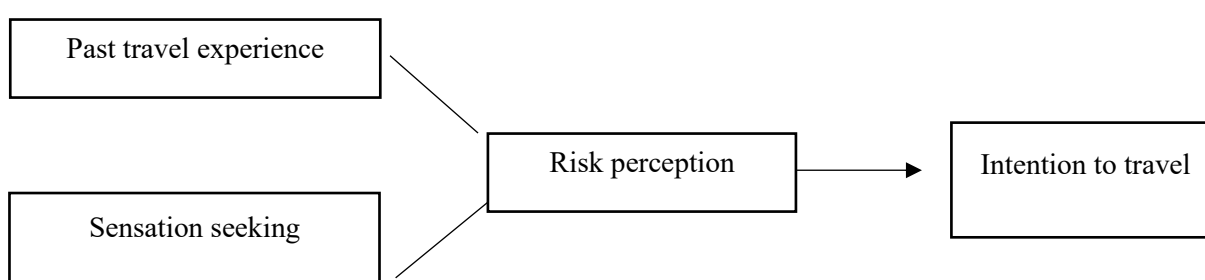
Risk Perceptions as a Mediator

Many studies have shown that risk perception often acts as a bridge between past experiences and future decision-making. For example, Demuth et al. (2016) found that individuals who had gone through stressful evacuation events like property damage or emotional loss were more likely to act cautiously in future emergencies, depending on how they perceived the risk. In tourism, Polas et al. (2019) found a similar pattern: past travel experiences influenced medical tourists' decisions through their perception of risk. In the same vein, Makhdoomi and Baba (2019) highlighted that certain psychological factors such as perceived value, satisfaction, and attitude can influence the relationship between how tourists view a destination and their intention to visit. A destination with good reviews and a strong image, for instance, may lead to greater satisfaction and encourage travel especially when risk perception is favourable. Likewise, Riaz and Hunjra (2015) showed that psychological traits like risk-taking behaviour and how problems are framed affect decision-making in financial contexts, again with risk perception serving as a key mediator.

When it comes to tourism, especially during uncertain times like the COVID-19 pandemic, risk perception becomes even more central. Satar et al. (2023) found that travel risk perception plays a positive mediating role in shaping travel intentions during the pandemic. In other words, tourists may not cancel trips simply because of health concerns, but because they perceive the risk as high. This can lead them to delay, change, or cancel travel plans altogether. Overall, previous literature has linked risk perception to key influences like past experience and sensation-seeking personality. However, recent findings emphasize the importance of viewing risk perception as a dynamic factor that translates external experiences into internal decisions, especially in times of global uncertainty. Understanding how risk perception mediates these relationships can help destination marketers and tourism planners better shape strategies to build travellers confidence.

However, there remains a gap in research exploring how risk perception mediates the relationship between independent constructs and travel intentions, highlighting the need for further investigation. From the literature reviews and related theories, the theoretical framework can be illustrated as in Figure 1. The theoretical framework describes the relationship of factors influencing international tourists' intention to travel by having risk perception as a mediator.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the travel intentions of international tourists visiting Malaysia, focusing on those with prior travel experience. Due to the impracticality of surveying the entire population, convenience sampling was employed, and a sample size of 384 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, ensuring a 95% confidence level. Data were collected through a longitudinal survey using self-administered, closed-ended questionnaires to enhance accessibility and minimize bias. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.7 deemed acceptable. Descriptive analysis captured demographic variables, while SEM enabled the assessment of complex relationships between latent and observed variables, incorporating both measurement and structural models. SEM proved effective in addressing multicollinearity, estimating correlations, and testing the proposed theoretical framework. This comprehensive methodological approach ensures the robustness and validity of findings on the factors influencing international tourists' travel intentions in Malaysia.

Data Analysis

Most international tourists surveyed were from Asia (84.6%), followed by Europe (10.4%), the Americas (3.1%), the Middle East (1.6%), and Africa (0.3%), reflecting national tourism trends reported by MOTAC. Most respondents were middle-aged, with 35.7% aged 45–54, and a mean age indicating a predominance of the 35–44 age group. Females constituted 67% of the sample, suggesting a gender imbalance worth exploring further. In terms of marital status, 62.2% were married, indicating Malaysia's appeal as a family or couple-friendly destination. Group travel was common, with 51% traveling in pairs or trios and 44.3% in larger groups, while solo travelers represented only 4.7%. Most tourists (74.4%) stayed for less than one week, consistent with the national average stay of 6.5 days. Educationally, 53.4% had completed high school, and 46.3% held higher education qualifications (diploma, degree, or postgraduate). Income-wise, 61.5% earned below \$40,000 annually, indicating that Malaysia primarily attracts middle-income tourists.

Hypotheses Testing

As shown in Table 4, the finding indicate distinct effects of key variables on travel intention. Past travel experience did not significantly influence risk perception ($\beta = -0.054$, $p = 0.213$) but had a positive and significant effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.155$, $p = 0.017$). Sensation-seeking personality showed no significant impact on risk perception ($\beta = -0.022$, $p = 0.356$), yet negatively affected travel intention ($\beta = -0.069$, $p = 0.049$). Interestingly, risk perception had a significant positive effect on travel intention ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.047$), indicating that higher perceived risk may increase travel motivation, challenging traditional expectations.

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing

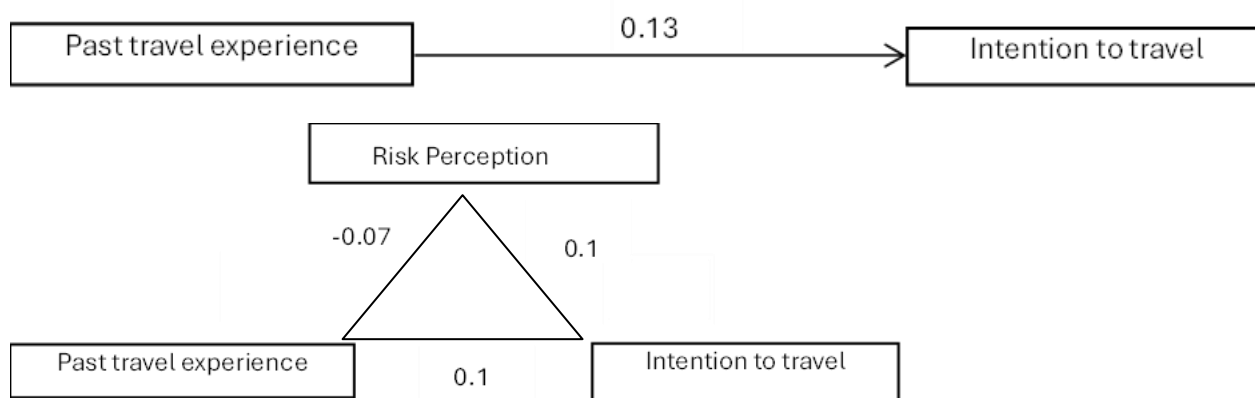
Hypothesis Statement of Path Analysis	Estimate	P-value	Result in hypothesis
H1: Past experience has a significant effect on tourist intention to travel	0.155	0.017	Supported
H2: Past experience has a significant effect on risk perception	-0.054	0.213	Not supported
H3: Risk perception has a significant effect on tourist intention to travel	0.212	0.047	Supported
H4: Sensation-seeking personality has a significant effect on tourist intention to travel	-0.069	0.049	Supported
H5: Sensation-seeking personality has a significant effect on risk perception	-0.022	0.356	Not Supported
H6: Risk perception has significantly mediated the relationship between past travel experience and intention to travel.			Not Supported
H7: Risk perception has significantly mediated the relationship between sensation-seeking personality and intention to travel.			Not Supported

The analysis demonstrates mixed effects of past travel experience, sensation-seeking personality, and risk perception on travel intention. Past travel experience had a significant positive impact on travel intention ($\beta = 0.155$, $p = 0.017$) but did not significantly affect risk perception ($\beta = -0.054$, $p = 0.213$). Sensation-seeking personality showed no significant effect on risk perception ($\beta = -0.022$, $p = 0.356$) but had a significant negative influence on travel intention ($\beta = -0.069$, $p = 0.049$). Additionally, risk perception significantly and positively influenced travel intention ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.047$). These findings highlight the complex and varied roles these factors play in shaping travel intention.

Mediating Effect of Past Travel Experience and Intention to Travel

Figure 2 shows that there is no mediation effect of risk perception between past travel experience and travel intention. Although the direct effect slightly increases from 0.13 to 0.14 after introducing the mediator, mediation typically requires a reduction in the direct effect. Furthermore, the indirect effect (0.0112) is minimal compared to the direct effect (0.14), and only one of the two indirect paths is statistically significant. These findings confirm that risk perception does not mediate the relationship between past travel experience and travel intention.

Figure 2. The Direct Effect of Past Experience on Intention to Travel



Referring to Table 5, the path analysis results revealed mixed outcomes. First, past travel experience had a significant positive effect on intention to travel ($\beta = 0.155$, $p = 0.017$), indicating that individuals with previous travel experience are more likely to plan future travel. However, past travel experience did not significantly influence risk perception ($\beta = -0.054$, $p = 0.213$), suggesting that having traveled before does not necessarily lower or heighten travelers' sense of risk. Interestingly, risk perception was found to have a significant positive effect on intention to travel ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.047$). This finding implies that even when travelers perceive potential risks, their willingness to travel may remain strong, possibly because they adopt coping strategies, have confidence in safety measures, or associate risk with adventure.

Table 5. The Path Coefficient and Its Significance

Hypothesis Statement of Path Analysis	Estimate	S.E	C.R	p-value	Result on hypothesis
H1: Past travel experience has significant effect on intention to travel	0.155	0.065	2.378	0.017	Supported
H2: Past travel experience has significant effect on risk perception	-0.054	0.043	-1.245	0.213	Not supported
H3: Risk perception has significant effect on intention to travel	0.212	0.107	1.986	0.047	Supported

Mediating Effect of Sensation-Seeking Personality and Intention to Travel

Figure 3 shows the direct effect of sensation-seeking personality on travel intention, with a beta coefficient of -0.13. When risk perception is introduced as a mediator, the beta coefficient remains unchanged. This indicates

that the mediator does not influence the relationship. Another way to assess mediation is by comparing the beta coefficients of direct and indirect effects. The indirect effect is calculated as $-0.05 \times 0.16 = 0.008$, which is much smaller than the direct effect (-0.13). Since the direct effect remains stronger and unchanged, no mediation occurs between sensation-seeking personality and travel intention.

Figure 3. The Direct Effect of Sensation-Seeking Personality on Intention to Travel -0.13

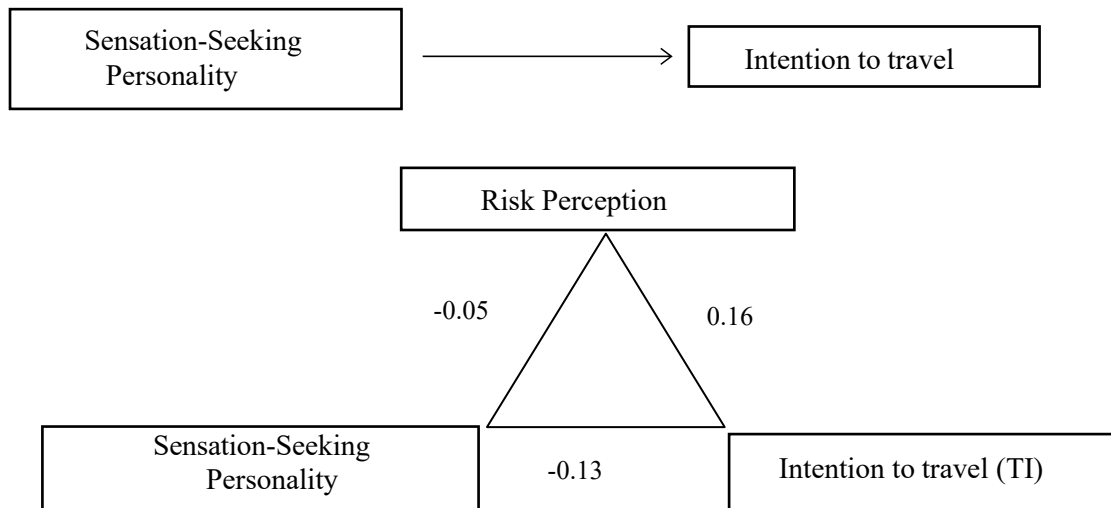


Table 6. The Path Coefficient and Its Significance

Hypothesis Statement of Path Analysis	Estimate	S.E	C.R	p-value	Result on hypothesis
H4: Sensation-seeking personality has significant effect on intention to travel	-0.069	0.035	-1.971	0.049	Supported
H5: Sensation-seeking personality has significant effect on risk perception	-0.022	0.023	-0.923	0.356	Not Supported
H3: Risk perception has significant effect on intention to travel	0.212	0.107	1.986	0.047	Supported

Table 6 illustrates that sensation-seeking personality had a significant negative effect on intention to travel ($\beta = -0.069$, $p = 0.049$), suggesting that individuals with stronger sensation-seeking tendencies may be less inclined to engage in conventional travel, possibly preferring alternative or extreme activities instead. However, sensation-seeking personality did not significantly influence risk perception ($\beta = -0.022$, $p = 0.356$), indicating that this personality trait does not meaningfully shape how individuals evaluate risks associated with travel. Additionally, risk perception was found to significantly and positively affect intention to travel ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.047$). This result implies that even when travelers are aware of potential risks, their intention to travel remains strong, perhaps because they develop coping mechanisms, perceive risks as manageable, or even associate risk with adventure and excitement.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate the complex relationships among past travel experience, sensation-seeking personality, risk perception, and international tourists' travel intention. Specifically, it examines how past experiences and sensation-seeking traits influence risk perception (RO1), and how these two factors directly impact travel intention (RO2). The study also explores the effect of risk perception on travel intention (RO3), recognizing its potential to either deter or encourage international travel. Finally, it assesses the mediating role of risk perception in the relationship between past travel experience, sensation-seeking personality, and travel intention (RO5), to determine whether risk perception serves as a key psychological link in shaping travel

behaviour.

Past Travel Experience and Risk Perception

Contrary to earlier studies (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Perpiña et al., 2017; Cui et al., 2016), this study found no significant relationship between past travel experience and risk perception ($p = 0.213$). These findings suggest that past travel experience might no longer play a strong role in shaping how tourists perceive risks when traveling internationally to Malaysia. This shift likely reflects how quickly the tourism environment is changing. With constant updates on safety measures, the widespread use of digital platforms especially social media and continuous improvements in services, travelers today tend to rely more on real-time information rather than on what they experienced in the past. In other words, previous travel experiences may lose relevance or become outdated when destinations and travel conditions change significantly. This supports the idea that risk perception is fluid and heavily influenced by current contexts and information sources, such as media and peer recommendations.

Moreover, it's possible that past travel experience now influences risk perception in a more indirect way. Instead of directly shaping perceptions of risk, it might work through factors like destination familiarity or overall image. For example, recent studies (Hu et al., 2021) have found that memorable past experiences often affect tourists' desire to revisit through feelings of nostalgia or emotional attachment, rather than through their perception of risk. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding calls for an update to existing models of travel risk. It suggests that the relationship between past travel experience and risk perception may weaken when real-time digital information and rapidly changing destination conditions come into play. Future models should, therefore, consider how evolving information channels such as social media and live updates and the dynamic nature of destinations can moderate the effect of past experiences on how tourists perceive risk.

Sensation-Seeking Personality and Risk Perception

This study found no significant relationship between sensation-seeking personality and risk perception ($p = 0.356$), contradicting earlier findings by researchers such as Morakabati and Kapuściński (2016) and Fuchs (2011). Previous tourism research has shown mixed results regarding this relationship. For instance, Lepp and Gibson (2008) similarly found no significant link between sensation seeking and risk perception among young adults in the U.S., while other studies have suggested that individuals with higher sensation-seeking tendencies tend to perceive less risk.

Sensation seeking, as defined by Marvin Zuckerman (1979), refers to “the need for varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience.” However, a more recent meta-analysis by Blomstervik (2022) suggests that sensation seeking aligns more with novelty-seeking rather than an attraction to risk itself. This helps explain the current finding: international tourists with high sensation-seeking traits may perceive travel risks in a similar way to others, partly due to the influence of modern media in shaping collective risk awareness (Lepp & Gibson, 2008).

Although sensation seekers are often drawn to new and stimulating environments, Malaysia may not be perceived as a particularly risky or adventurous destination. As a result, their sensation-seeking tendencies may not strongly influence their perceptions of travel risk. According to Zuckerman's theory, these individuals are motivated primarily by novelty and excitement rather than by the pursuit of danger. This interpretation aligns with previous studies showing that sensation seekers are more likely to engage in adventure or extreme tourism (Page et al., 2005; Cater, 2006; Giddy, 2016), reflecting a desire for diverse and stimulating experiences rather than a lower sensitivity to risk (Lopez-Bonilla & Lopez-Bonilla, 2012).

Past Travel Experience and Intention to Travel

This study found a significant and positive relationship between past travel experience and intention to travel ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that satisfying previous visits increase the likelihood of tourists returning to Malaysia. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that enjoyable travel experiences foster loyalty and revisit intentions (Hu et al., 2021; Lin, 2024). When tourists have positive experiences, they develop

familiarity and comfort with the destination, which helps reduce uncertainty and create positive emotions such as nostalgia and attachment; factors that strengthen their intention to return.

Tourist satisfaction plays a vital role in shaping travel intentions, though perceptions can vary depending on individual expectations and experiences (Chiu et al., 2016). Positive experiences often lead tourists to promote destinations through word-of-mouth or social media, whereas negative experiences such as poor infrastructure, unprofessional service, or price discrimination can discourage repeat visits (Christian et al., 2011). Firsthand experiences also carry more influence than secondhand information, as they build a sense of familiarity and perceived safety (Liu, Li, & Kim, 2016). In short, the quality of past experiences strongly determines future travel intentions, with positive encounters enhancing destination loyalty (San Martin et al., 2013; Petrick & Backman, 2002) and negative ones, such as crime or political instability, prompting avoidance behaviour (Korstanje, 2011).

Theoretically, this relationship aligns with the push–pull motivation framework (Crompton, 1979) and consumer-behavior models (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011), which explain how positive past experiences cultivate favorable attitudes, reduce perceived risks, and encourage repeat visits. Future research could build on this by integrating concepts like destination attachment or experience memorability (Hu et al., 2021) to capture the emotional dimension of travel decision-making more effectively.

Interestingly, this study also found a significant positive relationship between risk perception and travel intention ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.05$). While many past studies suggest that higher risk perception discourages travel (Hasan et al., 2017; Zhang & Kim, 2025), these findings suggest the opposite: in some contexts, being aware of risks can actually motivate tourists rather than deter them. Tourists who recognize potential risks may take proactive steps such as buying insurance, checking safety updates, or preparing health precautions which can increase their confidence and readiness to travel.

This interpretation aligns with the Risk Perception Attitude (RPA) framework by Rimal and Real (2003), which proposes that individuals who perceive higher risks but also possess strong self-efficacy tend to respond through protective or adaptive behaviours rather than avoidance. In tourism, Wang et al. (2019) found that adventure travelers often view risk as an inherent and exciting part of the experience, not as a barrier. Hence, this study supports the idea that risk perception is not always negative; it can, under certain conditions, enhance travel intention when tourists feel capable of managing those risks and when the destination appeals to their sense of adventure and preparedness.

Sensation seeking Personality and Risk Perception 0.049

This study found a significant negative relationship between sensation-seeking personality and intention to travel ($\beta = -0.069$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that individuals with strong sensation-seeking traits are less likely to intend to travel to Malaysia. This may be because high sensation seekers tend to prefer destinations that offer more novelty, excitement, or even a sense of danger; features not typically associated with Malaysia's relatively safe and structured tourism environment. In other words, the destination might not be perceived as “thrilling” enough to satisfy their desire for new and intense experiences.

Sensation seeking, as defined by Zuckerman (1979), is the need for varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take risks for the sake of such experiences. Previous studies have shown that people with high sensation-seeking tendencies are drawn to adventurous forms of travel, such as extreme sports, exploration, or activities that involve uncertainty and excitement (Cater, 2006; Page, Bentley, & Walker, 2005). Conversely, when destinations are perceived as predictable or low-risk, these individuals often lose interest (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Pizam et al., 2004). This helps explain why the current study found a negative relationship, high sensation seekers might not see Malaysia as offering the level of novelty or challenge they crave. Research by Giddy and Webb (2018) supports this view, showing that sensation seekers are motivated more by the thrill of adventure and novelty than by traditional sightseeing or comfort-based tourism. Likewise, Blomstervik (2022) emphasized that sensation seeking is more about pursuing new and stimulating experiences than about taking actual risks.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding suggests that the influence of sensation seeking on travel intention depends on the perceived nature of the destination. When a destination is seen as exciting and full of discovery, sensation seekers are likely to show stronger travel intentions. However, when it is viewed as safe or familiar, their motivation tends to decrease. For destination marketers, this insight is valuable. It indicates that to attract high sensation-seeking travelers, Malaysia could promote more adventure-oriented tourism products such as jungle trekking, white-water rafting, caving, or off-the-beaten-path eco-adventures that offer the excitement and novelty this segment looks for.

Risk Perception and Intention to Travel

The study identified a significant and positive relationship between risk perception and travel intention ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher perceived risk can influence, rather than deter, international tourists' decisions. This finding contrasts with earlier studies that generally associate high perceived risk with reduced travel intention (e.g., Caber et al., 2020). The divergence highlights the role of individual socio-psychological traits such as risk tolerance, socioeconomic status, and sensation-seeking personality in shaping how tourists interpret and respond to risk (Tarlow, 2014). While some travellers actively avoid high-risk destinations, others adopt coping strategies like purchasing insurance, preparing medically, or learning local languages. Tourists commonly mitigate uncertainty by gathering travel information through media, peer recommendations, or official government sources. As observed in the case of Saudi Arabia's vaccination requirements for Hajj pilgrims, self-protection measures like immunization increase traveller confidence. Although external risks such as terrorism, crime, and pandemics are largely beyond travellers' control, appropriate risk management behaviours can reduce anxiety and support travel decision-making.

The Role of Risk Perception in Mediating the Relationship Between Past Travel Experience, Sensation-Seeking Personality, and International Tourists' Intention to Travel

The study found that risk perception did not mediate the relationship between the independent variables and travel intention. A key reason for this is the general perception of Malaysia as a safe travel destination. Although certain areas, such as eastern Sabah, have experienced terrorism-related incidents, these risks are not perceived to affect the country as a whole. Furthermore, since these incidents occurred more than a year prior to the study, their influence on tourists' emotional responses and risk awareness had likely diminished, aligning with prior research suggesting the temporal proximity of threats affects their psychological impact. Demographic factors also contributed to the non-significant mediation effect. The majority of respondents were aged 35 and above, and while older travellers are typically more risk-averse, findings on age-related risk behaviour remain mixed. This may have diluted any consistent pattern of risk perception across age groups. Additionally, the gender imbalance in the sample 63% female may have affected outcomes, as women are generally more risk-sensitive and emotionally responsive to potential threats. Cultural and social role expectations in Asian contexts may further influence how different genders perceive and respond to travel risks. These demographic variations likely contributed to the lack of a mediating effect of risk perception in the travel decision-making process.

Research Implication

The study offers important theoretical insights by emphasizing the limited long-term influence of past travel experiences on risk perception. Although positive travel experiences generally strengthen destination recall and revisit intentions, their impact may fade over time, especially when the gap between visits is significant. This highlights the need for sustained engagement to maintain destination relevance. Grounded in the push and pull theory and consumer behaviour theory, the research underscores the role of motivation, learning, and attitudes in shaping travel decisions, while recognizing that psychological experiences, not just past behaviour, drive future intentions. Additionally, the study confirms a significant link between sensation-seeking personality traits and international travel intentions. Tourists with high sensation-seeking tendencies characterized by a desire for adventure, novelty, and risk are more likely to engage in unique and high-risk tourism experiences, supporting previous findings on allocentric travellers. Practically, the findings underline the need for more comprehensive risk management strategies in Malaysia's tourism industry. Despite the evident risks associated with health crises, political instability, and crime, structured risk mitigation efforts remain limited. The study calls on tourism stakeholders including government bodies, travel agencies, and hospitality providers to integrate risk awareness



with personalized marketing strategies that consider cultural background and traveller personality. Creating memorable, safe, and informative travel experiences is essential for sustaining tourist interest. The research also provides a useful framework for academicians to explore risk perception and decision-making in tourism, enriching scholarly discourse and guiding future tourism policy development in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into how psychological traits and past experiences influence international tourists' travel intentions, especially in the context of Malaysia, a destination generally seen as safe and familiar. By examining the roles of past travel experience, sensation-seeking personality, and risk perception, the findings offer a richer understanding of how people make travel decisions in the post-pandemic world.

The results suggest that past travel experience may no longer strongly or directly shape how tourists perceive risk, particularly in a world where new challenges such as health concerns, political instability, or environmental threats can emerge suddenly. However, prior experience continues to play a key role in shaping revisit intentions. Familiarity with a destination builds comfort, trust, and confidence, making tourists more likely to return. This aligns with earlier research showing that repeat visitors often see destinations as safer and more predictable (Chew and Jahari, 2014; Karl, 2018). Sensation-seeking personality traits also play a significant role in travel intentions, though not necessarily through risk perception. High sensation seekers, who crave novelty, variety, and stimulation, are drawn to destinations that offer unique, adventurous, or unconventional experiences (Zuckerman, 1979; Giddy and Webb, 2018). In a destination perceived as safe and familiar such as Malaysia, the connection between sensation seeking and risk perception weakens. For these travelers, the destination might not feel risky or thrilling enough to satisfy their need for excitement, showing that the impact of sensation seeking depends on how a place is perceived and presented. Interestingly, the study challenges the traditional idea that risk always deters travel. For some tourists, particularly those with strong coping skills, previous travel experience, or a high tolerance for uncertainty, risk can enhance the sense of excitement or adventure (Karl, 2018; Lepp and Gibson, 2003). A moderate level of perceived risk can make a trip feel more engaging rather than discouraging it.

The research highlights that the role of risk perception is highly context-dependent. In low-risk or well-known destinations such as Malaysia, risk may have little influence on travel intentions. Other factors, including perceived novelty, destination image, or emotional attachment, might better explain why tourists choose to visit. This suggests that understanding both the destination and the traveler's psychology is crucial when modeling travel behavior. From a practical perspective, these findings have important implications for tourism marketers and policymakers. To attract high sensation-seeking tourists, destinations such as Malaysia should develop and promote more adventurous and experiential offerings such as jungle trekking, caving, white-water rafting, and cultural immersion tours. These experiences can help shift perceptions, showing Malaysia not only as safe but also exciting and full of discovery.

At the same time, promoting safety alone may not appeal to all travelers. While safety remains vital for risk-averse visitors, others seek challenge, spontaneity, and novelty. A balanced approach is essential, one that reassures travelers while highlighting unique experiences and adventure. Effective risk communication is also critical, particularly through digital channels. Social media, travel influencers, and online reviews can provide real-time, credible information that shapes tourists' perceptions more effectively than traditional brochures or advertisements.

Finally, marketers should consider personality-based segmentation. High sensation seekers may respond best to messages emphasizing adventure, exploration, or authentic local experiences, while low sensation seekers may prefer campaigns focusing on comfort, safety, and cultural familiarity. By understanding these psychological differences, destinations can design marketing strategies that connect with a wider range of tourists and create more personalized and meaningful travel experiences.

Recommendation for Future Research

This study mainly focused on the factors and risks that affect international tourists visiting Malaysia, looking

only at the demand side of the tourism industry. To gain a fuller picture, future research should also consider the supply side businesses and operators that make up the tourism ecosystem. These include transportation providers, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment companies, accommodation providers, and travel agencies. Each of these sectors faces different types and levels of risks, so future studies could either zoom in on one particular sector or group similar ones together for deeper analysis. It would also be valuable to adopt a mixed-methods approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques, as this not only improves data quality but also provides richer insights into human behaviour (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Surveys and interviews, for instance, complement each other well in social science research. A larger sample size would further strengthen the reliability and generalizability of results, allowing for more confident conclusions, as Lam et al. (2004) emphasize that sample size significantly affects the power of hypothesis testing. Extending this research to different regions would also help validate the proposed framework and highlight how risk perceptions and behaviours vary across diverse geographical contexts.

To make future research even stronger, it should incorporate modern factors that are shaping today's travel landscape such as social media influence, digital-risk communication, and destination resilience since these elements increasingly shape how tourists perceive and respond to risks (Li, Xu, & Hu, 2022). Analytical techniques could also be improved through the use of advanced statistical tools like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), confirmatory factor analysis, bootstrapping, and reliability testing, which together can produce more solid and theory-driven findings (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2021). Furthermore, various groups of travellers by gender, nationality, or travel frequency through exploring differences among multi-group analysis could reveal why people perceive and react to risks differently (Cheng, N., & Hu, W. (2024). Strengthening the theoretical foundation using behavioural models such as the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) would also help explain how individuals assess risks and make protective travel decisions (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1997; Wang, Liu-Lastres, Ritchie, & Mills, 2019).

Adding qualitative or mixed methods, such as interviews or open-ended surveys, would enrich the findings by providing a more personal and emotional perspective on what motivates tourists whether excitement, trust, or cultural influence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Comparing results across different tourism types, such as adventure, cultural, or eco-tourism, could also help position Malaysia's strengths and uniqueness in the global tourism landscape (Lepp & Gibson, 2008). Finally, improving generalisability requires larger and more diverse samples, culturally validated measurement scales, and sensitivity analyses to ensure consistent and reliable outcomes. Future studies should also present their findings in a way that clearly links theoretical insights with practical implications, making the research not only academically meaningful but also valuable for tourism professionals and policymakers.

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