

An Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Kota Kinabalu as a Tourism City: Impacts, Mitigation Measures and Recommendations

ABSTRACT

: The paper focuses on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Bornean tourism city of Kota Kinabalu in terms of impacts, mitigating measures, challenges faced and in turn, offers recommendations for destination management. It analyses the “what and how” impact of COVID-19 on tourism business operators and local residents of Kota Kinabalu. Qualitative interviews with 40 respondents, including tourism business operators and residents reveal businesses were significantly impacted by the pandemic due to the drop of tourist arrivals. Major impacts include loss of revenue, change of business operating hours as well as temporary and permanent closures. This led to new marketing strategies that focused on products, pricing and digitalisation to stimulate the local tourism industry. The paper suggests a destination resilience framework to enhance the sustainability of any destination. An empirical understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a tourism destination can offer new perspectives and relevant strategies to rebuild and rebrand the destination as well as revitalise its economic and tourism business sustainability. The paper also calls for tourism stakeholders to re-examine ways to rebuild tourism businesses and rebrand Kota Kinabalu City in the new norm post-pandemic, review market segments and consider diversification, as well as design crisis management and contingency plans to withstand unpredictable events in the future.