

## AWARENESS OF FEMALE TOURISTS ON ASPECTS OF SAFETY AND SECURITY THREATS

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**Abstract:** *Studies on the security and safety assurance for tourists are not new, however, awareness regarding the safety of women tourists and the threat to their safety are still lacking. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to (i) identify the types and factors of security threats that concern women tourists when traveling in a city, and (ii) examine their awareness of safety issues when traveling in a city. In the context of this study, Kota Kinabalu is selected as the study location. A quantitative approach is used in this study through the distribution of questionnaires, interviews, and observations. A total of 93 respondents were included in this study. This study revealed that respondents were concerned about the threat of being robbed, which recorded 74.2%, followed by the threat of being kidnapped and raped, both of which recorded 44.1%. Moreover, there were two factors that may pose a threat to female tourists traveling within the city: 34.4% for location and 24.7% congestion in tourist areas. In terms of security, security officers were required in the city (4.22). Walking in tourist areas at night*

resulted in a mean of 2.58. In terms of safety awareness, the statement 'I am very concerned about my safety while traveling' received a 'very high' score, while the statement receiving a 'high' score was 'I was scared when approached by a beggar while on holiday in Kota Kinabalu. As the result, the findings of this study have important implications for stakeholders involved in improving safety measures in Kota Kinabalu so that tourists, especially women, can enjoy the city's attractions.

**Keywords:** Threat, Awareness, Female Tourists, Security, Vacation.

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## Introduction

The tourism industry represents one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, as it has recorded long-term growth for arrivals and receptions of international tourists (World Tourism Organization, 2019). In spite of this, the tourism industry is increasingly vulnerable to various threats and risks, such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, economic crises, disease outbreaks, and new viruses (Anichiti et al., 2021). Sausmarez (2007) notes that the security of the tourism industry is influenced either by human actions such as terrorist attacks, accidents, and kidnappings or by natural factors such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. As the consequence, tourists' lives and health are at risk (Žuromskaite & Nagaj, 2018; Chauhan & Negi, 2018).

Tourism industry stakeholders need to pay more attention to aspects of tourist security and safety in order to ensure continued growth and revenue generation in a destination (Nagaj & Žuromskaite, 2020). It is an important aspect that needs to be monitored, both in terms of human safety and environmental safety. As specified by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (1991), these dangerous risks are caused by human and environmental activities occurring in tourist destinations, including theft, pickpocketing, assault, and fraud, as well as unlawful acts such as rape and harassment.

Concerned tourists will make sure of the safety and satisfaction of their holiday. They become dissatisfied and constantly anxious when traveling in the event of a security threat (Ahmad Fitri et al., 2014). The authors assert that tourists may feel insecure and vulnerable to crime, violence, and accidents. In general, tourists on vacation place a high priority on their safety. They are increasingly concerned not only with human security threats such as kidnappings and robberies, but also with natural disaster phenomena such as earthquakes, floods and tsunamis. Women, particularly, are more likely to be targeted by criminals than men (Rohana et al., 2012). It is due to the nature of women who are weak and vulnerable. Various issues involving the safety of women tourists, including cases of kidnapping, rape, snatch thefts, etc. It is a matter of concern to tourists, particularly women tourists. In Sabah, a kidnapping case happened once involving Chinese tourists in Semporna. Natural disasters are also a concern for tourists planning to visit the state. For example, a recent earthquake occurred in Kundasang (Berita Harian, 2015). Low security levels cause tourists to decide not to visit the affected destinations, resulting indirectly in the decline of the tourism industry. Thus, in order to further explore the issue, this paper focuses on examining the types and factors of security threats that are of concern to women tourists while on vacation in Kota Kinabalu. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows;

(i) identify the types and factors of security threats that are of concern to women tourists when traveling in a city;

(ii) examine the awareness of women tourists on safety aspects when traveling to the city. In light of the findings of this study, tourism service providers may be able to develop strategies for improving safety aspects by identifying factors that are of concern to women tourists during vacations in tourist destinations.

## Literature Review

### Security Assurance and Threats in the Tourism Industry

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (1991), the phrase "safety and security" refers to the protection of the life, health, physical, psychological, and economic well-being of tourists. Tourists will be more willing to travel to a destination if there is a high level of security guaranteed. Michalko (2003) states safety refers to the physical safety of tourists and their property in a foreign environment, understanding local signs, indicators, and social conventions, as well as the safety of consumer services. Maser and Weiemair (1998) assert that security assurance is protected and spared from risks associated with crime, natural disasters, disease, transportation, or language barriers, and the uncertainty of destination and rules. As suggested by Pearce (1988), concern for personal safety is a key component in the decision-making process for individuals making decisions regarding their journey. In this sense, safety assurance appears to be an important consideration in determining a person's decision to plan and participate in an excursion. The safety aspect is defined as the absence of hazards, techniques, and equipment that can reduce, control, or prevent accidents (Collier, 1994). According to Kwon (1999), safety is defined as a state of being free from accidents.

Safety anxiety is an emotional reaction triggered by a complex array of subjective and objective factors resolved by neutral and hormonal factors that trigger debilitating and more disturbing experiences in nature than feelings (Bigne & Andreu, 2004). In addition to safety, emotions are involved when people feel unsafe in a given situation. Cho and Jang (2008) define security anxiety as the emotional overlap of worry and fear when confronted with a situation that triggers anxiety. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), uncertainty is a security concern because of the extent to which individuals feel threatened by an ambiguous or unknown situation. In addition, feelings of uncertainty are not only personal, but also shared through culture that is transferred and reinforced by others. In spite of this, uncertainty is a subjective and irrational feeling that occurs when an individual feels comfortable in a familiar environment, however, it may be perceived by others as dangerous (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The purpose of this article is to identify the types and factors of security threats faced by women tourists, and to examine their perceptions of safety when traveling in a city, particularly Kota Kinabalu.

### Safety and Security and its Relationship with Women Tourists

It is possible for tourists to be victims of incidents involving safety. It has been reported that tourists are the primary targets of security incidents since they are deemed fragile and easy to target. Tourists are perceived by some residents as people who are. Tourists are therefore targeted for robbery, regardless of their status and gender. According to reports, tourists are also at risk of being victims of crimes committed in tourist destinations because of their dress, which indicates that they are foreigners. Moreover, tourists, regardless of gender, tend to bring valuables and a lot of cash, especially in areas that are scarce and do not accept credit cards.

Additionally, some tourists do not pay attention to the surrounding environment because they are too captivated and distracted by the beauty of the destination. Because tourists are new to a destination, they are usually not familiar with the environment. A number of tourists, regardless of their status or gender, prefer to participate in risky activities that can pose a threat to their safety. Finally, tourists sometimes travel alone or without their friends. As a result, they may become targets and their safety may be at risk as they only move individually and not in groups (Holcomb & Pizam, 2006).

In this regard, tourism has an important role to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - commitments such as gender equality, women's empowerment, and not leaving anyone behind (Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2019). In spite of this, issues and challenges related to assurance and safety have the greatest impact on women's mobility. Due to unsafe urban environments, women are severely restricted in their mobility and are unable to access employment opportunities, education and healthcare services (International Tourism Forum, 2018). The topic of safety plays an important role in the context of tourism, particularly when female tourists are involved. Women tourists are generally more likely to encounter security disruptions than men. Individuals who are fearful of crime may change their behaviour and become more vigilant. According to Greenberg and Ruback (1992), women are more concerned with their physical safety than men due to their vulnerability and sexual risk differences in the manner in which they perceive being threatened by security.

According to Rohana et al. (2012), women are more likely to face greater safety risks while traveling than men. Research has shown that women are more concerned with the risks associated with travel than men (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006). Carr (2001) asserts that women are more concerned about crime than men. Due to this reason, most women prefer to travel with at least two people in order to protect themselves (Ahmad Fitri et al., 2014). Lynch and Atkins (1988) suggest that fear affects women's behaviour. In their study, 16% of women reported feeling unsafe during the day and 35% reported feeling unsafe at night. When women are in a weak state, they will try to avoid being in a situation that demonstrates weak point. Atkins (1989) reports that extensive research has been conducted about travel safety which suggests that women are reluctant to venture out after dark when traveling in the city. Focas (1989) conducted a study on women who worry about their own safety during travel after dark. The findings suggest that there is an effect of a particular time period on women's security threats. Levinson (2002) noted that women are more likely to be targeted by criminals, especially by snatchers, while walking or waiting for a bus. Among all the threats women face, crime is the most frightening (Skogan & Klecka, 1977). A number of women were abducted and held captive while abroad (Ahmad Fitri et al., 2014).

### **Research Methodology**

A survey and descriptive design was used to study the threats and awareness of tourists related to safety during holidays in a city and the method used is quantitative. A quantitative method is essentially an investigation that follows a statistical analysis and relying on numerical evidence to draw conclusions or test hypotheses as well as data that can be obtained from survey questionnaires, observations, or secondary sources (Veal, 2017). The questionnaire method is the most suitable method of data collection due to its ease of analysis due to time constraints. A descriptive study seeks to explore an issue that has not been explored or has been less studied. Questionnaires are more practical and effective to use because they can improve the accuracy and truthfulness of the responses provided by respondents. Furthermore, respondents are able

to express their opinions freely, and are not obligated to answer each item submitted in the questionnaire. In order to carry out this study, only 93 female tourists were randomly chosen. A questionnaire was used as the research instrument. According to Krosnick and Presser (2010), questionnaires represent the backbone of a study because questionnaires enable researchers to collect and analyze samples, select and conduct interviews, evaluate computerized work, and do other preparatory work with respondents. Also, the questionnaire was developed from relevant views and was of a descriptive nature (Eiselen et al., 2005).

### Area of Study

It is located at the coordinates 5°58'17"N 116°05'43"E with an area of 136 square miles (351 km<sup>2</sup>) in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. state capital of Sabah is located in Kota Kinabalu which is the state's administrative center. Kota Kinabalu was designated as Malaysia's sixth city on February 2, 2000. There are over 437,500 people living within the city's 350.70 square kilometers. Kota Kinabalu is often referred to as the gateway for tourists visiting Sabah.

### Findings

#### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were domestic women tourists (84.9%) and the remaining 14 respondents (15.1%) were foreign tourists. The majority of respondents were aged 21-30 years and 31-40 years, with 33 people (35.5%) and 30 people (32.3%) respectively. A majority of the respondents were Malays, 51 (54,8%) and 20 (21,5%) Sabah and Sarawak Bumiputera. Among the 49 persons surveyed (52.7 percent) were single, 41 (44.1%) were married, and 3 (3.2%) were widowed or widowers. The majority of respondents have attended higher levels of education, such as universities and colleges, with 73 people (78.5 percent). Twenty-nine respondents (20,4%) had a secondary education whereas one respondent (1,1%) had only attended primary school. In terms of employment background, 35 individuals work as civil servants (30.7%), 19 individuals work as private servants (20.4%) and six individuals are self-employed (6.4%). In addition, there were 17 respondents who were students, nine who were housewives, six who were entrepreneurs, four who were self-employed, and three who were retirees (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Demographic Respondents Profile

Demographic Profile	Criteria	Frequency	Percent (%)
Category	Local tourist	79	84.9
	Tourist	14	15.1
Age	20 years and under	9	9.7
	21 - 30 years old	33	35.5
	31 - 40 years old	30	32.3
	41 - 50 years old	15	16.1
	50 years and above	6	6.4
Race	Malay	51	54.8
	Chinese	4	5.4
	Indian	3	3.2
	Bumiputera Sabah	14	15.1
	Bumiputera Sarawak	6	6.4
	Other races	14	15.1



Marital status	Single	49	52.7
	Get married	41	44.1
	Widow / widower	3	3.2
Education	Tertiary	73	78.5
	Secondary	19	20.4
	Primary	1	1.1
Occupation	Traders / entrepreneurs	35	37.7
	Self-employed	19	20.4
	Retired	6	6.4
	Housewife	4	4.3
	Students	3	3.2
	Civil servants	9	9.7
	Private servants	17	18.3

### Characteristics of Respondent Visits

The characteristics analysed for respondents' visits were the purpose of the visit, the type of visit, the travel arrangements, the frequency and duration of the visit. In Table 2, 56 respondents (60.2%) reported traveling and vacationing to Kota Kinabalu, followed by 12 respondents (12.9%) visiting family or friends, 11 respondents (11.8%) visiting on business, five individuals (5.4%) attending conferences or seminars, and nine respondents (9.7%) attending courses. Among the respondents, seven (7.5%) visited Kota Kinabalu alone, 18 (19.4%) travelled in pairs, 36 (38.7%) travelled in groups, and 32 (34.4%) travelled with their families.

The majority of female tourists' holidays to Kota Kinabalu was privately arranged, involving 76 tourists (81.7%). In terms of those managed by company or department, there were 14 tourists (15.1%) and the remaining 3 tourists (3.2%) were managed by travel agents. Based on the frequency of visits, a total of 42 tourists or 46.2%, visited Kota Kinabalu for the first time, a total of 35 tourists (37.6 %) were on their second to fifth visits. Visitors who visited more than five times accounted for 16 tourists (17.2%). More than half of the tourists stayed for three to four days (53.8%), followed by those who stayed for five to six days, 16 tourists (17.2%). There were 15 respondents who stayed only one to two days (16.1%), and the remaining 12 respondents (12.9%) vacationed in Kota Kinabalu for seven or more days.

**Table 2:** Respondents' Visit Characteristics

Visit Characteristics	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Purpose of visit	Vacation	56	60.2
	Visiting relatives / friends	12	12.9
	Business affairs	5	5.4
	Other business affairs	11	11.8
	Course / seminar matters etc.	9	9.7
Visit types	Travel alone	7	7.5
	Paired	18	19.4
	In a group	36	38.7
	With family	32	34.4
Travel arrangements	Privately managed	76	81.7
	Managed by company	14	15.1
	Managed by a travel agent	3	3.2

Frequency of visits	First time visit	42	45.2
	Second to 5th visit	35	37.6
	Visit more than the 5th visit	16	17.2
Visit duration	Stay 1 until 2 days	15	16.1
	3 until 4 days	50	53.8
	5 until 6 days	16	17.2
	7 days and above	12	12.9

### Types of Threats Concerned Women Tourists

The following table illustrates the threat types that concerned to women tourists in Kota Kinabalu when they were on holiday. The respondents were asked to select the three threats they were most concerned about from the given threat options. Among the respondents, theft or robbery was the most concerning threat, representing 74.2% (69 people), followed by kidnap and rape, which each accounted for 44.1% (41 people). Other threats included accidents (41.9%), natural disasters (36.6%), food poisoning (29.5%) and disease (20.4%). However, the threat of being deceived by travel agents is not a serious concern since it was only the concern of nine respondents (9.7%).

**Table 3:** Threat Types Concerned by Women Tourists

Threat Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The threat of being snatched / robbed	69	74.2
The threat of kidnapping	41	44.1
The threat of rape	41	44.1
The threat of an accident	39	41.9
The threat of natural disasters	34	36.6
The threat of food poisoning	27	29.0
The threat of disease	19	20.4
The threat of being deceived by travel agents	9	9.7

### Factors Affecting the Safety of Women Tourists

Table 4 provides a summary of the factors that pose threats to respondents during holidays in Kota Kinabalu. A security breach was caused by only one factor in this question. Study results revealed that the location factor poses the greatest major threat to the safety of women tourists, accounting for 34.4 percent (32 people), followed by congestion in tourist areas, which constitutes 24.7 percent (23 tourists). Apart from these two factors, the others are lack of supervision by authorities (19.4%), negligence of tourists themselves (17.2%), and a lack of facilities (4.3%).

**Table 4:** Factors Causing the Safety Threats of Women Tourists

Safety Threat Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Location	32	34.4
Congestion of tourist areas	23	24.7
Lack of supervision by authorities	18	19.4
Negligence on the part of tourists	16	17.2
Lack of facilities	4	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100</b>

**Level of Security Situation While on Holiday in Kota Kinabalu**

Table 5 provides information on mean score based on respondents' responses. The responses of respondents were assessed on a Likert scale, namely 1 = very unsafe, 2 = unsafe, 3 = neutral, 4 = safe, and 5 = very safe depending on the situation set. This study interpreted mean scores using the approach proposed by Alias (1999). The table shows five scales of mean scores: a very low scale (1.000 to 1.80), a low scale (1.81 to 2.60), a medium scale (2.60 to 3.40), a high scale (3.41 to 4.20) and very high scale (4.21 to 5.00). Very low scores indicate that respondents feel very unsafe, low scores indicate respondents feel unsafe, medium scores indicate respondents are neutral to the situation, high scores indicate respondents feel safe, and very high scores indicates respondents feel very safe to travel for the stated situation.

**Table 5:** Mean Interpretation

Range	Level
1.00 – 1.80	Very low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
3.42 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very high

Source: Alias (1999).

The study rated the presence of security personnel or police in tourist areas as 'very high' (4.22). In this type of setting, respondents felt very comfortable. Three situations resulted in 'high' mean scores, namely walking through tourist hotspots during the day (3.92), observing general impressions of the tourist area (3.72), and conducting business with a merchant in the tourist area (3.57). In two situations, the mean score was 'moderate', namely when using public transportation (3.24), and when in crowded places such as night markets (2.65). However, walking in popular tourist areas at night was considered to be extremely dangerous (2.72). It was found that respondents were hesitant to visit Kota Kinabalu at night due to the insecurity at night (Table 6).



**Table 6:** Safety Situation When Traveling in Kota Kinabalu City

Security Situation	Mean	Level
Presence of security officers / police on duty in tourist areas	4.22	Very High
Walking in tourist areas during the day	3.92	High
The overall feeling of the tourist areas visited	3.72	High
While dealing with traders in tourist areas	3.57	High
Using public transportation to or from the area	3.24	Moderate
While in a crowded area like a night market	2.65	Moderate
Walking in tourist areas (tourist attractions) at night	2.58	Low

**Awareness of Women Tourists on Safety When Traveling in Kota Kinabalu City**

There is evidence that women tourists are aware of safety issues when they travel to Kota Kinabalu, as shown in Table 7. Responses were rated on a Likert scale, 1 indicates strongly disagree, 2 indicates disagree, 3 indicates neutral, 4 indicates agreement, and 5 indicates strongly agree, based on the nine situations. In the study, it was shown that the statement "I am more concerned about safety when traveling in a new place" scored a mean of 4.32, indicating the high level of awareness of women tourists about the situation studied. A single statement had a high mean score, the statement "I feel scared when approached by beggars (either children or old people) when on holiday in Kota Kinabalu," with a mean score of 3.44. Many of the statements concerning the awareness level of tourists while on holiday in the city received a mean score of 'moderate': I am concerned about the current state of Kota Kinabalu (3.23), the recent earthquake in Sabah (3.11), the Tando incident (3.10), and I believe no criminal activity occurs involving women tourists (3.06). There was a low mean score for two statements of awareness: "I have experienced safety issues while traveling" (2.48), and "I am more comfortable traveling alone than in groups" (2.35).

**Table 7:** Awareness of Women Tourists on Safety Aspects When Traveling in Kota Kinabalu City

Statement	Mean	Scale
I am more concerned about safety when traveling in new places.	4.32	Very High
I was scared when approached by beggars (either children or the elderly) while on holiday in Kota Kinabalu.	3.44	High
I feel anxious to come to Kota Kinabalu when hearing or reading news about kidnapping crimes taking place in the state.	3.23	Moderate
I was anxious to shop in the street area.	3.15	Moderate
I was anxious to come to Kota Kinabalu after the recent earthquake in Sabah.	3.11	Moderate
I was anxious to come to Kota Kinabalu after the Tando incident	3.10	Moderate

I am sure that there is no criminal activity involving women tourism while on holiday in Kota Kinabalu.	3.06	Moderate
I have experienced security breaches while traveling.	2.48	Low
I am more comfortable traveling alone than in a group.	2.35	Low

### Discussions

The findings of this study are similar to Skogan and Klecka's (1977) study which concluded that crime incidence is the most feared threat to women. Although there were other threats, criminal threats such as snatch thefts and robbery were identified as the top threats for female respondents. Although the study indicates that the threat of being conned by a travel agency is not as concerning to respondents as it once was, it is becoming more frequent in Malaysia. The findings in this study match with Milman and Bach's (1999) who found that certain geographic areas have different perceptions of safety in comparison to tourists. This indicates that safety threats due to geographical factors are related to tourist destinations. Tourists will not choose to visit unsafe areas. Kaya and Kubat (2007) claim that the configuration of the space has a greater influence on a woman's fear than the actual crime. A security threat factor is created due to the location and size of a given area. Generally, a person's fears are more focused on areas that possess unpleasant characteristics. The reason for this is that each location is uniquely influenced by its social, economic, and cultural environment. Location influences the factors that lead to security threats.

The findings of this study revealed that the presence of police officers can provide a feeling of security to female tourists. Ahmad Fitri et al. (2014) found that police presence in tourist areas increases tourists' sense of security. Ahmad Fitri et al. (2014) study show that almost 99 percent of female tourists felt safe walking in tourist areas throughout the day. Time and timing are important factors that impact the safety of women tourists. The study conducted by Focas (1989) found that women experience greater fear while traveling at night in order to maintain personal safety. This is consistent with the results of this study, which found that female tourists are more reluctant to walk in tourist areas at night. Focas (1989) suggests that a woman must consider transportation and safety in order to have a peaceful trip. Public transportation must be tailored to meet their needs. Therefore, public transportation plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety of women tourists in Kota Kinabalu.

There are similarities in this study with a study conducted by Astrop (1996), indicating that women's travel is different from men's. Women are more concerned about their personal safety when traveling. Women's concerns about their security while traveling are clearly linked to the importance they place on their safety. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety is the second most important need in life. Additionally, beggars who are typically either children or the elderly often target tourists. According to Ahmad Fitri et al. (2014), tourists constitute the primary source of revenue on islands. Beggars are a threat to the safety of tourists. In Kota Kinabalu, beggars are common at the Philippine Market, the Sinsuran Night Market, and the Salted Fish Market areas. Tourists and visitors in the area are harassed for alms and the beggars will not leave until money is given to them (Siti Nurul Asyikin, 2015). Due to this situation, tourists are often left feeling insecure and disturbed. On another note, the study indicates that female tourists are more likely to make friends while traveling than their male counterparts. Ahmad Fitri et al. (2014) report that most female tourists travel at least twice during their trip. This is due to the fact that they feel more secure.

## Conclusion

Women tourists who travel to a holiday destination are generally aware of the risks and safety issues that must be taken into consideration. In general, they tend to generate income at a single vacation destination, as they are likely to spend their money on shopping, dining, drinking, utilise more comfortable and safe lodgings, and even lounges, and their movements are more diverse and extensive. Stakeholders and service providers should pay particular attention to strategies to improve safety aspects that pose a significant threat to women tourists on holiday in tourist destinations. In terms of limitations, this study is primarily focused on domestic tourists rather than foreign tourists. Furthermore, there are no clear categorizations of the variety of destinations they are visiting in Kota Kinabalu, rather the area is examined within the context of a tourist destination in general. Accordingly, the results of this study cannot provide insight into the types of security threats faced at different locations. In future research studies, it is hoped that the gaps in this study will be addressed in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the threats and concerns of women tourists visiting a major city like Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

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