

The Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Heritage Tourism in Malaysia: A Review

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 August 2023

Revised 12 September 2023

Accepted 29 September 2023

Online first

Published 1 January 2024

Keywords:

Heritage tourism

Crisis management

COVID-19 pandemic

Cultural tourism

UNESCO world heritage site

DOI:

10.24191/bej.v21i1.474

ABSTRACT

Over the past several decades, the tourism industry centered on cultural sites has evolved into one of the most active and rapidly increasing economic sectors across the globe. This is especially true in countries that are home to a large number of heritage monuments. According to reports provided by the Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, the cultural tourism industry contributed 551 million Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) to the country's economy over the course of the preceding three (3) years prior to the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition, more than seventeen (17) million individuals participated in cultural tourism events during that period. However, ever since the COVID-19 pandemic happened, the tourism heritage business in Malaysia has undergone a big economic collapse economically. As a result, the earnings of a great number of individuals have suffered as a result of this. This article presents a brief investigation of how the COVID-19 outbreak has impacted Malaysia's heritage tourism industry by doing a thorough evaluation of existing studies and statistics from the local government and offering an analysis of the findings. According to the findings of this study, the revenue generated by the heritage tourism industry in Malaysia dropped by an amount equivalent to 50% in the year 2020 compared to the previous year. In addition, there was a decline of more than one hundred thousand (100,000) jobs in sectors of the economy that are directly connected to tourism. It is common knowledge that the COVID-19 outbreak has caused enormous losses for the economy of the country; despite this, the findings of this study shed light on the extent to which these losses damage the economic viability of the heritage tourism sector.

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<https://doi.org/10.24191/bej.v21i1.474>

INTRODUCTION

The tourism business is extremely susceptible to the environment. This vulnerability is evident in the country's susceptibility to various crises, including those caused by infectious diseases, environmental disasters, economic crises, terrorism, and social occurrences (Rossello et al., 2017; Tse et al., 2020). In simpler terms, the tourism business is very sensitive to its surrounding environment, which might include everything from contagious diseases to societal occurrences. In simpler terms, the tourism business is very sensitive to its surrounding environment, which might include everything from contagious diseases to societal occurrences. For example, the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, had a lasting effect on the growth of the United States of America's tourism industry for a few years long, while the Wenchuan Earthquake (5.12 Richter scale), which struck China in 2008, caused around 12.7 billion USD in direct economic losses in Sichuan Province alone (Mao, 2019; Yang et al., 2018).

According to a study by Law (2006), the researcher claimed that infectious disease crises hit the tourism business the hardest. The 2002 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), every so often foot and mouth disease, and 1997's debut of the Avian Flu, as well as Malaria, Yellow Fever, Dengue, and Ebola that have been salvaging the world and directly made a huge imprint on the tourism industry (Blake et al., 2003; Kuo et al., 2008; Rossello et al., 2017; Zeng et al., 2005).

Since January 2020, all of Asia's tourist hotspots have instituted Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) related bans (International Labour Organization, 2020). The travel restrictions enforced in Malaysia had cost the nation's hotel, aviation, and tourism industry an estimated 6.53 billion MYR loss in 2020 (Malaysia Association of Hotels, 2021). Despite the fact that there is a brief window of opportunity for domestic travel from June 2020 until September 2020, the tourism and hotel industries have lost over 80% of their business since March 18th, 2020. The tourism industry in Malaysia contributed 14.1% or 199.4 billion MYR, to Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the year before the pandemic, but only 58.3%, or 38.6 billion MYR, to the country's GDP in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021).

In the year 2020, Malaysia's tourism industry suffered an almost 83% decline in tourist arrivals for both domestic and foreign markets. In the year 2021, during which the majority of the year was on Movement Control Order (MCO), the nation further suffered a bigger figure at 97% loss in tourist arrivals subsequently. In response to those figures, the tourism receipts also saw a decline of 85% and 98% in the year 2020 and 2021, respectively. From these trends of decline in both major tourism performances, it is only appropriate that the heritage sites in Malaysia also suffered a major decline trend in tourist arrivals and revenues. Both international and domestic borders were put to padlock with barbwire guarding the area from time to time from April 2020 until the end of 2021.

Table 1. Typology and number of traditional houses conducted in Lenggong

Year	Tourist arrivals (million)	YoY	Tourism receipts (billion MYR)	YoY
2018	25.83		84.1	
2019	26.10	1%	86.1	2%
2020	4.33	-83%	12.7	-85%
2021	0.13	-97%	0.24	-98%
2018	25.83		84.1	

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2022

One of Malaysia's most popular heritage tourism sites, Melaka's heritage district was not spared. As a result of the enforcement of nationwide movement restrictions and the closing of the international border, thousands of reservations and subscriptions were cancelled in the state. The state that houses the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or better known as UNESCO's listed heritage city suffered a 73% decline in total tourist arrivals in 2020 as compared to the year before (Ashari, 2021).

<https://doi.org/10.24191/bej.v21i1.474>

On the other hand, lockdowns of varying degrees of severity have proven to be challenging for many residents of Penang, who had anticipated welcoming 8.3 million tourists in 2020 until the COVID-19 outbreak dashed their expectations (Ferrarese, 2021).

Regardless of whether or not a full lockdown is implemented, the tourism and hospitality industries are doomed to fail as long as movement restrictions are enforced, with both domestic and foreign borders being inaccessible. The authorities need to realise this fact, and the government can no longer pretend that this reality does not exist as there are an estimated 3.6 million people working in this industry, and their lives, or what is left of them at this point, are at risk here.

The paper intends to assess evidence of the ways in which the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the heritage tourism industry in Malaysia. Previous studies, governmental statistics and documents were reviewed systematically where specific criterion-based selection and evidence-based study were taken into the acknowledgement of this study. The paper will look into the economic impacts of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on the heritage tourism industry in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 Pandemic

As of 2019, the tourism was one of the world's most important economic sectors, accounting for 8.9 trillion USD (10.4% of global GDP) and supporting a total of almost three hundred thirty-three million (333,000, 000) jobs (both direct and indirect). It is estimated that international tourism is responsible for 1.7 trillion USD in annual revenue, or 6.8% of overall global exports and 28.3% of international services exports (Bălan et al., 2021). The first eight (8) months of 2020 had a 71.9% reduction in international tourist arrivals compared to the same period in 2019, citing data from the (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2020). Despite the progressive reopening of a growing number of destinations during the second period of May and June 2020, the predicted improvement in June compared to May remained minimal as to what was expected. Losses of nine hundred million (900,000,000) international arrivals and over 935 billion USD in export profits from international tourism were reported globally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of 2020; more than ten (10) times what we lost in 2009 due to the economic and financial turmoil (Bălan et al., 2021).

Major threats to global public health have been posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which causes COVID-19 was first isolated and identified in individuals in December 2019 who had been exposed to the virus at a seafood market in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China (Zhu et al., 2020). The fatality rate, in comparison to SARS (10%) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) with 40% fatality rate, COVID-19 has caused a considerably more severe pandemic despite its lower fatality rate at an estimation of 2-3%. As of March 15, 2020, SARS-CoV-2 had swiftly expanded to 34 provinces and cities in China, with infections recorded in 144 countries/territories/areas across multiple continents (World Health Organization, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to national and international security.

Outside China, Japan was the first country to start testing all potentially infected return tourists, regardless of illness symptoms. They tested 565 persons who were evacuated from Wuhan and discovered that 8% were positive (Macintyre, 2020). The virus was then detected in South Korea, Italy and Iran subsequently before spreading throughout the world.

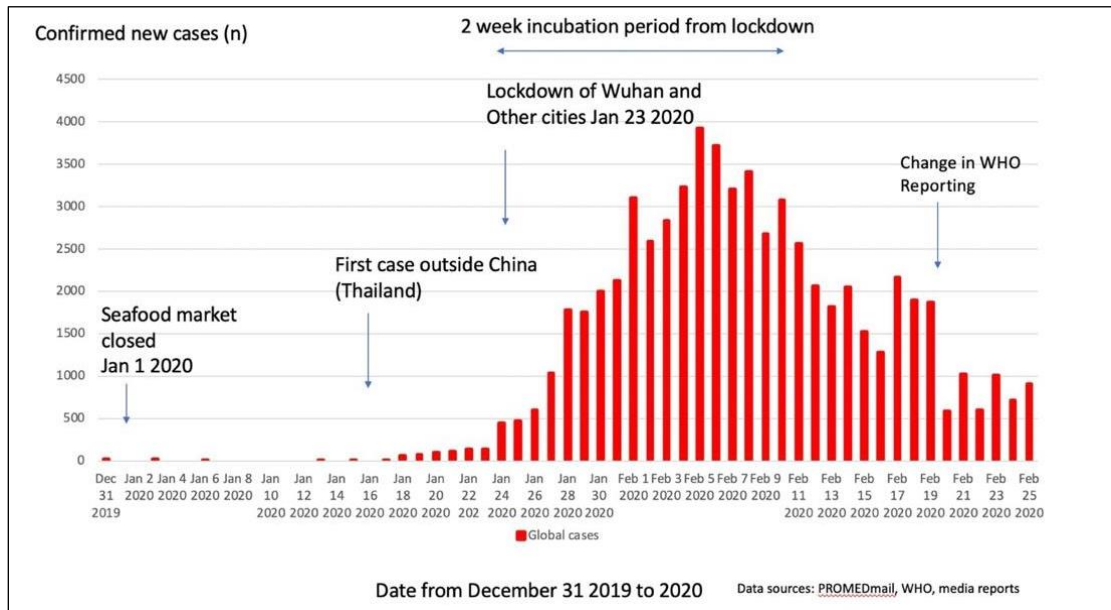


Fig. 1. Pandemic curve of COVID-19 in China from December 31st 2019 to February 25th 2020

Source: MacIntyre, 2020

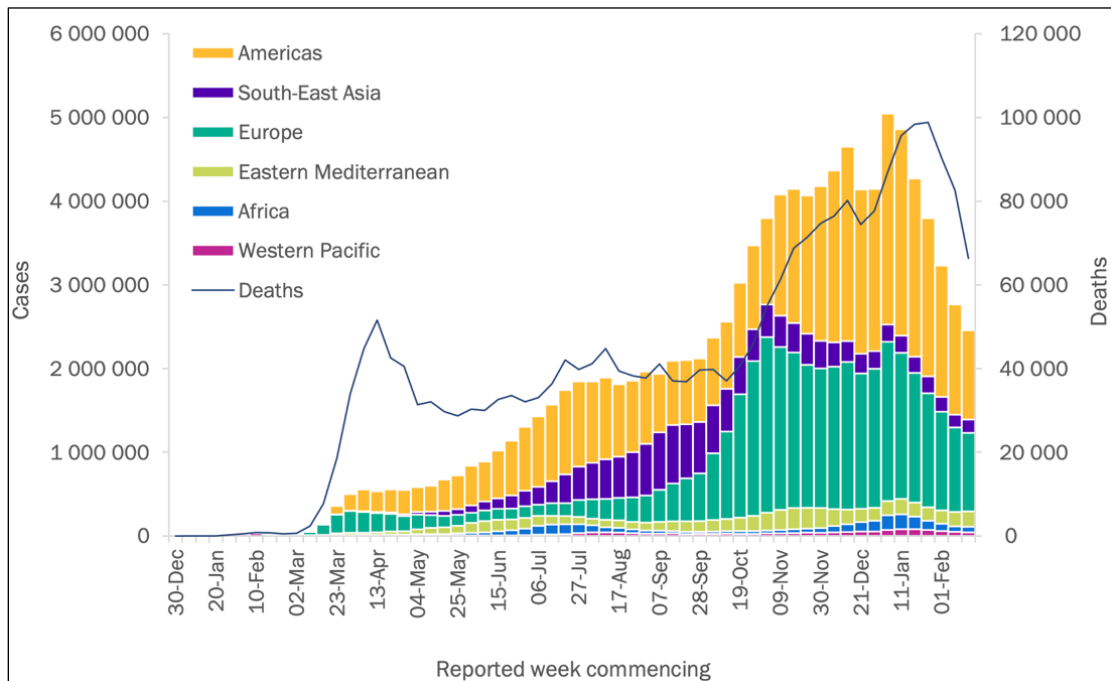


Fig. 2. WHO region's weekly report of COVID-19 cases and worldwide death toll, as of February 2021, a year after the virus's debut

Source: World Health Organization, 2021

<https://doi.org/10.24191/bej.v21i1.474>

After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020, many governments throughout the world imposed a global lockdown, the first of its kind in this century. Thus far, this century has seen at least five different pandemics, including H1N1 in 2009, polio in 2014, Ebola in 2014, Zika in 2016, and Ebola in 2016, but there has never been a global lockdown as such. It aims to safeguard lives from the pandemic (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). Domestically, people were confined to their houses and prevented from leaving, severely curtailing or eliminating their normal interpersonal connections inside the country. Internationally, the governments closed their borders, making it more difficult for people to travel between them. This was proven to impose a great shock to people worldwide as the entire economic system was literally at a halt with mostly ceased to operate when the lockdown was first announced.

Global Heritage Tourism During COVID-19 Pandemic

The World Tourism Organization's Barometer of January 2021 by United Nations World Tourism Organization (2021) estimates that the cancellation of festivals and border closures resulted in a loss of 1.3 trillion USD in export revenue for the tourism industry, which had a severe effect on persons employed in the cultural sector and on the mobility of artists. The global cultural community has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries' efforts to contain the virus have resulted in the closure of cultural landmarks, including museums, heritage places of cultural significance, and world heritage sites, depriving local people of both cultural enrichment and economic opportunity. 90% of nations have shut down their World Heritage sites during the height of the global blockade (Bálan et al., 2021).

Globally, in a survey done by the, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2021), many responders to the study anticipate that the consequences of the crisis on World Heritage sites will endure for months, if not years, to come. At the height of the crisis, 90% of countries holding World Heritage assets were reported to have closed or partially closed them, and responders to this poll indicated an average of 71% closure of sites in February 2021. According to respondents, the number of visitors to World Heritage sites decreased by 66% in 2020, and at sites where staff losses were recorded (13% of sites in the survey), an average of 40% of permanent employees and 53% of temporary personnel were made redundant (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). The survey also revealed significant repercussions on local communities, particularly the loss of cash resulting from a precipitous decline in visitation to World Heritage sites and dire fears for the future. Some World Heritage locations also reported instances of illicit logging and mining, poaching, and vandalism as a result of a drop in monitoring and regulated visitor numbers.

As a result of the sudden decline in tourism, several businesses were forced to lay off employees and cut back on essentials like conservation and upkeep. Many people in the neighbouring areas have also lost their jobs and, therefore, their means of subsistence. However, many natural regions were relieved of some of the stress brought on by humans, and rehabilitation and restoration efforts were successful in certain situations. While the crisis has exposed some flaws in the management systems aspect of the World Heritage at some sites, it has also provided an opportunity to strengthen others by learning from the vast range of experiences that have arisen as a result of the crisis and by putting in place proper research and recovery planning.

Malaysian Tourism During COVID-19 Pandemic

Tourism is a significant component of the Malaysian economy's revenue. In 2019, tourism receipts totalled 86.1 billion MYR, in comparison to 83.1 billion MYR during the same time in 2018 (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). Despite its consistent and potential expansion, the tourism sector is very vulnerable to calamities such as terrorist attacks, natural catastrophes, and disease outbreaks. The recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which has had and is continuing to (in some sectors) have a negative effect on the economy of Malaysia, put a stop to the bullish run that was being experienced by the industry.

The then Prime Minister Tan Seri Muhyiddin Yassin, in 2020, estimated that the tourism industry lost about 3.37 billion MYR at the beginning of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Dzulkifly, 2020). As a result of the worldwide pandemic, Malaysia's mega campaign; Visit Malaysia Year 2020 (VM2020), was put on hold (The Straits Times, 2020). Also, 170,085 hotel room bookings worth 68 million MYR were cancelled as of March 16, prior to the enforcement of MCO), according to the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH), and the losses are projected to increase by the end of the year (Malaysian Association of Hotels, 2020; Ying, 2020). There were also predictions that 1,488 of the 4,888 hotels listed under Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) were expected to be shutting their doors by the end of 2020 (Ahmad, 2020).

Players in the airline business have pointed out that the loss-making company is in jeopardy of going bankrupt as a result of global travel prohibitions and decreasing demand. Employees at AirAsia, Malindo Air, and Malaysia Airlines in Malaysia have been given pay cuts ranging from 10% to 100%, as well as unpaid leave, based on their income and level of seniority (Sidhu, 2020).

On the other hand, the aviation business faced its worst crisis when, beginning March 29th 2020, the Chinese government banned any foreigners from entering the country. Foreigners are not permitted to enter the nation as of the end of May 22nd 2020 (Quan, 2022). Concerned that more COVID-19 infections might be "imported" into China, Chinese officials also imposed further restrictions on foreign carriers, such as restricting them to one flight per week and prohibiting flights from being over 75% full. All three main Malaysian-based airlines have seen significant drops in revenue and profits, putting them at serious risk of bankruptcy. As a result, the airlines have requested the Malaysian government to step in and offer help to the aviation sector (Chin, 2020).

HERITAGE TOURISM IN MALAYSIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Economic Impact

The tourism industry's contribution to GDP in 2020 was 199.4 billion MYR, or 14.1% of total GDP, compared to the year 2019, with a 15.9% contribution (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Dropping by 17.1% (YoY), the GVATI saw its first annual percentage decline since the 2005 TSA compilation. In 2021, amounting to 197.9 billion MYR, the tourism industry's GVATI was 12.8% of GDP, down from 14.1% in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Only the retail sale of vehicle fuel at 4.7%, retail commerce at 4.4%, and country-specific tourism services at 3.4% showed positive development relative to other tourism subsectors. The retail sector has consistently been the most important contributor to the tourism industry contributing at 56.1%.

The cultural industry has been funnelling a large amount of revenue to the nation's economy. In 2019, MOTAC was reported to have received 585 million MYR in revenue from the cultural industry alone (Bernama, 2019). Like other statistics mentioned, when the pandemic hit Malaysia, the heritage industry was nowhere near a safe spot. Down by 58% in 2020 from 2019, the industry suffered a total of 344 million MYR when the pandemic hits. In 2021, the revenue slightly increased by 20 million MYR, with 8% of growth from the previous year, amounting to up to 261 million MYR in revenue for the industry (Bernama, 2022).

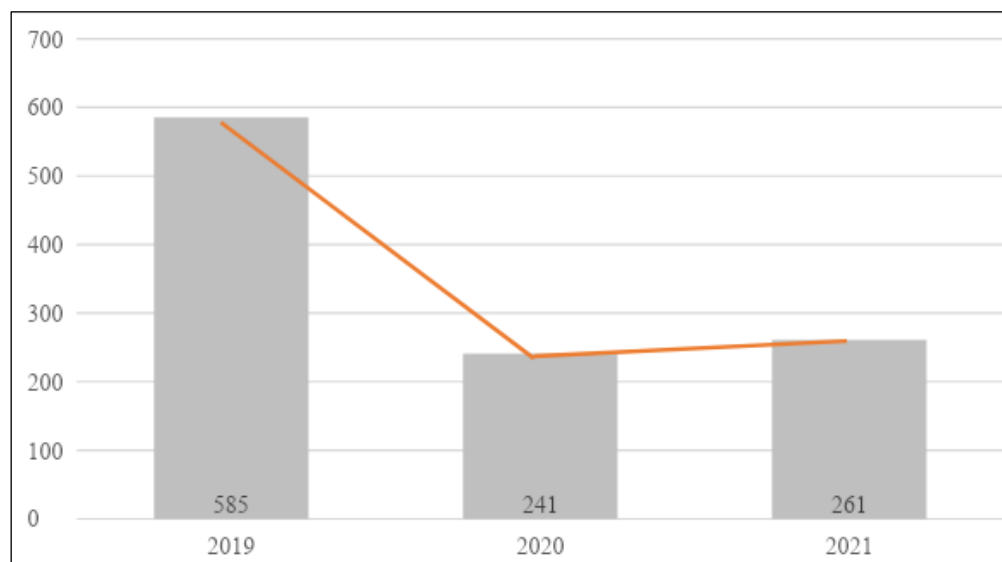


Fig. 3. Heritage tourism revenue in million MYR and its YoY pattern in Malaysia

Source: Bernama, 2019, 2021, 2022

MOTAC reports that the country's tourism and cultural industries lost over 85 million MYR from April 2020 to April 2021 (Bernama, 2021b). The first half of the year 2020 employment figures from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) show a decline of 1% from the previous year, to 14.93 million persons in the workforce. Employment in the hospitality, food service, arts, and entertainment industries, as well as recreation centres, was hit particularly hard. During the nationwide lockdown, all cultural events and activities around the country were put on hold, and some were straight away cancelled to not be rescheduled in the near future (The Star, 2020).

Generally, according to Jusoh (2021), the national tourism sector recorded a negative development for each market by region, namely the short-haul market or Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (-69.1%), the medium-haul market (-69.0%) and the long-haul market (-58.8%) in the year 2020. Additionally, about 120 hotels across the country had to close operations temporarily and completely after facing a bitter period following the spread of the pandemic. In reality, the hospitality industry lost at least 6.5 billion MYR in revenue throughout 2020. With these numbers, it demonstrates the downfall of the heritage tourism industry. Transportation options, marketing, and unique features can all increase the number of tourists that visit a heritage site (Jusoh, 2021). Heritage sites in city centres like Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Penang remain popular because of the abundance of available services. Sites like the Lenggong UNESCO World Heritage Site (Perak) and the Bujang Valley (Kedah) are still accessible despite their relatively great distance from urban centres. Sites such as the Niah Cave (Sarawak), Black Cloth Cave (Sarawak), Cha Cave (Kelantan), Chawan Cave (Kelantan), and Chawas Cave (Kelantan), as well as Gunung Senyum (Pahang), Kota Johor Lama (Johor), Cave Madai (Sabah), and a number of other caves and sites throughout the country, are of course inaccessible, particularly during the pandemic.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the world in 2020 and 2021, the number of museum visitors to all registered museums in Malaysia under the Malaysian Museum Department dropped almost 80% from 2019, which led to a corresponding drop in revenue (Bernama, 2021a). According to the data shown in Figure 5, even before the pandemic, the YoY has been declining since the year 2018 and gradually led to a major decline in 2020. With the MCO restrictions, the museums had to opt to cease operation

throughout the lockdown period announced by the then Prime Minister, making it lose more than 2.2 million visitors in 2020. Resulted directly from the lockdown, the museum's management also had to face a major obstacle where most of the museum workers across Malaysia were forced to work from home.

According to a study by Alpian (2022) in Muzium Nelayan Tanjung Balau, there was proven to be a significant decline in workers' proficiency with technology for museum workers who are working from home. With the revelation from the study, we could say that the inefficient skills to work from home will directly affect the workers' productivity and eventually affect the museum's management performance during the pandemic. The statement is in accordance with a theory by Mraovic (2022), in her article discussing the relationship between efficiency and productivity, where it is proven that lack of efficiency is directly related to lack of productivity. The same study also revealed that the studied museum lost all of its revenue from the museum's membership fee, sales revenue of museum products and tickets since the virus' debut in the country.

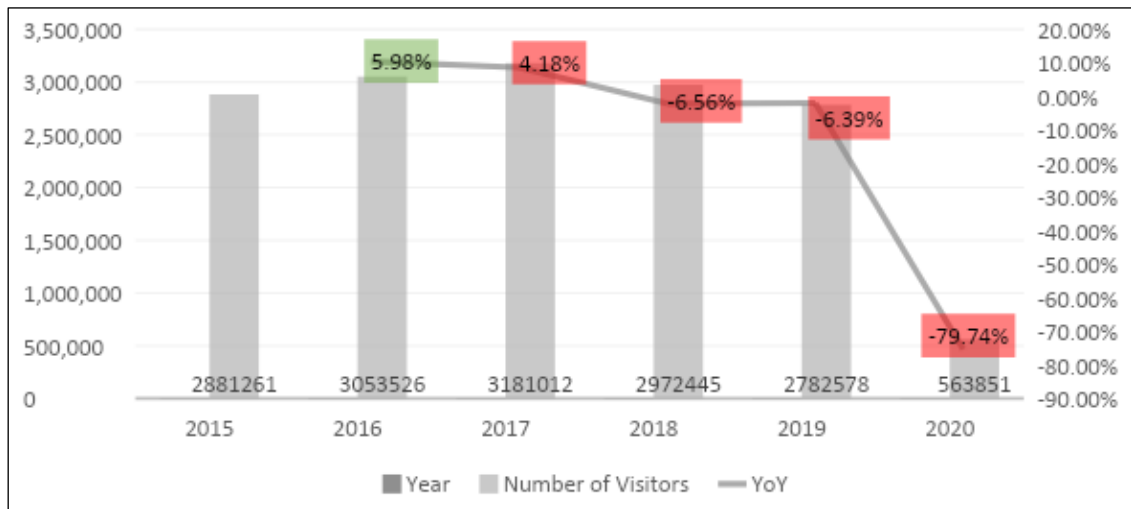


Fig. 4. Total number of visitors and YoY for all museums registered under the Malaysian Museum Department, 2015 to 2020

Source: Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2021

Impacts on World Heritage Sites

Up to this point, four (4) different locations in Malaysia have been inscribed on the World Heritage List. Two (2) are considered cultural, and two (2) are considered natural. As Georgetown and Malacca are both included in the group "Historic Cities Along the Straits of Malacca," it might be argued that there are five (5) sites.

Natural:

- (i) Kinabalu Park, Sabah (2000)
- (ii) Mount Mulu National Park, Sarawak (2000)

Cultural:

- (i) Lenggong Valley Archaeological Heritage site, Perak (2012)
- (ii) Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca, Melaka and George Town (2008)

In the year the virus made its debut, all the heritage sites mentioned suffered approximately 74% fewer visitors compared to the previous year. Based on Figure 5 below, the data shows that the year 2019 was the peak of Malaysia's heritage tourism, gaining the most visitors throughout the year since 2010. The nation's heritage tourism industry was not anywhere improving in 2021, which only received 52% of total visitors from the year before. The Year-Over-Year percentage from the year 2018 went from +0.12%, +9.43% in 2019, -73.87% in 2020, and -48.09% in 2021 (Figure 6).

Table 2. Tourist arrival statistics to heritage sites in Malaysia, 2010 to 2021

Year	Total number of visitors
2010	16,956,132
2011	18,855,693
2012	20,407,819
2013	16,293,114
2014	17,006,255
2015	17,688,142
2016	18,502,562
2017	18,719,272
2018	18,741,132
2019	20,692,693
2020 (COVID-19)	5,406,650
2021	2,806,744

Source: Jabatan Warisan Negara, Zon Selatan, Jamin, 2021

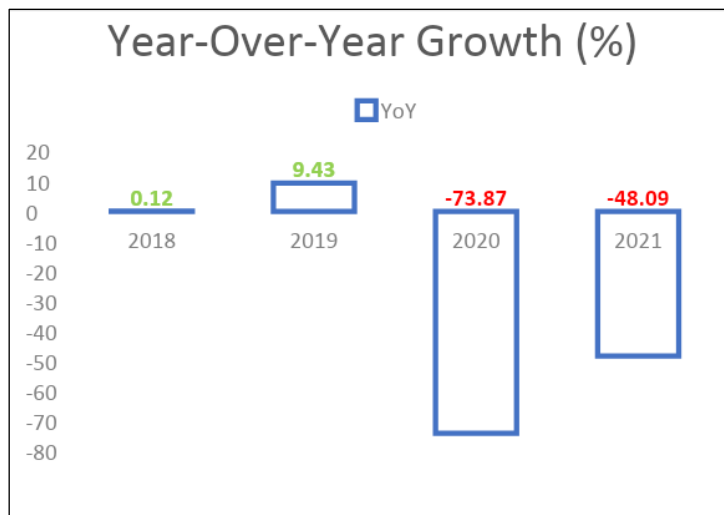


Fig. 5. YoY growth of tourist arrivals in Malaysia's heritage sites, 2018 to 2021

Source: Jamin, 2021

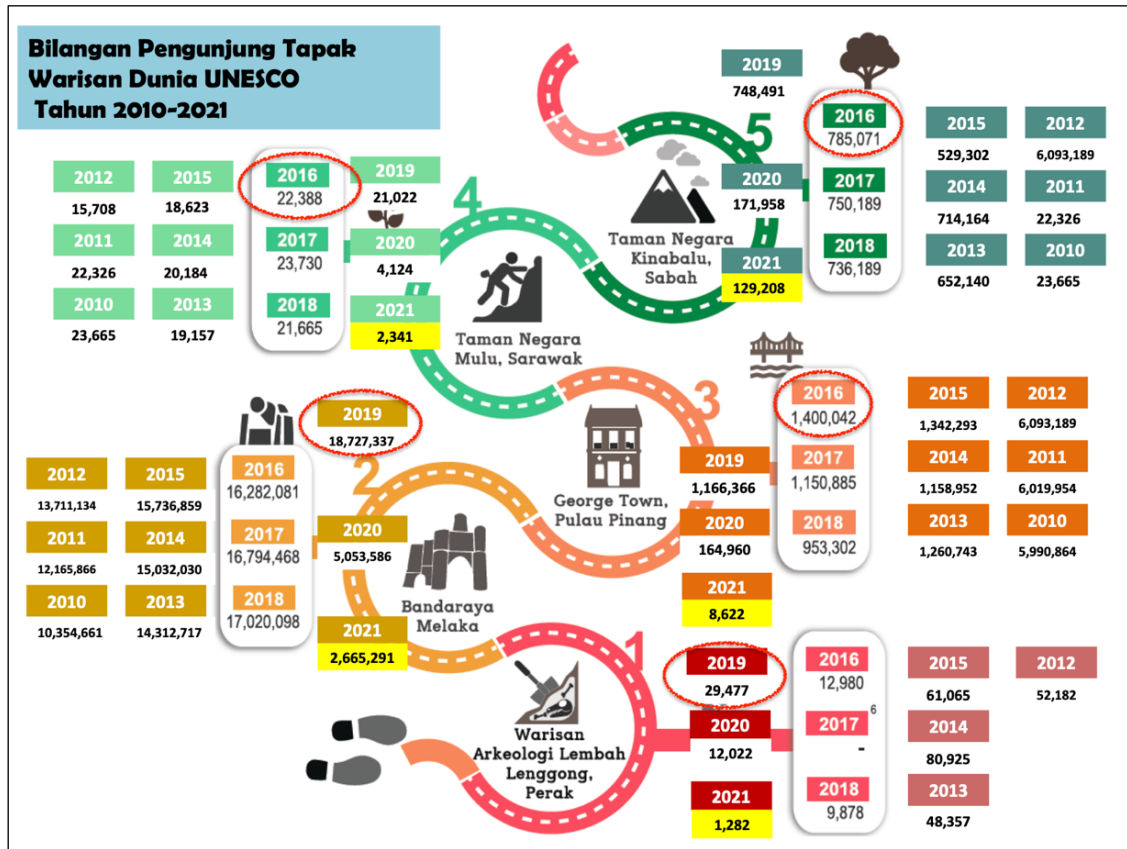


Fig. 6. Tourist arrival statistics to all Malaysia’s heritage sites

Source: Jamin, 2021

In 2020, of over 5.4 million visitors to all the heritage sites, 93% came from Melaka, followed by 3.2% from Kinabalu Park, 3.1% from George Town, 0.2% from Lenggong, and 0.08% from Mulu National Park. Despite the pandemic, the dispersion of tourist arrival statistics has remained quite similar for the past 5 years, pre-COVID, with the majority of the arrivals being in Melaka and the least arrivals being in Mulu National Park.

Maneuvering COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia

Malaysia’s Prime Minister announced the first lockdown, known as the MCO, on 16th March 2020. It all kicked off on March 18th, and the first MCO (MCO1) ran until March 31st, 2020 and was later extended for an additional two weeks (MCO2), till April 14, 2020 (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). The MCO ran for a few more series until it was lifted entirely later in 2021 (Table 1).

Table 3. Malaysian efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic

Dates	Actions
27 January 2020	A total of 26 hospitals were selected where people suspected of having COVID-19 infection might go for further testing and treatment. People from Wuhan, Hubei Province, and China can no longer enter the country.

28 January 2020	To help expedite the return of Malaysians from the Hubei province of China, a committee was formed including representatives from the National Disaster Management Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Malaysian Armed Forces, and the National Security Council.
1 February 2020	Sarawak banned any Chinese nationals and foreign nationals who had travelled to China during the previous 14 days. Those who were granted work, student, or extended social visit permits were required to self-quarantine for 14 days.
8 February 2020	Non-Sabah citizens were required to stay out of Sabah for 90 days, and Sabah residents who had recently visited or returned from China were ordered to self-quarantine for 14 days.
11 February 2020	Malaysia and Singapore convened to form a collaborative group to contain COVID-19, to be led by their respective deputy health ministers.
5 March – 14 March 2020	On March 13th, the government of Malaysia added the countries of Italy, Iran, and South Korea to the list of those whose citizens were subject to full travel restrictions.
16 March 2020	The MCO will be put into effect on March 18th, as indicated by the Malaysian prime minister.
Movement Control Order (MCO) – 18 March 2020 – 3 May 2020	
18 March 2020 – 31 March 2020	PHASE 1
1 April 2020 – 14 April 2020	PHASE 2
15 April 2020 – 28 April 2020	PHASE 3
29 April 2020 – 3 May 2020	PHASE 4
Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) – 4 May 2020 – 9 June 2020	
4 May 2020 – 12 May 2020	PHASE 1
13 May 2020 – 9 June 2020	PHASE 2
Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) – 10 June 2020 – 31 March 2021	
10 June 2020 – 31 August 2020	PHASE 1
1 September 2020 – 31 December 2020	PHASE 2
1 January 2021 – 31 March 2021	PHASE 3
MCO by States – 13 January 2021 – 31 May 2021	
Depending on the COVID-19 condition, each state transitioned between MCO, CMCO, RMCO, EMCO, and semi-enhanced Movement Control Order (EMCO)	
Total Lockdown – 1 June 2021 – 28 June 2021	
National Recovery Plan (NRP) – 15 June 2021 – 31 December 2021	
1 June 2021 – 1 October 2021	PHASE 1 PHASE 2
5 July 2021 – 1 October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 5 July 2021 (started out with the states of Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Perak) ● 7 July 2021 (Penang) ● 10 July 2021 (Sabah) ● 14 July 2021 (Sarawak) ● 26 August 2021 (Negeri Sembilan) ● 4 September 2021 (Malacca) ● 10 September 2021 (Klang Valley, WP Putrajaya, WP Kuala Lumpur) ● 24 September 2021 (Johor) ● 1 October 2021 (Kedah)
4 August 2021 – 18 October 2021	PHASE 3
26 August 2021 – 8 November 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4 August 2021 (starts with WP Labuan, Sarawak, Perlis) ● 4 September 2021 (Negeri Sembilan) ● 17 September 2021 (Terengganu) ● 24 September 2021 (Pahang) ● 1 October 2021 (Klang Valley, WP Putrajaya, WP Kuala Lumpur, Malacca) ● 8 October 2021 (Johor) ● 18 October 2021 (Kelantan, Kedah, Sabah, Perak, Penang)
	PHASE 4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 26 August 2021 (starts with WP Labuan) ● 24 September 2021 (Negeri Sembilan) ● 8 October 2021 (Pahang) ● 18 October 2021 (Klang Valley, WP Putrajaya, WP Kuala Lumpur, Malacca) ● 25 October 2021 (Terengganu, Johor) ● 8 November 2021 (Kelantan, Kedah, Sabah, Perak, Penang)

Source: Bernama, 2020a, 2020b; Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2020; Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia, 2020a, 2020b

National Recovery Plan (NRP)

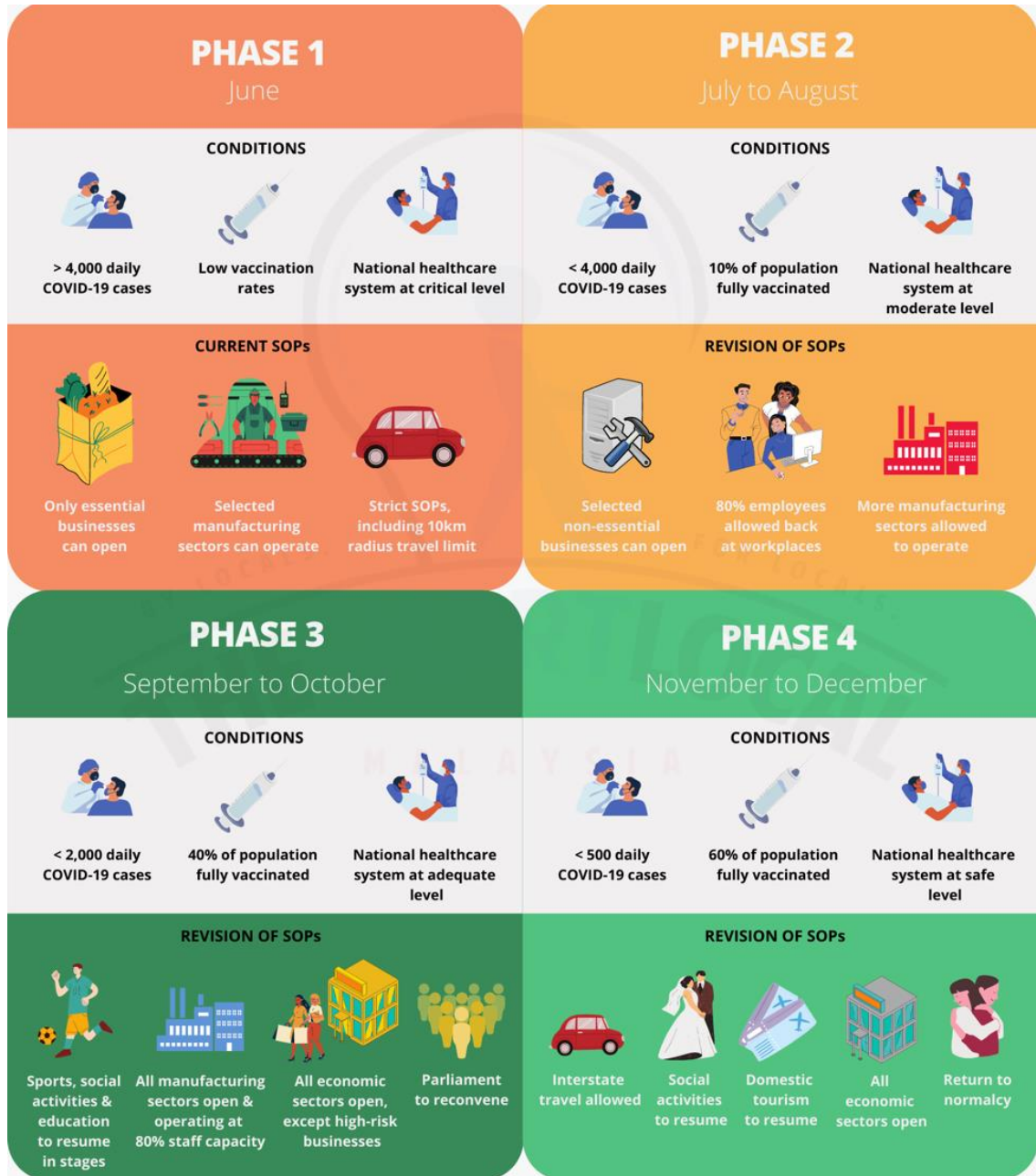


Fig. 7. Malaysia’s national recovery plan (NRP) for COVID-19

Source: Cho, 2021

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Vaccination in Malaysia began on February 24th 2021 but acquired traction on June 20th 2021 (Tang & Chin, 2021). The same study also revealed that only 19.1% of Malaysians had gotten at least a single dose of the COVID-19 vaccinations since around July 1st 2021, a significant increase from 2.8% on May 1st 2021. Ultimately on October 27th 2021, about 75% of the total population was completely immunised (Mathieu et al., 2021). Concurrent with the NRP's announcement, interest in immunisation was rising. The adaptive management of COVID-19 across the country may now take into account the immunisation rate. The four-part national recovery plan will ultimately result in the resumption of normal operations across all economic sectors (Malaysian National Security Council, 2021).

Daily new instances of COVID-19, bed utilisation rate of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) wards and the number of the completely vaccinated population are the three markers used to determine whether to move on to the next phase. Each of the three metrics represents a different aspect of the public's safety in regard to the spread of COVID-19 and the ability of the public healthcare system to treat those infected (Malaysian National Security Council, 2021). The first stage is a comprehensive movement control system, similar to the previous entire lockdown, implemented due to the high number of daily COVID-19 cases, the high occupancy of intensive care units, and the poor vaccination rate (Bernama, 2021c). Once daily COVID-19 instances drop below 4,000, the congestion of ICU units lowers from a severe to a moderate level, and 10% of the total population is fully vaccinated, the shift to phase two may begin.

Phase 2 allows more sectors of the economy to operate, such as entertainment, gatherings of up to five fully vaccinated people, and dining-in. In the third stage, regulations are relaxed even more, and additional areas, such as schools and sports, are allowed to reopen. Vaccinated people are also allowed to hold larger gatherings, and there are no longer any bans on eating out. Phase 4 brings in the full legalisation of social activities, including the resumption of interstate travel and assembly. Each state's progress through NRP's stages is determined by its performance based on these three metrics.

Due to the country's entry into RMCO on June 10, 2020, and the selective implementation of CMCO and MCO in states with a higher occurrence of COVID-19, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) has gradually recovered from a slowdown of 8.4% in 2nd quarter of 2020 to a slowdown of 3.6% in quarter 4 of 2020 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2021). The GDP of the second quarter of 2021 increased by 16.1% annually, coinciding with the RMCO and intermittent adoption of statewide MCO variations that are significantly less rigorous than the first MCO implemented at the commencement of COVID-19.

According to the GDP, things are looking up for the economy. Positive signs were observed in other economic indicators in June 2021, such as the 1.4% increase in the Manufacturing Output Index and the 6.5% rise in the total sales of the manufacturing sector. When this article was written, data on the economy's performance in the third quarter of 2021 had not yet been made public. With the majority of the population immunised by the end of the year 2021, however, the Malaysian Central Bank predicted a 4% increase in GDP in 2021 under a speedier recovery scenario (Idris, 2021). Consistent with the national vaccination rate, which was 74.8% in 2021, this forecast assumes that 78.1% of the population will have received at least one dose of vaccine. Ultimately, as of October 2022, Malaysia's vaccination rate has reached 84.2% of the population with at least 2 doses of vaccine received (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The tourism industry was among the first to face the direct impacts of the pandemic, receiving -74% of international tourist arrivals globally, as governments worldwide enforce efforts to contain the virus, which caused nearly all tourism activities to cease immediately. Employment in the heritage tourism industry was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying social isolation and travel restrictions measures, setting off a domino effect across several sub-sectors and revealing the industry's inherent precarity and reliance on the informal economy. Loss of 1.3 trillion USD in export revenue is attributed to

the decline in international tourism (eleven times as much as was lost during the financial crisis of 2008-2009).

At the national level, Malaysia saw a 73.87% drop in tourist arrivals in all of its UNESCO-listed heritage sites, with more than 15 million lesser arrivals than the year before. The postponement and cessation of cultural programs in Malaysia as a result of precautions taken in relation to COVID-19 have placed the country's cultural community dangerously close to the point of disintegration, dragging down the entire heritage tourism industry along with it. When the pandemic hit, nearly 100,000 tourism-related workers in the country lost their jobs due to business closures and layoffs, and it is believed that workers in the heritage tourism sector were a big part of the statistics.

With possibilities of more advanced viruses and diseases yet to be discovered in the future, it should be taken with a serious note that the tourism industry will be the hardest hit industry in the occurrence of a global economic crisis such as COVID-19. Heritage tourism is becoming a major source of employment globally, and many countries regard it as a top priority for stimulating job creation, particularly among young people. Hence, those of importance should stand up from being armchair critics to finally produce precise initiatives and effective approaches to be taken into serious implementation in order to salvage the tourism industry from continuously being the dead duck in the occurrence of a global emergency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is thankful for the cooperation from the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, Tourism Malaysia, and the university for cooperating and supporting this research.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

NNZK wrote the article with help from RRR and ANAA. NNZK carried out the literature review and data analysis. RRR supervises during the data collection and ANAA supervises during the data analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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