

COVID-19 and the Transformation of Tourism Industry in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

Tourism industry is one of the major contributors to the economy, globally and domestically. In Malaysia, Sabah reached a new record level for hitting the highest tourism receipts at RM8.342 billion in 2018 and 2019. COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in global challenges, especially in tourism industry. Thus, this conceptual paper aims to determine how tourism practitioners in Sabah deal with the resilience issue for the transformation of a better recovery or future. This paper will apply the four (4) general phase of change event from resilience adaptive cycle; (1) Reorganization (innovation and creativity), (2) Growth (exploiting opportunities that arise from Phase 1), (3) Consolidation (establishing fixed institutions in Phase 2 to adapt to context changes) and (4) Collapse (failure or fixed institutions in Phase 3 to adapt to context changes). This study uses quantitative approach for data collection. As a result, this paper finds that not all of the organization move through all these 4 phases as they are handling it according to their own system or suitability.

Keywords: Tourism Industry in Sabah; COVID-19; Resilience; Recovery.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a fatal disease that resulted in serious financial losses, economic and health crises worldwide (Anderson et al., 2020). During in short term period, this virus has recorded massive count in the number of infected cases. As of 08 August 2022, 589,710,257 total cases recorded worldwide. This rise concern as the outbreak affected the health and daily life of mankind. Originated in Wuhan on 2019, this disease spread across the world and hit the economy badly, especially the tourism industry. Accounted as a major contributor for economy, this industry faced downfall from the pandemic declaration. According to Abbas (2021), the most frightening news of seasonal influenza outbreaks, epidemics, pandemics, and catastrophes results in a steep decrease in the travel and tourism industry, a dominant contributor to the service industry. Tourism encounter a reset just as it did after the global financial crisis in 2008 and terrorist attack on 2001 but with the potential to be transformative this time.

According to UNWTO (2020), the international tourist arrivals for Malaysia in 2019 surpassed 1.5 billion for the first time. When Malaysia is just at its peak from this achievement, COVID-19 hit the industry brutally. There is a significant decrease in the number of tourist arrival after the declaration of global pandemic in Mac 2020. Following to the announcement, pandemics adversely impact tourists' behaviors and their mental wellbeing (Bauer et al., 2021) as they drop their planned tour plans in fear of the disease infection, as it looks impossible to avoid transmission of the virus during travelling (Meadows et al., 2019). Malaysia faces serious