



Travel Tit-For-Tat: Travel Trends in Malaysia

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Pivot, Not Panic: How Businesses Are Coping with the Changes

Since March 2020, Malaysia's tourism and hospitality sector has lost over 80% of its business due to strict movement control orders imposed by the government to curb the rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases.

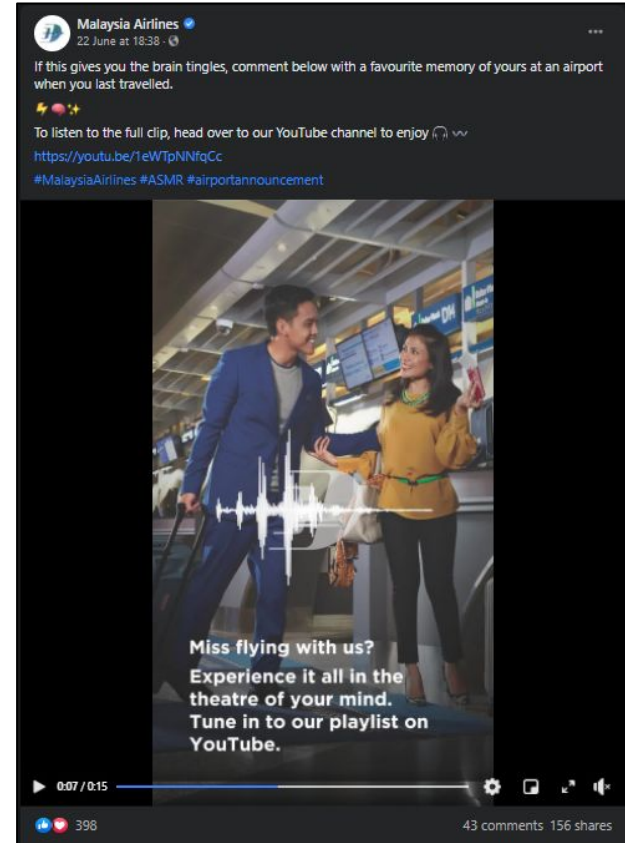
From June to September of last year, domestic travel was allowed as Malaysia eased up on lockdowns nationwide, however, this did little to help the country's flailing tourism industry.

Apart from the usual promotions and offers, some companies in the travel and F&B industries have sought out creative ways to keep their brands at the top-of-mind and to keep interest in their respective industries going.



Tickling Your Senses with Nostalgia

Malaysian Airlines sought a creative way to invoke a feeling of nostalgia and “tingles” by releasing an ASMR clip [1, 2, 3, 4]. The video was favourably received and went viral, with many news outlets covering the clip as well as netizens posting about how they missed flying [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. In a similar vein, the Company posted about patiently awaiting the moment we can all travel freely again [1, 2, 3, 4], capitalising on tugging at the heartstrings and invoking longing.





The World On Your Plate

Meanwhile, brands in the F&B industry were not to be outdone by using food as a means of travel and experiencing new adventures through different types of cuisine. In other words, **let your palate and senses travel in the comfort and safety of your home** [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9].

Road To Recovery: Can Travel Bubbles and Vaccination Passports Revive Tourism?

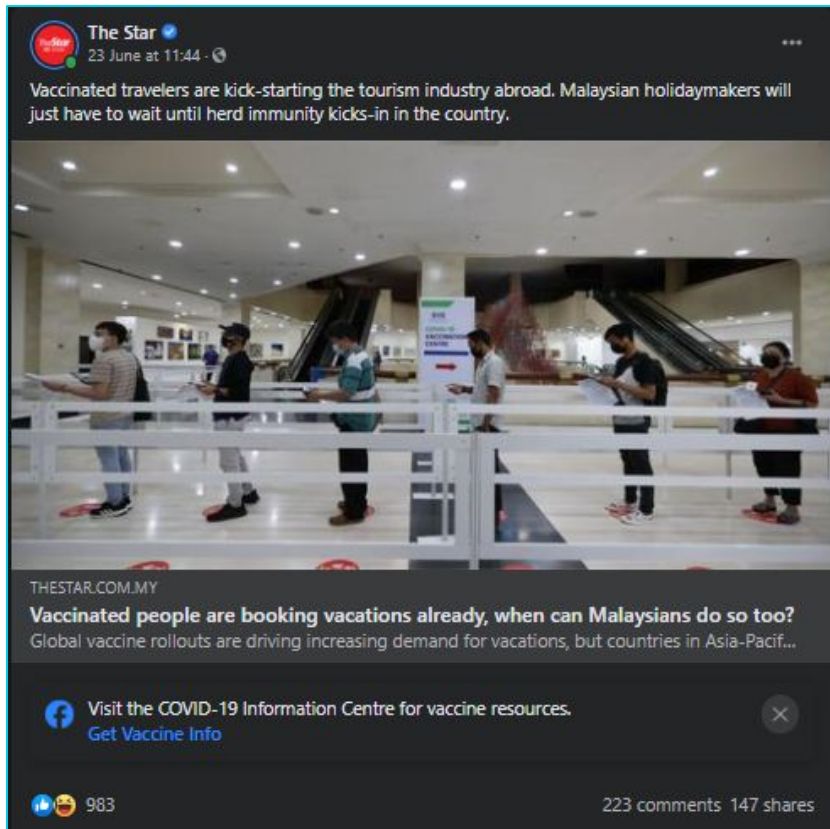
It's evident that travel bubbles are the way forward given the global vaccine rollout. According to a report by TripAdvisor, a faster travel recovery rate is observed in countries like the United States and Britain, which have both seen large number of the adult population vaccinated and this in turn is pushing the tourism recovery forward [\[1\]](#). This strengthens the likelihood of long-term recovery for the travel industry hinging on more people getting their vaccinations.



Using Technology as a Travel Tool

That being said, Malaysian holiday makers who are raring to go on their first holiday since the pandemic began last year, saw a glimmer of hope following the government's announcement that fully-vaccinated Malaysians may soon be able to use MySejahtera as an immunity passport to travel interstate and overseas [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. Netizens lauded the move, however, some were sceptical, citing possibility of fraud or ineffectiveness [1, 2, 3, 4].





Dream Now, Travel Later?

Meanwhile, the government also said it is working with relevant ministries and agencies for travel bubble once borders open [1, 2, 3]. An idea that could be emulated by the Malaysian government would be New Zealand's move to set up a two-way quarantine-free travel bubble [1]. Additionally, Tourism Malaysia has thought ahead and launched the #DreamNow #TravelLater campaign to entice foreign tourists to choose Malaysia as their tourist destinations when borders re-open [1, 2, 3, 4, 5].

When The World Opens: Pandemic Fears and 'Safe' Travels

Studies showed that infectious diseases, in particular, have a direct impact on people's travel decisions and their destination preferences [\[1, 2\]](#).

Increased travel anxiety is one of the critical factors for such behaviour. However, travel behaviour among Malaysians showed the opposite, especially during the Hari Raya holiday as droves left the city for their hometowns to celebrate with their loved ones.



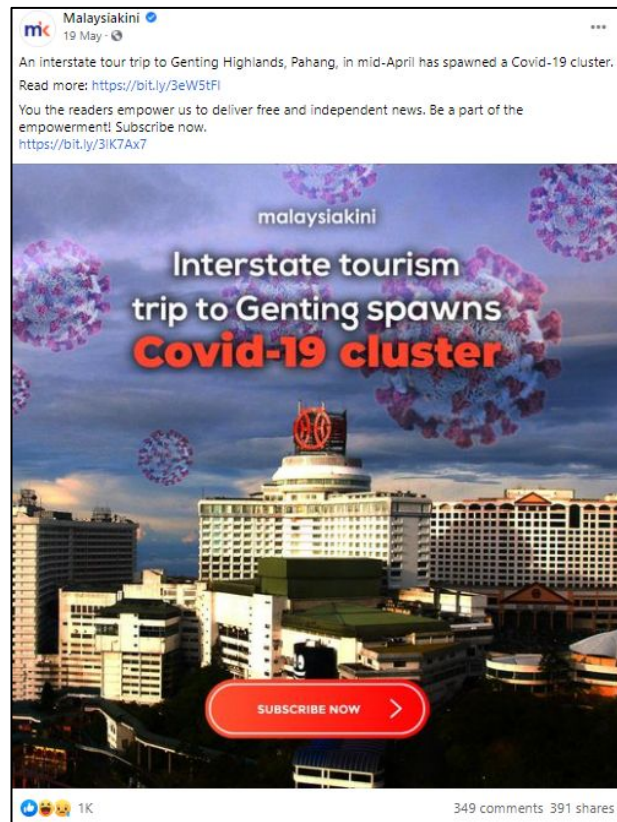
One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Despite the travel restrictions imposed by the government, it is estimated that about 200,000 people ignored interstate travel restrictions and bypassed police roadblocks during Hari Raya Aidilfitri [1, 2, 3]. The netizens questioned the authorities for such a situation and even suggested punishing those who failed to comply with the SOP [1, 2, 3, 4].



[Not] Daring Enough : To Fly or Not To Fly

Travel intention among Malaysians is relatively high. For example, a tour trip to Genting Highlands from Kedah took place back in mid-April under the tourism bubble when states are under the recovery movement control order (RMCO) [1, 2, 3]. However, negative sentiment was observed when Genting was allowed to operate as a travel bubble destination, but other people have not been able to see their families and businesses losing out following poor enforcement by the authorities [1, 2].



Battle of the Fittest: Survival of Medical Tourism

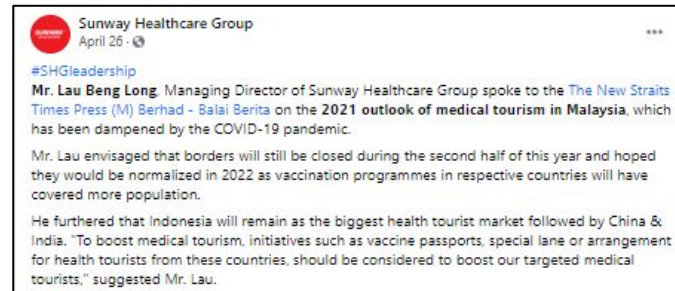
Malaysia's health tourism business has risen to become a significant international destination for patients from Asia and beyond. Malaysia is seen as a preferred destination for many patients abroad, listing quality services, competitive prices and accessibility as key factors. However, with travel restriction and changes in consumer behaviour, Malaysia is expecting the health care travel market to be smaller in 2020 and beyond [1, 2].



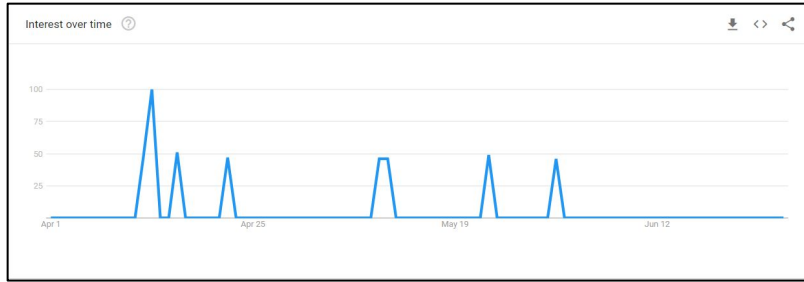
The Travel Bubble Loophole

Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) CEO Mohd Daud Mohd Arif said that MHTC is the first in Malaysia to establish a medical travel bubble to bring in critical international patients for treatment. Patients were brought in a controlled manner with stringent checkpoints to ensure their safety and that these patients do not start a new cluster [1, 2, 3].

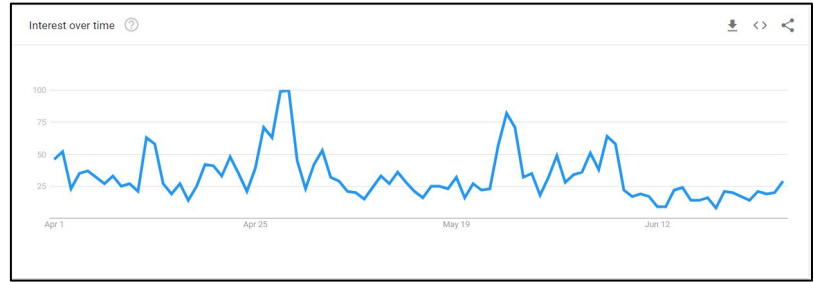
Sunway Healthcare Group managing director Lau Beng Long said that progressive immunisation programme and agreements and alignment between countries with the protocols and guidelines of vaccination passports will put Malaysia on the path to normalising travel [1, 2].



Let Your Fingers Do the Travelling : What Are People Searching For?



Travel for Work



Holiday

Google Trend data shows the search trends for the key terms “Travel for work” versus “holiday” for the analysed period.





Onward and Forward: Rebuilding Tourism For The Future

- The Malaysian government could set clear guidelines for point-to-point travel arrangement between governments to ensure vaccination passports are secure, effective and reliable, and disseminate information to prove it is as a way to allay fears of those skeptical of the implementation.
- Businesses in the travel industry could look into tie ups with each other as a way to keep their Brands at the top of mind. For instance, tie up between restaurants and airlines where airlines could distribute merchandise with food orders or restaurant vouchers with presale of airline tickets.

Peeping Through The Keyhole

- Hospitals could leverage on digitalisation in promoting medical tourism by allowing patients to continue online consultations with doctors in Malaysia amid travel restrictions.
- Businesses such as animal parks and zoos could do online tours of the parks and set up live-cams as an initiative to keep interest and business going.



What Our Insights Specialists in Malaysia Say



“Malaysians are hoping to see an acceleration in vaccination rollout and digital solutions to travel (at least domestic) safely soon.”

- Lalitha Shamugam, Insights Analyst

“Malaysians are eager to travel but are still wary of a possible increase in cases or health risks. They want clear guidelines and strict SOPs in place for peace of mind and to stay safe.”

- Sharyl Kaur, Insights Analyst





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