


# Chapter 17

## Travel Risk and Intention to Visit a Destination During the COVID-19 Pandemic


**Gonca Aytas**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8221-4808>  
*Afyon Kocatepe University, Turkey*

**Aysel Aliyeva**

*Afyon Kocatepe University, Turkey*

**Engin Aytekin**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0296-7368>  
*Afyon Kocatepe University, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The primary purpose of this chapter is to look into the risk perceptions of people traveling during the COVID-19 and their intention to visit destinations. Another aim of this chapter is to provide the readers with conceptual information about the concept of perceived risk, risk factors encountered in the tourism sector, and the intention to visit a destination. In this context, a literature review was performed, and the concept of perceived risk, perceived risk factors in tourism, and the process of intention to visit a destination in connection with the previous studies were explained. Later on, the risk perceptions and destination visit intentions of the individuals regarding the destination visit during the COVID-19 were studied. Finally, suggestions have been offered relating to the tourism sector by making inferences from the information obtained from secondary data.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Perceived risk is specified as a feeling of uncertainty about the possible adverse consequences of using a product or service (Choo, Choo & Kang 2015: 22). The purchasing process of consumers consists of a total of five stages: determining the problem, searching for options, evaluating options, purchasing decision and post-purchase evaluation. The concept of perceived risk is powerful in the early stages of this process. Simply put, people perceive risks at the first stage of this process. In the other stages of the process, it is strived to find solutions to diminish the perceived risks (Yener & Taşçıoğlu, 2020: 432). The researchers put forward different opinions regarding the perceived risk mechanism in affecting customers' behavior (Rundmo, 1999; Lim, 2003; Martin & Camarero, 2008; Jonas, Mansfeld, Paz, & Potasman, 2011; Bülbül and Özoğlu, 2014; Agharzayev & Bakır, 2020). In the context of tourism, the perceived risk has been probed as the foremost subject of as a factor affecting the intention to visit a touristic destination or the intention to choose a tourism business negatively (Shafieizadeh, Alotaibi & Tao, 2021: 7). Terrorism, war, social instability, natural disasters and health problems constitute risk factors perceived by people in terms of the tourism sector (Qui et al., 2020: 3). The intention of people to visit a destination is closely related to several factors. For this reason, destination selection, which is considered decision-making process, constitutes a crucial part of tourism research (Ustasüleyman and Çelik, 2015: 86). Intention to visit a destination depends on perceptions of people outlined as “*the way the people organize and interpret information about the destination*” (Isaac & Bedem, 2020: 3). The critical concern most tourists have when visiting destinations is the health risk. Therefore, the health risk is considered a key factor influencing the decision-making process of tourists. It has also been determined in studies that tourists are less likely to visit a destination with a high health risk (Shin & Kang, 2020; Rahimizhian & Iran 2020; Chua, Ansi, Lee & Han). As in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, during any outbreak, the flow of inbound and outbound tourism is immediately lessened due to the decision of tourists not to visit certain geographic areas or destinations because of the government restrictions to stop the spread of the virus. In such a situation, the risk of the epidemic can generate significant changes in demand for certain destinations because passengers may consciously decide not to be exposed to such risks (Fotiadis, Polyzos & Huan, 2021: 2). During the COVID-19 pandemic, travel was seen as a high-risk activity and the uncertainty and misleading information about epidemics on social media result in high risk perception among travelers and consequently significant reductions in travel demand (Zheng, Luo & Ritche, 2021: 1). Given the current situation and in the case of normalization of life, it is possible to see that there is grave uncertainty about what awaits the tourism industry in 2021. Unless the COVID-19 vaccine is administered to all age groups and there is a definitive treatment for the disease, it poses a critical problem to what extent people will be open to socialization and enter crowded environments. It is expected that especially the people who are connected with people who died due to the epidemic, the people with chronic diseases and the elderly may not be willing to take a vacation in the near future. That is why, the formation and direction of demand constitute one of the most major problems in the short run in the tourism sector. In order to get rid of this problem, all tourism stakeholders should act in cooperation towards coming up with a solution. The role of researchers in this process is to manage quality research focused on problem-solving and to meet the needs of the sector and share the results with the relevant stakeholders in the sector and the public (Atay, 2020: 170).

For the reasons mentioned above, there is a necessity to better understand travel risk and safety perceptions. In this section, the risk perceptions of potential visitors to travel in the COVID-19 process and their intention to visit destinations will be discussed by referring to previous studies in the literature.

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