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Determinants of Perceived Travel Risk Among Travelers in Puncak Alam, Selangor: The Role of Purchasers' Behavior, Legal Challenges and Insurance Availability

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Abstract: This study investigates the determinants of perceived travel risk among travellers in Puncak Alam, Selangor, a growing suburban destination in Malaysia. In an era marked by global uncertainty, travellers' perceptions of risk significantly influence travel behaviour, destination choice and engagement in tourism activities. This research examines how purchasers' behaviour, legal challenges and insurance availability shape individual perceptions of travel-related risks. The study posits that these perceptions are further influenced by geographical and socio-economic characteristics of the host environment. This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research methodology design, collecting data from 150 respondents selected through convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling method. A structured questionnaire was used as the data collection tool, and the results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis with the help of SPSS software. The results will reveal that the three variables, which are the purchaser's behaviour, legal frameworks, and insurance accessibility, play a significant role in shaping perceived travel risk. The findings might provide valuable insights for tourism operators, policymakers, and insurance providers in crafting targeted risk management strategies and communication frameworks. By understanding these contributing factors, stakeholders can enhance traveller safety perceptions, support informed travel decisions, and promote sustainable tourism development in emerging destinations. This research contributes to the broader literature on travel risk perception and offers practical implications for improving destination image and tourism service quality in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Perceived risk, risk perception, travelers, purchasers' behavior, legal challenges, insurance availability*

1. Introduction and Background

Travel-related risk is broadly defined as any threat to travellers' physical or psychological well-being that may disrupt their journey. International travel inherently exposes individuals to a variety of risks ranging from health and safety to financial and infrastructural, depending on both destination and travellers' characteristics. In 2024, Malaysia recorded over 25 million international arrivals with a 24.2% increase from 2023, signalling greater exposure to these multifaceted risks and placing pressure on public infrastructure, insurance markets, and health systems (Reuters Staff, 2025).

Understanding travel risk requires examining both objective and subjective dimensions of risk, as well as their interplay with destination image and tourist attitudes. Caber et al. (2020) showed that perceived risks across health, safety, and finances shape travellers' destination evaluations and decisions, suggesting that destination management must address not only real dangers but also travellers' risk perceptions through clear communication and reassurance.

In the Malaysian context, pre-travel risk beliefs profoundly influence behaviour. Che Hasan et al. (2022) found that pre-travel health advice and prior exposure to destination risks significantly enhance vaccine knowledge and attitude and a finding echoed by qualitative studies showing that perceived susceptibility and experience drive risk-reducing behaviours among university students (2022). Yet, most travellers maintain stable risk perceptions pre- and post-travel, unless personally impacted by harm or illness.

Furthermore, Grigoriadis et al. (2025) demonstrate through the Social Amplification of Risk Framework that political instability, terrorism, and negative media coverage adversely affect destination choice and amplify perceived travel risks. The surge in tourism risk research since COVID-19 emphasizes the growing influence of

both real and perceived threats on travel behaviour and marketing strategies.

Finally, several recent incidents in Malaysia underscore the range of travellers' risks from hypothermia-related fatalities on Mount Kinabalu (Sabah tourism authorities considering fitness criteria), to ongoing maritime kidnapping threats in eastern Sabah, and high-profile transport accidents involving foreign tourists. These cases reinforce that travellers' safety remains a paramount concern for destination competitiveness and policy response.

RO1: To investigate the relationship between the purchaser's behaviour with perceived travel risks among travellers.
RO2: To examine the relationship between legal challenges with perceived travel risks among travellers.
RO3: To investigate the relationship between insurance availability with perceived travel risks among travellers.

2. Literature Review

Risk Perceptions among Travelers: Risk and tourism are fundamentally intertwined, as leisure travel inherently involves exposure to both physical and psychological threats. In conceptualizing perceived risk, scholars have noted the overlapping and often inconsistent use of terms such as uncertainty, worry, fear, and anxiety, causing definitional confusion (Setiawan et al., 2024). Perceived risk encompasses individuals' judgments regarding both the likelihood and severity of potential harm (Slovic et al., 2016). This distinction is critical: known probabilities pertain to "risk," while unknown probabilities invoke "uncertainty", a conceptual split rooted in ambiguity aversion theory.

Tourism risk research overwhelmingly explores subjective risk perceptions, since tourists respond to perceived rather than actual risk (Setiawan et al., 2024). Tourism is a high-experience domain where evaluations are based on anticipation and uncertainty, leading consumers to rely on heuristics and emotional cues (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Risk perceptions vary across situations and decision-making contexts. Researchers argue that individuals weigh certain risk dimensions more heavily depending on the context (e.g., transport vs medical risk) (Setiawan et al., 2024; Najar & Rather, 2023). Furthermore, experience plays a key moderating role: travelers learn from prior trips, reducing perceived risk and increasing confidence for future travel (Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Maulana et al., 2022).

Finally, tourism research demonstrates perceived risk's significant influence on destination image, travelers' behavior, and loyalty. For example, disruptions such as political turmoil or health crises can distort destination image through media amplification, affecting future travel intentions (Grigoriadis et al., 2025). A multi-dimensional analysis by Maulana et al. (2022) identifies five distinct risk dimensions, which are potential loss, psychological, health, social, and financial, and shows they shape accommodation and travel choices post-COVID-19.

Purchaser's Behavior: Destination image profoundly shapes both the travel decisions of prospective tourists and the experiences of those already vacationing. Recognizable objective risks such as crime, illness, political unrest, or terrorism can stem from negative events, directly influencing this image. Scholars define risk perception as travelers' awareness and concern about social or environmental issues at a destination; heightened awareness often leads to increased sensitivity to risk in future travel choices.

While risk may have positive (e.g., thrill-seeking) and negative (e.g., financial loss) dimensions, most research emphasizes the undesirable aspects. Travelers' behavioral intentions are influenced by their sense of responsibility, which is closely tied to perceptions of their own impact, echoing findings in consumer and sustainable behavior literatures (recently corroborated by Setiawan et al., 2024).

Importantly, travelers' characteristics influence sensitivity to risk and choice: price-conscious backpackers may forgo insurance, while families prioritize comprehensive coverage. Research shows that perceived risk

and destination image interact to influence visit intentions. A 2022–2023 Indonesian study found that health and socio-psychological risk affected visit decisions directly and indirectly through destination image (Anzani et al., 2022). Likewise, a 2023 MDPI study confirmed that destination image strongly influences travel intention, mediated by COVID-19 perceived risk across cognitive, affective, and security dimensions. In

Malaysia, Kumar, Shagirbasha & Konar (2023) reported that destination image and perceived COVID-19 risk jointly shaped Malaysian urban tourism behavior, underlining the practical importance of these constructs.

In the context of risk-taking tourism (e.g., adventure travel), scholars increasingly recognize risk as an intrinsic element of the travel experience. Thrill-driven tourists willingly accept bodily harm risks for experiential rewards (Allman et al., 2022). However, a lack of personal experience with hazards such as political instability or terrorism amplifies reliance on media and vicarious information, making prior knowledge essential for informed decision-making.
H1: There is a relationship between the purchaser's behavior with perceived travel risks among travelers.

Legal Challenges: Trust is a foundational element of financial and insurance systems. In travel contexts, money mediates trust between consumers and institutions, with insurance and professional expertise playing key roles in restoring balance, often accepted without question. Recent research highlights how media framing influences perceived risk: new media use tends to amplify health-related concerns, prompting travelers to adopt protective behaviors, while traditional media's framing effects are less clear.

Customer perceptions of unfairness in insurance can trigger negative behaviors. Equity theory suggests that consumers assess fairness by comparing inputs (such as paid premiums) to received outputs; a perceived imbalance may motivate adverse actions (Johnson & Lee, 2022). Attribution theory further explains how consumers interpret insurance outcomes: they frequently assess whether adverse outcomes are due to company negligence or personal fault (Smith & Wang, 2023).

Insurance logic in travel is clear. Consumers must purchase policies in advance to mitigate potential harm. Providers must actively educate travelers about their coverage of what is and isn't included, potential claims scenarios, and situational caveats to build trust and prevent misunderstandings. Travel insurance literacy is positively associated with trust and purchase intention, especially among digitally engaged travelers (Taylor et al., 2023).

Moreover, framing effects can significantly influence insurance uptake. Studies using experimental interfaces reveal that presenting insurance premiums with loss-framing (highlighting what travelers stand to lose) increases purchase intention, especially among younger users (Lahoti et al., 2023).

For travelers venturing into remote or risky areas, understanding the timing and limitations of rescue and coverage, such as delays in medical evacuation, is crucial. Insurance providers should ensure travelers grasp these realities in advance, enabling informed decisions and aligning expectations with policy terms.
H2: There is a relationship between legal challenges with perceived travel risks among travelers.

Insurance Availability: The media's portrayal of hazards plays a pivotal role in shaping public risk perceptions. Some threats are sensationalized, others downplayed. Recent studies confirm that fear-laden headlines significantly amplify perceived risk, whereas neutral reporting diminishes urgency, even affecting preventive behavior (Qian et al., 2024). Specifically in travel, framed narratives about terrorism or pandemics can sway destination choices and safety behavior (Xie et al., 2023).

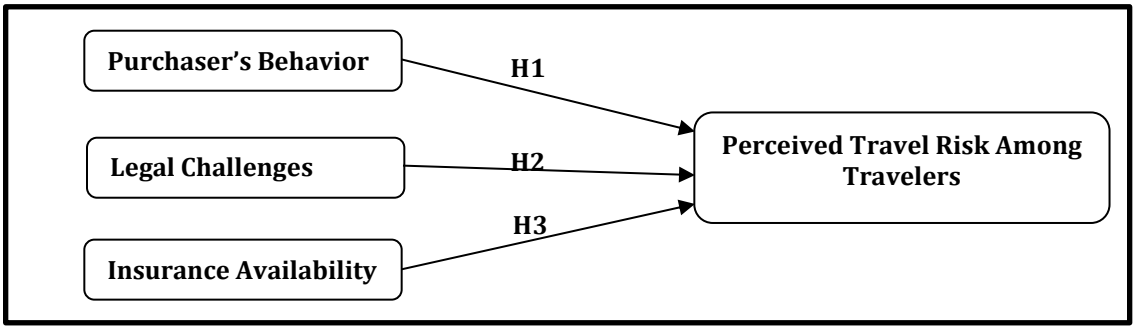
Lacking first-hand experience, tourists rely heavily on secondary sources, media, social platforms, and peer feedback when assessing destination safety. Comprehensive reviews indicate that perceived destination risk directly influences purchase intentions, pressing travelers toward safer options or higher insurance coverage (Cui et al., 2016).

Regarding insurance fairness, contemporary studies reveal that justice judgments hinge on consumers' perceived control. A 2025 survey in Europe found individuals deem data-driven or behavior-based insurance

fair only if they understand and can influence the outcome; otherwise, perceived fairness drops sharply (Zuiderveen et al., 2025). This echoes early attribution research, but with a modern data focus: external factors such as regulation may be accepted, while internal mismanagement triggers dissatisfaction and behaviors like churn or negative word-of-mouth.

H3: There is a relationship between insurance availability with perceived travel risks among travelers.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



3. Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study involved distributing a structured questionnaire to approximately 50,000 individuals in Puncak Alam, Selangor. The structured questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool, systematically gathering information to assess the relationships between the independent variables, which are purchasers' behaviour, legal challenges, and insurance availability, with the dependent variable, perceived travel risks among travellers.

The study adopted a correlational research design to analyze the relationships between the independent variables and perceived travel risks among travellers in Puncak Alam, Selangor. The researcher applies the quantitative research methodology, and the sampling method proposed for this research is convenience sampling, which falls under the category of non-probability sampling techniques**.** Convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily accessible and willing to participate**,** rather than being randomly chosen from the broader population. This method is often used in exploratory research due to its practicality**,** time efficiency**,** and cost-effectiveness**,** especially when the target population is difficult to access or when a large sample is not essential for generalizability. Although a sufficient sample size for this research would ideally exceed 350 individuals who travel every month, a targeted sample of 150 respondents has been selected for this study. These respondents are drawn from three key groups: travel agents, professionals in the insurance industry, and frequent travellers themselves. In this study, all the data will be analysed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Software (SPSS). This sampling approach is designed to capture diverse perspectives relevant to travel-related risk while maintaining feasibility within the research constraints. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights into the Puncak Alam community's awareness and preparedness levels and experiences with expected risk exposure while travelling.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of perceived travel risk among travellers in Puncak Alam, Selangor, by examining the interrelated roles of purchasers' behavior, legal challenges, and insurance availability.

The findings confirm that each variable significantly contributes to travellers' risk perceptions, with implications for decision-making, destination trust, and preparedness. Specifically, travellers who are more informed and proactive in managing risks through insurance and legal awareness tend to exhibit lower perceived risk and greater confidence in travel planning. Legal uncertainties and limited access to comprehensive insurance further amplify perceived vulnerabilities, especially in unfamiliar or high-risk destinations. These insights underscore the need for targeted interventions, including risk communication, insurance literacy, and policy reforms that reinforce travellers' protection.

By advancing understanding of how personal behavior, systemic constraints, and market accessibility shape risk perceptions, this research contributes meaningfully to tourism risk scholarship. The study's outcomes are instrumental for stakeholders aiming to build resilient, trustworthy, and traveller-centric tourism ecosystems.

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