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# THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE LIFE CYCLE OF TOURIST DESTINATION AND THE RECOVERY STRATEGIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS IN MALAYSIA

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## Abstract:

The paper presents exploratory qualitative research the impacts of pandemic on the life cycle of tourist destination and propose recovery strategies through the lens of hotel operators, airline operators and tourism promotion boards in Malaysia. Butler's tourist area life cycle (TALC) model was extended to explore the stages of the tourist destination. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the tourism industry worldwide, leading to unique challenges for tourist destinations. The impacts on each tourist destinations and its severity are at varying levels. Data collection consisted of 4 hotel operators, 3 local airlines manager and 4 senior officers of tourism promotion boards through interviews via video conferencing platforms from June 2021 to March 2022. The findings seem to confirm that impacts have cause break in the life cycle on tourist destinations which can be described in four stages: stagnation, exploration, involvement, and development. These stages illuminate the contextual issues requiring different approaches to ensure that the destination remains attractive, competitive, and sustainable. It provides both theoretical insights and practical implications. Specifically, the TALC model is considered relevant and serves as an alternative approach to explain the impacts on tourist destinations, offering a new perspective on developing post-pandemic destination recovery strategies.

## Keywords:

Covid-19 Pandemic, Tourism Area Life Cycle, Malaysia, Tourist Destinations, Recovery Strategies.

## Introduction

The global tourism industry has been profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting unprecedented challenges to tourist destinations worldwide (Schmude et al, 2021). Localised tourist destination economies have also been affected albeit to varying extents (Chan & Tay, 2022). Consequently, a great decline in tourist arrivals and a subsequent decrease in revenue, profits, investments and number of employees (Hanafiah et al, 2021). These challenges have forced the tourism sector to reevaluate its strategies, adapt to changing circumstances, and envision a post-pandemic future. Tourist destinations, often viewed as dynamic entities, evolve through different stages in their life cycles, ranging from exploration and growth to consolidation and stagnation or rejuvenation (Butler, 1980). These stages represent key milestones in a destination's development, each presenting unique opportunities and challenges.

The pandemic has tested the resilience and adaptability of Malaysia's tourism industry, a sector that significantly contributes to the nation's economic growth. Hoteliers and airlines operators, integral components of the tourism ecosystem, have been at the forefront of navigating the complex terrain created by the pandemic. Their experiences and strategies provide valuable insights into how tourist destinations are managing the crisis, redefining their positions in the industry, and preparing for a new era of tourism. The role of destination management organizations known as tourism promotion boards in the Malaysian context are also vital in tourist destination management. Funded by the government through budget allocation, its primary purpose is to attract visitors, drive tourism growth, and ensure the overall success and sustainability of a destination. Tourism promotion boards work closely with various stakeholders, including government agencies, local businesses, tourism operators, and community organizations, to create a unified approach towards destination management. This research endeavours to shed light on various facets of the pandemic's impact on Malaysia's tourism industry. Chan and Tay (2022) suggested measures and effects put in place to build a resilient tourist economy post COVID-19, encompassing the sustainable recovery of tourism, promotion of digital transition, and support for a green tourism system (Hanafiah et al, 2021). Several in-depth studies on the pandemic's impact on the tourism industry have been conducted (Jiricka et al, 2020; Sigala, 2020) but not specifically on tourist destinations, especially in the context of Malaysia. Hence, the study aims to identify Malaysia's current stage as a tourist destination within Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle model. Understanding the current stages of tourist destinations is pivotal for formulating strategies aimed at recovery, development, and ensuring long-term sustainability. By evaluating Malaysia's position in the destination life cycle, it becomes possible to pinpoint areas where concerted efforts are needed to reignite tourism growth. Researchers suggest that the tourism area life cycle (TALC) is a useful framework and descriptive tool about a destination's distinct development stages over time and its markets (Cooper & Jackson, 1989).

## Literature Review

### *Tourist Destinations*

Tourist destination can be conceptualized having different life cycles – birth, early growth, teenage years, maturity, and decline. This process may vary in term of duration, as it is influenced by several factors (Butler, 2024). Without good planning and controls, tourist destinations tend to decline over time in the quality of visitor experience (Plog, 2004). A

tourist destination offers various business and leisure activities to cater to tourist needs. It has a complex relationship with the society, the economy, and the environment. These dimensions are important for the destination's sustainable growth; each contributes differently to the tourism business and economic landscape, which has been significantly adversely influenced by the pandemic in Malaysia (Chan et al, 2010). In addition, the context of a tourist destination is critical, as it influences the post-pandemic recovery strategies to rebuild the tourism industry. The pandemic has significantly affected city tourism destinations' economy, community lifestyle and destination environment, which invariably impacts destination sustainability.

A tourist destination is a geographical location that attracts visitors. Typically, the key components of a tourist destination are attractions, infrastructures, hospitality businesses, accessibility, amenities, safety, security, and environment. The magnitude of the pandemic's tragic impact can be observed in the steep drop in tourist arrivals, tourism receipts and business closures because of travel bans, border closures and safety measures. Research investigating the pandemic's impacts on tourist destinations is important for developing recovery measures and strategies (Škare et al, 2021). Various practical measures have been considered to stimulate tourism demand and facilitate destination capacities to meet expectations (Huynh et al, 2022). At the destination level, disruptive technological applications (e.g., travel apps) help tourists tailor a safe travel plan. Tourist destinations can foster tourists' travel intentions and support tourism revitalization in the post-pandemic period (Duong et al., 2022). The contagion has revealed the social, psychological, socio-economic, and cultural influences of various tourism stakeholders, impacting destinations through changes in the business landscape.

Destination development processes are influenced by many factors, including tourist arrivals, tourism resources and the destination's condition. Tourist destinations, as the product, undergo an evolutionary process in response to changes not only in demand and supply but also to critical factors such as health and safety issues. It thus suggests that a new pattern is possible. Indeed, the life cycle concept is a useful analytical tool for destination stages (Choy, 1992). The post-pandemic recovery of the tourism industry requires insight into the stages of a destination; the TALC model is thus relevant.

Zimmermann (1997) have observed the effect of a break in a cycle of development, many of which have been due to conflicts (Weaver, 2000). Such breaks have been much more complicated and challenging due to COVID-19 pandemic which had halt international and domestic tourism the same time due to impose lockdowns. Consequently, these had affected destinations differently depending on the stage of development in the TALC model (Butler, 2021b). How destination respond once this is over will determine the fate of many destinations and is currently an area of great speculation (Lew et al, 2020).

### ***Impacts of Pandemic on Tourism Industry and Review on Recovery Strategies***

The global tourism industry has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with far-reaching consequences for various sectors within the field, leading to socio-political, economic and tourism demand crises (Beh & Lin, 2021). The prolonged restriction on mobility has crippled the tourism business resulting in reactive response and strategy for survival and transforming into the new norm of operation. Nordin et al., (2023) documented COVID-19 significant impact on communal and tourist activities and developed 'new norms' for the workplace in tourist destinations (Rahman et al, 2023).

According to ICAO (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the world schedules passenger traffic from year 2019 to 2021, compared to 2019, the seats offered by airlines were reduced by 50 percent in 2020 which is a 2,699 million passengers (-60%) reduction. As a result, airlines loss approximately USD 371 billion of gross passenger operating revenues in 2020. In 2021, it recorded a loss of approximately USD 305 to USD 324 billion of gross passenger operating revenues of airlines as of 24 August 2021 (ICAO, 2021a).

Hotel and airline operators have responded to these challenges through several strategies. Financially, they have emphasized cash reserve management and cost reduction measures, often accompanied by salary cuts. Additionally, they have leveraged government stimulus packages, although some found these to be insufficient or unsustainable. In terms of human resources, the operators have prioritized staff adaptability and cooperation, seeking ways to maintain staff morale despite salary cuts and downsizing. They have also embraced multi-tasking and flexible roles as part of cost-saving measures. Business diversification strategies have involved product replacement, cost-saving initiatives, and the exploration of new market segments. The crisis has prompted a re-evaluation of existing business models and the introduction of innovative offerings to adapt to changing customer preferences.

The tourism promotion boards were also not spared by the COVID-19 pandemic as events like “Visit Malaysia Year 2020” was cancelled as travel came to a halt. Despite this setback, these agencies have seized the opportunity to accelerate digital transformation, conducting promotion events through video conferencing and providing stimulus packages to assist the private sector to keep afloat (Ministry of Finance, 2020a; MOTAC, 2020b).

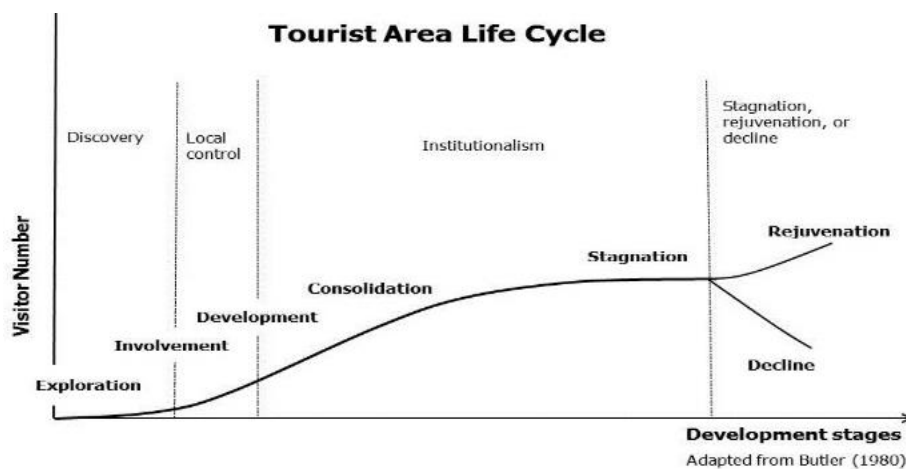
### ***Tourism Revitalization and Recovery Strategies***

The pandemic has a tragic impact on the tourism industry in Malaysia due to travel bans and movement control orders, resulting in significant declines in tourist arrivals, tourism revenue and job losses. According to Foo et al., (2021) these effects are evident: from January to March 2020, hotel booking cancellations caused a loss of revenue of RM 23,021,301 in Kuala Lumpur and RM 11,550,605 in Sabah (Foo et al, 2021). The Malaysian Association of Hotels (2020) documented that a total of 2,041 workers lost their jobs (MAH, 2020), 5,054 received pay cuts, and 9,773 went on unpaid leave. The pandemic had severe impacts on tourist businesses and destinations in Malaysia (Chan et al, 2022): lifestyles and livelihoods in the destinations were profoundly affected due to a decrease in tourist arrivals and the enforcement of travel restrictions, stringent standard operating procedures, and social distancing measures (Chan & Tay, 2022). Consequently, there were effects on tourist destinations’ sustainable growth, while the life cycle and development stages of tourist destinations were changed. The impacts have driven changes within destinations, thus influencing their ‘evolution’. As a result, tourist destinations and business have had to rethink their strategies for rebuilding and recovery. The strategies implemented involved a combination of health and safety measures, diversification, innovation, and collaboration to adapt to the ‘new normal’ and regain traveller confidence. Several studies on tourism rebuilding strategies have been conducted on the Malaysian context (Chan et al, 2022; Foo et al, 2021; Kasim et al, 2020). Government-sponsored loans are crucial to the tourism industry’s survival (Yeh, 2020). Recovery strategies should attend to segmentation and planning, integrating tourism into sustainable development and considering underlying causes (Goh, 2021). Open communication is key to successfully combating the pandemic, and government-sponsored loans are crucial to the tourism industry’s survival (Yeh, 2020). Three

strategies initiated were improving hygiene and health standards, intensifying promotions, and controlling operational costs (Ralinas, 2022). The tourism industry can adjust to the 'new normal' following the pandemic by adopting such strategies (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020).

### ***Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle and Tourist Destinations***

Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) offers a valuable framework for understanding tourist destinations' evolution and markets (Cooper & Jackson, 1989). It emphasizes the balance between economic growth and sustainability, outlining stages such as exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation. TALC provides insights into how destinations adapt to changing market conditions, aiding in the assessment of their developmental trajectory. Refer Butler's model Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle Model**

Source: Butler (1980)

TALC delineates the evolutionary stages of tourist destinations (Gore et al, 2021). The initial stage, Exploration, witnesses limited infrastructure and visitor numbers, necessitating efforts to raise awareness. In Involvement, tourism infrastructure grows, attracting more visitors while maintaining sustainability. Development marks rapid growth with sophisticated infrastructure and competition, prompting the need for effective management. Consolidation stabilizes the destination's mature industry and focuses on quality maintenance, albeit facing challenges like overcapacity. Stagnation signals reduced popularity and potential decline, necessitating adaptation or diversification. Finally, Decline or Rejuvenation presents opportunities for revitalization through rebranding or infrastructure improvement. Butler's TALC serves as a valuable tool for understanding destination evolution and guiding tourism planning and development efforts (Butler, 1980; Baum, 1998).

The tourism industry has long recognized the evolutionary nature of destinations, as evidenced by the application of the product life cycle framework since the early 1960s (Martin & Uysal, 1990; Tooman, 1997). This model has been extensively utilized, with over thirty country cases demonstrating its efficacy. Researchers have explored its application in various contexts, such as Park (2006) examining marketing strategies for Jeju Island and Boyd (2006) assessing ecotourism destinations in Western Canada. Additionally, studies have analysed destinations like China's Zhangjiajie National Forest Park (Zhong et al, 2008),



Niagara Falls (Getz, 1992), and those with diverse features (Hovinen, 2002; Tooman, 1997), along with rural tourism (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

Few studies specifically apply the TALC model to revitalize tourist destinations impacted by the pandemic or discuss its potential as a framework for understanding the pandemic's impact on tourist destinations and recovering planning. TALC facilitates an understanding of tourist destination development stages, helping tourism planning stakeholders evaluate and learn from past strategies. It can also help predict the destination's future trajectory through various forecasting methods. Destination managers can use this information to avoid a decline. Hence, the paper suggests that the TALC model is a relevant and useful framework for understanding the pandemic's effects on tourist destinations and recovery planning. It is especially important to consider the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the post-COVID era and to prioritize sustainability and resilience in recovery strategies.

### **Data and Method**

This study uses exploratory qualitative research approach to explore tourism destination development stages and the pandemic's impacts on tourist destination from hotel operators, airline operators and tourism promotion boards perspective. The qualitative inductive approach helps understand individual perspectives regarding the subjective, individualized, and the contextual aspects of the pandemic's impacts. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the opinions, perception, and strategies of respondents in the tourism industry. The primary data collection method employed was semi-structured interviews. Interviews conducted via online platforms was conducted with key representatives from hotel, airline and tourism promotion boards organizations in Malaysia. A total of 4 hotel operators, 3 airline operators and 4 tourism promotion boards from the tourism industry were selected. Table 1 present the respondent profiles. Data collection was carried out from June 2021 to March 2022. Each interviews lasted 60-90 minutes. The study used a convenience sampling technique. It allows for the selection of respondents with direct experience and knowledge of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their respective organizations. The selection criteria comprised of respondents in managerial position having a significant role in decision-making processes in their organizations during the pandemic. The semi-structured interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for respondents to share their unique experiences and insights. The guide encompassed open-ended questions related to the impacts of the pandemic on financial management, human resources, and business diversity within the hotel and airline sectors. Respondents were encouraged to provide detailed explanations and examples to enrich the data. Key questions focus on impacts of pandemic on tourist destination and the stages and recovery strategies from the perspectives of hotels, airline business and tourism promotion boards. The interview responses were analysed using thematic approach and categorisation. Data analysis was driven by the interview responses, and thematic analysis was guided by concepts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the six stages of Butler's TALC model.

### **Results and Findings**

#### ***Profile of Respondents***

A total of 12 respondents comprised of four hotel operators, three local airline operators, four tourism promotion boards officers participated in the data collection, as presented in Table below. There were three international chain-branded hotel operators and one local branded hotel operator. The respondents from hotel operators are aged 50 years and above and the

business operations are between 21-30 years. These hotel operations are based in Sabah, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur which are from the top five destination states. For the airline industry, 3 local airlines were selected. The average age of the respondents is between 40- 50 years and the business operations on average between 10-20 years. These airline operations are based in Kuala Lumpur. There are three state tourism promotion boards, and one national tourism promotion board were selected. The representatives from the tourism promotion boards have an average age between 50 - 60 years. These tourism promotion boards are based in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Sarawak, and Sabah and in existence averaging 35 years.

**Table 1: Respondents Profile (Hotel Operators, Airline Operators and Tourism Promotion Boards)**

Industry	Demographics	Categories	Number of Respondents
Hotel Industry	Gender	Female	3
		Male	1
	Age Range	30 - 40 years old	-
		40 - 50 years old	-
		50+ years old	4
	Location	Sabah	2
		Kuala Lumpur/ Selangor	2
	Years in Operation	01 - 10 years	-
		40 - 50 years	-
21 - 30 years		4	
Airline Industry	Gender	Female	0
		Male	3
	Age Range	30 - 40 years old	1
		40 - 50 years old	2
	Organization	Local Airlines based in Kuala Lumpur	3
	Years in Operation	10 - 20 years	2
		20 - 30 years	1
Tourism Promotion Boards	Gender	Female	2
		Male	2
	Age Range	40 - 50 years old	1
		50 - 60 years old	3
	Location	Kuala Lumpur	1
		Penang	1
		Sarawak	1
		Sabah	1
	Years in Operation	10 - 20 Years	1
21 - 30 Years		1	
31 - 40 Years		-	
Above 40		2	

## Findings and Discussion

### *The Impacts of The Pandemic on Malaysia's Destination Life Cycle*

The findings reveal four stages to describe the impacts of pandemic on tourist destination, as shown in Table 2. The four stages tourist destination development stages emerged from interview responses include stagnation, exploration, involvement, and development.

**Table 2: Themes Emerged on Malaysia's TALC Stages**

<b>Themes: TALC Stages</b>	<b>Interview Responses and respondents Codes: International Chain-branded Hotel Operator (IHO), Local branded Hotel Operator (LHO), Sabah (S), Kuala Lumpur (KL), Selangor (Sel), Airline Operator Kuala Lumpur (AL), Tourism Promotion Board (TPB).</b>	<b>Proposed Approaches to Revitalize the Destination Life Cycle</b>
Stagnation Stage	<p><b>Hotel operators</b></p> <p>IHO 1 (S): I felt that we as an industry are in a stagnant stage in Malaysia. I felt that we would certainly not look in a more positive state right.</p> <p>IHO 1 (S): That is what I thought. We need to revive to improve.</p> <p><b>Airline operators</b></p> <p>AL2: Domestic is stagnating, but international tourism it is not stagnating.</p>	<p><b>Hotel operators</b></p> <p><u>Accessibility</u> IHO 1 (S): It's this partnership with airlines. It is very tactical; we need tactical campaigns.</p> <p><u>Marketing</u> IHO 1 (S): To have sustainable offerings for the guest. IHO 1 (S): New opportunities for Malaysia not to focus on the same market are important.</p> <p><u>Repositioning</u> IHO 1 (S): We should bring everybody together to have a campaign, an internal campaign and it is focused on our people. IHO 1 (S): The knowledge is important to our people in the industry so we can speak credibly to tourists and to people when they come in.</p> <p><b>Airline operators</b></p> <p><u>International brands</u> AL2: Create very powerful, good clusters around Penang, Langkawi, and even around Kuala Lumpur as well. So that we can attract quality tourist</p>



coming into Malaysia.

#### Collaboration effort

AL2: All these main players to work together to showcase Malaysia as a destination, and Kuala Lumpur International Airport as hub.

AL2: MATTA and MAH can give discounted rates or special rates to position Malaysia as a good stop over.

#### **Tourism Promotion Board**

#### **Tourism Promotion Board**

TPB 2: Before COVID, I would say stagnation stage. KLIA is still the same the last 20 years. Singapore has got 5 terminals for a small island.

TPB 2: We let everyone bypassed us - Vietnam, Cambodia. We are too divided.

TPB 3: Asia countries are doing much better than us.

TPB 3: Very complacent and think that we are very good already and do not want to develop ourselves.

TPB 3: We will be lagging, and the gap will be bigger and bigger.

TPB 3: A very scary position that we are in.

TPB 3: We need to be better for us because tourism is such a dynamic landscape.

TPB2: Top priority is building confidence for travelers. Without the confidence of travelers, tourism is hard to rebound.

TPB2: Hybrid approach, while we need digitalization, conventional approach is needed because tourism is person to person.

TPB3: We cannot say no to these technologies because we need to be seen visibly online in cyberspace.

TPB3: Malaysia needs to know exactly what it wants from tourism. We need the right strategy, destination uniqueness, and consistency.

Consolidation  
Stage

#### **Hotel operators**

IHO 3 (Sel): It's still under consolidation stage.

IHO 3 (Sel): I will not say we are at development stage because we do have a lot of resources.

IHO 3 (Sel): This consolidation would also then allow the country's tourism to ask ourselves. Have we promoted this enough or for the sake of just putting it as a calendar

#### **Hotel operators**

#### Accessibility

IHO 3 (Sel): The flexibility of travel rather than all the protocols that has really worked on this.

#### Marketing

IHO 3 (Sel): The Tourism Malaysia must be the voice that leads us and

of events.

IHO 3 (Sel): There is so much of true domestic tourism, we have unearthed a lot of beauty of Malaysia throughout the country.

IHO 3 (Sel): Need to get the states to redevelop hidden gems of each State.

IHO 4 (KL) we must reset and see what we have done few years back. Back when the numbers were so high.

IHO 4 (KL): We really need to consolidate things. This cannot be a one person moving forward, everyone must move forward together as a whole.

IHO 4 (KL): I still see a lot of things are still lacking. In hotels, because sometimes we still have our GSO (Global Sales Office) playing out its role and promote certain countries. But what of those who don't have that capacity? Where are they left? Now in certain countries, we don't have a GSO, what are we going to do to bring that business in?

### **Airline operators**

AL2: Malaysia today is at the consolidation stage.

AL2: We need to consolidate you know these operations, and even the way we do things, our tourism industry and we need to get feedback from all the players, on how we move forward towards the Covid-19 pandemic.

supports us in promoting.

IHO 4 (KL): Must go back and lure the market in that is the first step.

IHO 4 (KL): Our country is lacking to promote tourism in international social media, especially for example, through BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation News), AXN (Action eXtreme Network; news and entertainment), Saudi Arabia is doing a lot of promotions.

### **Collaboration**

IHO 3 (Sel): We really need to collaborate with people like MATTA (Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents) you know, MACEOS (Malaysian Association of Convention & Exhibition Organizers & Suppliers).

### **Partnerships**

IHO 3 (Sel): We have work to with ministries, as well as the other stakeholders you know, it is collaboration of efforts that I find that, we cannot work on this alone.

IHO3 (Sel): Hotels are service providers and accommodation providers which we need to ride and collaborate along with all stakeholders.

IHO3 (Sel): A lot of inter-relational communication between us and this has led to a lot of improvements needed for the country.

### **Airline operators**

### **Creative incentives**

AL2: Support the industry with subsidies and any loans that can help the small and medium companies to grow back their business.

AL2: To get the right talent in the industry and train them the right skill.

AL2: Stimulate and to compete in the international market to showcase Malaysia as a safe and value for money destination.

AL2: Want to move forward in the tourism industry and out from the consolidation stage.

AL2: The government to allocate some budget, 'incentivise' agents overseas or operators overseas.

### Tourism Promotion Board

TPB 2: We should start consolidating so that we can rejuvenate our tourism industry, we are too divided, too much playing game, rather than consolidate and shoulder each other and help each other more rather than bring down each other.

### Tourism Promotion Board

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#### Involvement Stage

#### Hotel operators

LHO 2 (S): What we can do together as hotel operators to improve our tourist arrival here.  
LHO 2 (S): I think we should be in the involvement stage.  
LHO 2 (S): Especially the tourism players, nobody getting involve in getting things done.  
LHO 2 (S): Need to involve all of us so that we can slowly and catch up a bit.  
LHO 2(S): Everyone will be having different views, everyone has their own set of problems, what they can see, can help each other. We are all interrelated.

#### Hotel operators

#### Marketing

LHO 2 (S): Continue to do marketing only.  
LHO 2 (S): Just to create awareness and share all these things out.  
LHO 2 (S): Last time we do not serve packed meal, but now packed meal is available. All can be modified now.  
LHO 2 (S): Doing a lot of online, digital marketing.  
LHO 2: (S) Persuade tourism authorities to do a roadshow, which they are supposed to do one Sabah Roadshow when the border is open.  
LHO 2 (S): Need to organize engagement sessions with all the tourism players. Talk about domestic, talk about Americas, Europe, and Oceania (AERO) market, talk about North, East Asia market.  
LHO 2 (S): They need influencers to promote Sabah in their own country.  
LHO 2 (S): Need to blast out through the email, or media social, or Instagram, and, we have a data trace through the handphone.

	<b>Tourism Promotion Board</b> TPB 1: You must be involved with the provider. For example, the airlines. TPB 1: We must exchange views. We must exchange our strategies.	<b>Tourism Promotion Board</b> TPB1: To work on tactical campaigns together with airlines and develop confidence that it is safe to travel.
Development Stage	<b>Airline operators</b> AL1: Think we are at the developing stage, because for us, China is still not open. So, when China re-open, there's a huge opportunity for us to continue to grow. AL3: We can see some growth on the tourism industry. We can see now a lot of people start flying, start taking break and vacation. AL3: Domestic tourism is one of the key points.	<b>Airline operators</b> <u>Good maintenance</u> AL1: Malaysia has a lot of beautiful assets, and they just need to make sure that they really get these current assets and infrastructure well maintained and managed. AL3: Currently I think it's better to concentrate on domestic tourism. <u>Destination</u> AL3: Destination is important, so the destination must put themselves as safe and secure to travellers and expect more things to be contactless.
	<b>Tourism Promotion Board</b> TPB 1: The campaign that we want to have together, be it the tactical campaign or whatever Airbnb campaign TPB 1: Develop the confidence of the people to come to Malaysia. TPB 1: We have the TSAM (Travel Safe Alliance Malaysia) things to tell these people that we are serious about it. TPB 4: Push to technology. Encourage the travel agents to explore on the digital platform.	<b>Tourism Promotion Board</b> TPB1: Develop the confidence of the people to come to Malaysia. TPB1: Travel Safe Alliance Malaysia is good move to build health and safety confidence. TPB4: We need to push and explore the digital platform.
Exploration Stage	<b>Tourism Promotion Board</b> TPB 1; Another area where we are talking about rebound is one, we need to explore, and we need to know how to go about it. Travelling patterns have changed when it comes to COVID and the findings through our travel bubble give us an indication of these changes.	<b>Tourism Promotion Board</b> TPB1 : We need to explore new strategies after the COVID.

TPB4: On the growing stage compared to the pandemic 2 years ago, yes, we are growing

Recovery Stage	Tourism Promotion Board	Tourism Promotion Board
	TPB 1: Number one that will be recovered is the domestic tourism. TPB 1: Number two that will be recovery is the neighboring country, the ASEAN country, then only it goes to the Asia region. TPB 4: If you compare before we are pandemic, then we are in the process or recovery. TPB 4: We have limits due to shortage of labour.	TPB 1: We must have educated workforce and must start hiring now. TPB 4: We must explore innovative ideas and new suggestion. We need to collaborate with all parties like Tourism Malaysia, airlines, Online Travel Agent, and associations. We need to investigate safety, capacity building and upskilling. Government direction and policy are also important.

Reflecting on the responses regarding the four tourist destination stages stagnation, exploration, involvement, and development. IHO 1 (S) express a prevailing sentiment of stagnation within Malaysia's tourism sector, emphasizing the need for revitalization. IHO 1 (S) acknowledges the stagnant stage of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) and stress the urgency to shift towards a more positive trajectory. Proposed approaches to rejuvenate the industry include strategic partnerships with airlines to enhance accessibility, employing tactical campaigns, and fostering sustainable offerings for guests through innovative marketing strategies. IHO 1 (S) emphasizes the importance of exploring new market opportunities for Malaysia rather than relying on existing ones. Additionally, repositioning efforts are suggested, advocating for collaborative internal campaigns focused on industry-wide knowledge enhancement to communicate credibly with tourists and locals alike. The overarching theme highlights a call for concerted efforts and strategic initiatives to break free from stagnation and breathe new life into Malaysia's tourism sector.

AL 2 view domestic tourism as stagnating while highlighting the vitality of international tourism. To revitalize the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) stages, AL2 suggest strategic initiatives. They emphasize the importance of partnerships with airlines, proposing tactical campaigns to enhance accessibility. In marketing, the focus is on developing sustainable offerings for guests and exploring new market opportunities beyond traditional segments. Repositioning efforts involve uniting industry stakeholders for internal campaigns, emphasizing the significance of knowledge to communicate credibly with tourists. Furthermore, AL 2 recommends creating powerful clusters around key destinations like Penang, Langkawi, and Kuala Lumpur to attract quality international tourists. They stress collaboration among major players to showcase Malaysia as a destination, with discounted rates from industry associations like Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) and Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) to position Kuala Lumpur International Airport as a hub and encourage stopovers. The overarching theme underscores the need for collaborative, strategic actions to rejuvenate both domestic and international tourism in Malaysia.



IHO 3 (Sel) and IHO 4 (KL) perceive Malaysia to be in the consolidation stage, acknowledging the country's abundant resources but emphasizing the need to reassess promotional efforts beyond merely listing events on the calendar. They advocate for a collective effort to rediscover and promote Malaysia's hidden gems, urging collaboration with states for the redevelopment of tourism products. The operators emphasize the importance of flexibility in travel protocols for accessibility. Marketing strategies hinge on Tourism Malaysia acting as a leading voice and supporting the industry, with an emphasis on international social media promotions and collaboration with entities like MATTA and Malaysian Association Of Convention & Exhibition Organisers & Suppliers (MACEOS). Recognizing the collaborative nature of the industry, they stress the need for partnerships with ministries and other stakeholders.

AL2 also echo the consolidation stage sentiment, emphasizing the necessity of feedback from all players to navigate the post-Covid-19 landscape. AL2 propose creative incentives such as subsidies and loans to support small and medium companies, attract talent, and stimulate international competitiveness, urging government budget allocation for incentivizing overseas agents and operators. The overarching theme underscores the call for comprehensive collaboration, strategic partnerships, and creative incentives to propel Malaysia's tourism industry forward.

In the involvement stage LHO 2 (S) stress the importance of working together to enhance tourist arrivals in Malaysia. Recognizing a lack of engagement among tourism players, they emphasize the need for collective involvement to address shared challenges and perspectives. In the marketing realm, the focus is on continuous efforts, such as online and digital marketing, to create awareness and adapt to changing preferences, for example LHO 2 (S) has packed meals available for customers. LHO 2 (S) advocate for collaboration with tourism authorities, suggesting roadshows and engagement sessions with players across various markets, including the AERO market and North-East Asia. Acknowledging the influence of social media, they propose leveraging influencers for international promotion and utilizing platforms like email, social media, and Instagram, along with mobile data tracking, to maximize outreach. The overarching theme highlights a call for active participation, collaborative efforts, and modern marketing strategies to propel the industry into the Involvement Stage and foster sustained growth in tourist arrivals.

AL1 view Malaysia as being in the development stage, citing the anticipation of China reopening as a significant growth opportunity. They note the positive trends in the tourism industry, observing increased travel and vacations, with a particular emphasis on the importance of domestic tourism. To sustain this development, AL3 stress the need for good maintenance of Malaysia's abundant assets and infrastructure. They emphasize the importance of destinations positioning themselves as safe and secure for travellers, with an emphasis on contactless experiences to meet evolving preferences. The overarching theme highlights the recognition of the developmental phase, emphasizing the strategic importance of domestic tourism and the need for meticulous maintenance and adaptation to changing traveller expectations.

In addition to the perspectives offered by industry operators and stakeholders, the Tourism Promotion Board (TPB) plays a crucial role in shaping Malaysia's tourism landscape. TPB 1 emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to recovery, highlighting the importance of rebuilding confidence among travellers and promoting safety through initiatives such as the

Travel Safe Alliance Malaysia. They stress the significance of phased recovery, starting with domestic tourism and gradually expanding to neighbouring countries and beyond. TPB 4 echoes these sentiments, emphasizing the importance of exploring new ideas and collaborations to drive growth and innovation within the industry.

TPB's insights align with the overarching themes of collaboration, strategic partnerships, and innovation evident in the responses of industry operators. Their initiatives, such as promoting safety measures and exploring digital platforms, are integral to shaping Malaysia's tourism future and ensuring sustainable growth in the post-pandemic era. By working alongside industry stakeholders and government bodies, TPB plays a crucial role in guiding Malaysia's tourism sector through various stages of development, from stagnation and consolidation to involvement, and ultimately, recovery and development.

In summary, the responses across different stakeholders in Malaysia's tourism industry provide a detailed roadmap for navigating the various stages of the TALC. From addressing stagnation through strategic partnerships and innovative marketing to fostering involvement and collaboration, and ultimately achieving recovery through confidence-building and technological advancements, these insights offer a comprehensive strategy for revitalizing Malaysia's tourism sector.

### **Implications, Conclusions and Limitations**

The implications of applying Butler's TALC model from the perspectives of hotel operators, airline operators, and tourism promotion boards amid the COVID-19 pandemic are manifold. Firstly, the emphasis on forging strategic partnerships with airlines and fostering collaboration among industry players underscores the significance of alliances in enhancing accessibility, promoting destinations, and positioning Malaysia as an appealing tourism hub. Secondly, the focus on innovative marketing strategies by hotel and airline operators, such as sustainable offerings and digital platform utilization, highlights the imperative of adapting to evolving consumer preferences to effectively target markets post-pandemic. Thirdly, the study underscores the importance of sustainable tourism practices, encompassing responsible management, environmental conservation, and community engagement, to ensure a resilient tourism environment. Lastly, the recognition of domestic tourism as a pivotal growth driver emphasizes the need for tailored initiatives to boost local travel, enhance infrastructure, and curate memorable experiences for domestic tourists, presenting industry players with opportunities to tap into the burgeoning domestic market.

In terms of conclusions, the study indicates that Butler's TALC model offers a valuable framework for comprehending the pandemic's impact on tourism destination development in Malaysia. It elucidates how the industry can navigate through various stages, from exploration to stagnation or rejuvenation, each marked by distinct challenges and opportunities. Strategically adapting across these stages is deemed crucial for the industry's survival and growth. The analysis sheds light on stages of stagnation and consolidation within Malaysia's destination life cycle, stressing the necessity for strategic interventions and collaborative efforts to reinvigorate the tourism sector. Proposed strategic initiatives, including partnerships with airlines and a focus on domestic tourism, present promising avenues for fostering industry growth and sustainability. Furthermore, anticipation of growth opportunities underscores the industry's resilience and adaptability in navigating challenges and capitalizing on emerging trends to propel Malaysia's tourism sector forward. Sustainability principles and collaboration are deemed vital for resilience, with stakeholder

collaboration playing a pivotal role in amplifying efforts and creating holistic, sustainable tourism experiences.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations are acknowledged. Firstly, generalizability is constrained. The findings pertain specifically to the hotel operators, airline operators and tourism promotion boards perspective in Malaysia and may not be directly applicable to other area life cycle. Future disruptions or shifts in traveler behavior may require further adaptation and refinement of strategies beyond the scope of this study. In conclusion, while this study offers valuable insights, it is essential to interpret its findings in the context of these limitations and the ever-evolving nature of the tourism industry.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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