

Exploring the Possible Effect of COVID-19 on Chinese Domestic Travel Pattern and Habits

Cheng Chao Zhang

Wenzhou-Kean University, Student, China
zhanchen@kean.edu

Candy Lim Chiu

Wenzhou-Kean University, Faculty, China
cchiu@kean.edu

Abstract. Each country is facing an unprecedented global health emergency with the COVID-19 pandemic. The tourism and travel industries are among the most affected sectors around the world. As of 23rd of January 2020, the epidemic was detected in several locations across mainland China. The Chinese government announced a mandatory home-based quarantine for travellers from provinces and cities at medium or high-risk levels. After 29 March 2020, when the spread of the epidemic is effectively controlled, provinces and cities are relaxing domestic travel restrictions. However, although it has allowed the Chinese to travel around certain regions, many Chinese will not choose airplanes as their transportation tool. They think that being cooped up in a commercial airliner is an extremely risky place to be during a pandemic because they have to keep a close distance with strangers for many hours.

The travel restrictions have changed Chinese citizens' preference for choosing their domestic travel patterns and habits. COVID-19 not only affect Chinese citizens' preference for choosing their travel transportation method, but it will also significantly influence their travel habits. Chinese citizens will be more likely to travel in small groups or independently to keep them safe instead of traveling in a large group. Usually, they will choose their family members or close friends as their small group partners. Based on a specific understanding of these people, they will be more assured to travel with them. Also, the Chinese will not choose to visit some crowded attractions. They will more prefer to travel to some less well-known locales. Compared with crowded attractions with less prominent localities, the latter's advantages are that the visitor flow rate will be relatively lower, helping keep a safe social distance. This paper investigated the effect of perceived risks and key demographic variables on destination affective and cognitive images during the epidemic outbreak. It also draws new insights on examining the mediating role of destination image between perceived risks and the intention to revisit. The results provided important implications and directions for the tourism and travel industries and the government and tourism authorities to develop recovery strategies to persuade tourists to revisit risky destinations successfully.

Keywords: domestic travel; tourism industry; perceived risk; destination image; COVID-19

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