



# Indonesia-Singapore Cross Border Tourism Facts

## (Case Study on Kepulauan Riau, Batam-Bintan Reopening Travel Borders – Post Pandemic Situation)

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**Abstract.** Tourism cooperation between Indonesia and Singapore is mutually beneficial as Singapore is an international transit centres for many tourists visiting Indonesia especially those came from both Batam and Bintan’s entrances. Indonesia gains from the big traffics in Singapore in which had contributed the “multiplier effect” on economic development of the two countries. After two years of lull in tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic, the popular Indonesian holiday islands of Bintan and Batam in Riau Archipelago Province were finalised plans in reponing their shores to leisure travellers from Singapore. The Indonesian government was prepared the launching of the travel bubble as Covid-19 cases on the two islands are under control. The Indonesian government is encouraging the establishment of travel bubble between Batam, Bintan and Singapore. This would help spur tourism as a travel corridor system which aims to divide travellers into different groups (bubbles) by separating travellers or the one who has a risk of being contracted to COVID-19 (either from history of contact or history of traveling to areas where community transmission has occurred) from the general public, accompanied by restrictions on interaction only to people in the same group (bubble) and the implementation of quarantine principles to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19. The research aimed to elaborate how the strategy being taken by Indonesia government to expedite the travel bubble implementation to enable the execution of reopening borders The thematic analysis of the research will also indicated framework for assessing various cross-border travel arrangements component being planned and its executing steps being taken.

**Keywords:** Pandemic · Reopening · Travel Border · Singapore · Indonesia

## 1 Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic both local and foreign tourists visiting Indonesia specifically to Batam and Bintan experiencing a very significant decline in two years of hull in tourism. Batam and Bintan were part of Indonesia’s Riau Archipelago, which hugely popular among tourists from nearby Singapore. Residents of the city-state could take a 45-min ferry ride for a weekend getaway at one of the islands’ countless beach resorts

**Table 1.** Number of Tourist Arrival – Indonesia Top Destination in 2019

| Destination                            | Tourist Arrival | Percentage |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| Bali                                   | 6.275.210       | 38.96%     |
| Riau Archipelago (Batam & Bintan etc.) | 2.864.795       | 17.79%     |
| Jakarta                                | 2.455.427       | 15.24%     |
| Others                                 | 4.511.522       | 28.01%     |

Source: Biro Pusat Statistik 2019

or golf courses. Both tourist numbers have plunged more than 90 percent during the pandemic, according to the Riau Islands Central Statistics Bureau.

In 2019, the islands ranked second after Bali as Indonesia's most-visited destination for foreign tourists, with more than 2.5 million international visitors. Of those, 1.9 million went to Batam, with most hailing from neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia (Table 1).

These tourists entering from Singapore through Batam and Bintan's are significantly important in the efforts to revive Indonesia's economy and tourism, especially to the Riau Islands province. In April 2022 after several challenging situation on coronavirus handling management in both countries, President Joko Widodo has approved the plan to open the tourist door for Batam and Bintan after various preparations were carried out under the coordination of the various Ministry. This milestones beginning as early as 24 January 2022 where Batam and Bintan entrances are accepting international travellers with specific rules and regulations.[1]

## 1.1 Reopening Travel Border Scheme

Border restrictions which have been imposed or increased as part of measures to respond to Covid-19 were impacting heavily while restarting travel and tourism in both countries should consider the entire travel ecosystem. Building a collective response to the crisis is an integrative process The travel and tourism industry intersects with the interests of multiple sectors and stakeholders ( Similarly, measures to accelerate recovery in travel and tourism in the region have required a comprehensive approach—ranging from fiscal and social protection support to the development of global protocols to ensure the health and safety of both travellers and the workforce[2].

The Indonesian government is encouraging the establishment of travel bubble to help spur tourism as a travel corridor system which aims to divide travellers into different groups (bubbles) by separating travellers or the one who has a risk of being contracted to the virus followed by a scheme of Vaccinated Travel Lane which more simplify and effective while Singapore government has tremendously put their utmost effort to speed up the reopening of border in very strict procedures. Further easing of border measures taken with effect from 26 April 2022 all fully vaccinated travellers entering Singapore via air or sea checkpoints will no longer be required to take a Pre-Departure Test (PDT) before departing for Singapore for more convenience travel journey [3]

## 1.2 Challenges and Opportunities on the Reopening Border for Tourism Recovery

A perspective blessing in disguise behind this pandemic on tourism recovery is to create more resilient, adaptive, and competitive tourism businesses of both countries. Extraordinary capability on health, security and safety concern should prioritize specifically with strict implementation requirement by Singapore's reopening border.[4] Challenges and opportunities of shifting from foreign tourists to domestic tourists is also consider for the survival in tourism sector is not only about the recovery, but also about the strategic recovery and transformability upon which the resilience can be built as the key for the development of tourism and creative economics in the future as the powerlessness in coping with this kind of disaster can be anticipated through risk management strategy such that, in terms of the effects, tourism industry would not go further down at the present time. Thus, transformation and resilience strategies would make tourism industry progressing, competitive and, sustainable for both countries.

## 2 Objectives

This research aims to elaborate these followings.

1. Facts findings on Indonesia-Singapore tourism relations post pandemic covid 19.
2. How the strategy being taken by Indonesia government to expedite the travel bubble implementation to enable the execution of reopening borders to Singapore
3. Findings relating to the advantages and limitation in which indicating framework for assessing various cross-border travel arrangements component being planned and its executing steps being taken.

The reopening of travel border conceptualization requires an international and systemic way in operating in order to reduce social-economic exclusion in the future could be helpful for tourism of both countries.

## 3 Theoretical Review

### 3.1 Definition of Border & Border Tourism

A simple definition of border is the dividing line between two countries or regions between them. Sometimes the border also refers to the land close to this line. A country that borders another country, a sea, or a river is next to it. Borders are geographical boundaries, imposed either by geographic features such as oceans, or by arbitrary groupings of political entities such as governments, sovereign states, federated states, and other subnational entities.[5] Borders are established through warfare, colonization, or mutual agreements between the political entities that reside in those areas; the creation of these agreements is called boundary delimitation.

Border tourism is the temporary displacement of people to the dividing line between two countries contiguous areas. This activity promotes the economic development of

these geographical regions. [6] Bringas (2004: 8) defines border tourism as “the temporary displacement of people outside their usual place of residence to the boundary between two countries adjacent cities, originated by leisure, entertainment, health, business, visits to relatives and/or friends, religion, social events or shopping, among others reasons, whose stay does not exceed one year and which compromises at least one night in the visited place. According to the World Tourism Organization border tourists are those who stay on the frontier for 24–72 h. Bringas and González identified two types of tourists that visit the border areas: the first one refers to a traditional tourist, who travels to satisfy his or her leisure needs, and the second one refers to those who travel for business reasons. Valenzuela (2003) points out that border tourism is not only defined by the border neighborhood, restaurants or hotels, but that it is a continuous interaction between the different actors, producing practical integrations and experiences for both tourists and residents. [7]

Border tourism destinations are often characterized by the political and socio-economic advantages that it offers, such as lower taxes or more permissive policies, favouring the development of certain types of tourism (Gelbman & Timothy, 2011). Obstacles found in international boundaries, which can affect the tourists flow, differentiating between two types of barriers: physical barriers, which are the typical fortifications or fencing; and psychological barriers, in which different circumstances may arise such as socio-cultural ones on both sides of the border, different policies or different economic circumstances in each of the countries or border areas.

### **3.2 Analysis and Implications: Border Closures, Access to Territory and Returns Due Pandemic**

According to Marcu (2015), borders are an essential element for people mobility between different countries. In some parts of the world, these geographical areas become tourist destinations, appearing what is called ‘border tourism’. Although, according to Martínez and Valdés (1982), unlike other tourist typologies, there is a higher economic disparity in border tourism through a line that separates two countries being this a scenario that confers its own characteristics [8].

Border restrictions which have been imposed or increased as part of measures to respond to Covid-19 are impacting heavily not only to traveler (read: tourists) but also to the asylum-seekers and refugees, Border closures may be detrimental to public health, as irregular movements and entry will increase the number of people who are not detected or known to authorities, further complicating efforts to curb and respond to the pandemic.

An important element in border destinations, appearing three clearly delimited dimensions: population security, related to events and situations that could endanger people and their properties; urban and regional security, through surveillance, control and punishment; and national security, which has a clear purpose, such as addressing structural problems and international aspects that could jeopardize national viability. Thus, boundaries mark the legal limits of the national sovereignty of a particular country, or the limits where a state can exercise its sovereign authority.

### 3.3 Singapore-indonesia Relations, Tourism Sector Challenges and Opportunities Post Pandemic

Indonesia and Singapore relations has ties to the degree that there is a structural conflict of interests behind the relatively mundane disputes between the two countries, it is rooted patterns of economic complementarity and interaction that have operated since the colonial era. After than 50 years of bilateral relations, both countries have come to a better understanding of each other, and to see the need for further cooperation[9]. Foreign direct investment from Singapore in the last half decade reflects this growing trust. Singapore has become one of the three biggest countries to invest in Indonesia. The tourism sector becoming one of the significant economic booster in Indonesia specifically in Kepulauan Riau province which only located less than one hour sea journey, it as was apparent from the fact that the cities of Batam and Bintan, had received a fairly high number of visits by Singaporeans. [10]

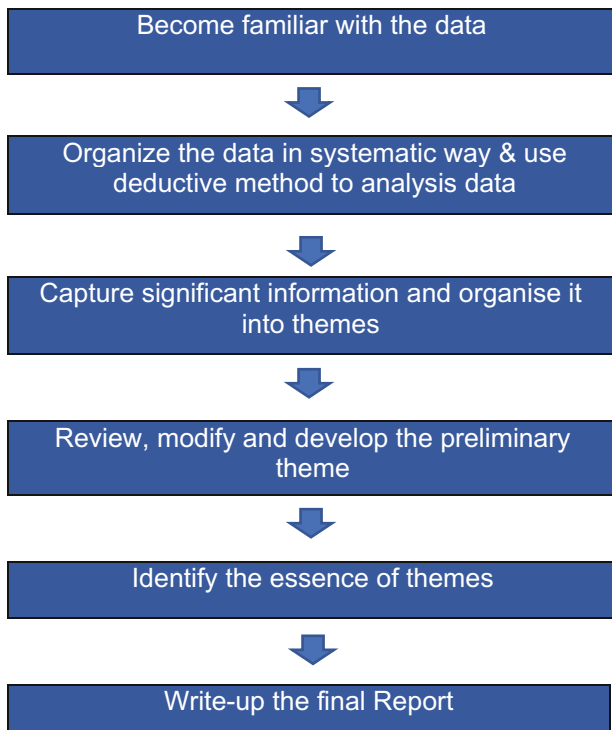
The COVID-19 pandemic has required states or countries to implement exceptional measures to curb the spread of the virus and to protect public health. While border restrictions or closure may be justified, exceptions are needed to safeguard basic rights, including for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.[11] The opportunity was wide open for Indonesia and Singapore to open their borders to one another after the pandemic which this tourism sector could be improved notably and be beneficial for both countries to the challenges of boosting the process of tourism recovery.

Indonesia-Singapore has tremendously put the effort to support in the first phase of the crisis focusing on immediate response and mitigation efforts to protect visitors and workers and ensure business continuity following the imposition of containment measures. As the containment measures start to ease, the next steps will be to get travellers moving, tourism businesses back up and running, and people back to work. This is an important, but complex and challenging task. While the medium and long-term tourism impacts of COVID-19 will vary between countries, destinations, and segments of the sector, it is clear that in order to open up while the virus is still circulating, governments will need to take balanced, measured and co-ordinated policy action at the local, national and international level.

## 4 Methods

This research using a thematic analysis to elaborate data that involves reading through a data set (such as transcripts from in depth interviews or focus groups) and identifying patterns in meaning across the data to derive themes. Thematic analysis involves an active process of reflexivity, where a researcher's subjective experience plays a central role in meaning making from data. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview results.

Three themes are primarily discussed in this research. First, the interview findings regarding facts on Indonesia-Singapore cross-border tourism. Second the interview findings showing how the strategy being taken by Indonesia government to expedite the travel bubble implementation to enable the execution of reopening borders covers its policy making based on the dynamic changes on the pandemic situation and international

**Table 2.** Thematic Analysis Flowchart

relations. Third the findings relating to the advantages and limitation in which indicating framework for assessing various cross-border travel arrangements component being planned and its executing steps being taken in order to reduce social-economic exclusion in the future could be helpful for future tourism of both countries (Table 2).

The qualitative research design is chosen to deepen practical understanding of the impacts and spill over effects of cross-border tourism cooperation to cross-border tourism integration during post pandemic. The analysis is based on empirical observations by capturing significant information and organize it into themes. [12] Following by a process of review, modify and develop the themes into three significant thematic themes. [13] An identification the essence of theme is related to the current body of knowledge of institutionalized cross border tourism collaboration between Indonesia specifically Batam-Bintan and Singapore.

## 5 Findings and Discussion

Restoring the tourism sector is gaining trust through inter-sectoral adaptation, innovation, and collaboration as the tourism industry in all of its dimensions depends on the policy of governments. This industry plays a very important role in the political development

and the expansion of peace, as well as the economic growth and development are the key factors. Considering that the development of tourism is directly under the political decisions of governments, the development of tourism diplomacy and its implementation can lead to the arrival of tourists, employment and economic prosperity, as a result of increased national income, and ultimately the establishment of a stable and guaranteed peace. On the other hand, the combination of linear and transversal factors has led governments to view the tourism phenomenon as an effective leverage in the international relations and to use diplomacy as a strong strategy for expanding tourism industry. [4]

The main task of diplomacy between Indonesia and Singapore is to protect the interests of the country in relations with the other countries and to develop relations with them. In this regard, the neighbours are of utmost importance because the way of establishing relations with them has a profound effect on ensuring national security, political, economic development, and the development of mutual relations. Despite its abundant potentials in the development of tourism, there is also limitation of policies implementation which related to domestic situation in regard of lack of codified and applicable as well as over lapping regulation strategies on countries border setting.

### **5.1 Travel Bubble Scheme Trial for Reopening Borders, Phase of Approach**

Indonesia has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic through the three-phase approach (Table 3).

Since Indonesia announced the Batam-Bintan-Singapore (BB-S) travel bubble on 24 January 2022, the two holiday islands have been busy firming up its safety protocols and adding extra layers of safeguards for each step of a traveller's journey. Comprehensive plan detailed the specifics of the travel bubble, including the zones that have been delineated on each island to cater specifically to tourists, and step-by-step instructions on the travel procedures.

During the interview research with Mr Abdul Wahah, The Group General Manager of Bintan Resort Cakrawala, Bintan Beach International Resort (BBIR) has an in-house lab that can process each arriving guest's mandatory Covid-19 PCR test within an hour. Meanwhile visitors will be transported to their respective resorts as they await their PCR results. There was also an assurance that 98% of its 5,000 staff are fully vaccinated, and the resort and its entire population of employees have been certified under CHSE Indonesia and CovSafeSG. In the circumstance that a positive Covid case is identified among its guests or staff, BBIR has its own quarantine facilities and emergency protocols to contain the virus. [14]

Likewise, for Batam, chairman of Nongsa Sensation, Anddy Fong highlighted the many similar safety precautions that will be undertaken from the start of the visitor's journey to the end, which include securely transporting guests from one resort to the next across Nongsa's extensive grounds. Currently, the BB-S travel bubble arrangement only allows travellers from Singapore to enjoy quarantine-free travel into Batam or Bintan, but they will be subjected to a seven-day stay-home notice (SHN) upon entry back to Singapore[4].

While Singapore has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the three-phase approach Restarting travel and tourism in the region must consider the entire ecosystem

**Table 3.** Indonesia three -phase of approach on re-opening border

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Learning Phase                    | Concepting and implementing several various I government regulations, including the acceleration of vaccination, easing of travel regulations, CHSE program, and open borders without quarantine. Several other steps can be taken to restore the tourism relations and impact of both countries such as private tourism programs during the transition from pandemic to endemic and collaboration with foreign influencers to increase foreign tourists' confidence in Indonesia -Singapore tourism. |
| In trial-and-error learning phase | Once travel bubble scheme executed to wvery travellers that enters under the Batam Bintan -Singapore scheme will be allocated either the BluePass token (for Bintan) or asked to download the PeduliLindungi app (for Batam) that identifies them as a travel bubble tourist. There will also be "border controls" situated along the circumference of the designated zones to prevent cross-contact with others outside of the travel bubble arrangement   |
| Contingency learning phase        | This trial scheme serves as a deterrence in attracting tourists to Batam and Bintan, and believes that the comprehensive set of Covid-19 risk mitigation protocols outlined by the respective hospitality providers in collaboration with the local authorities, can serve to facilitate two-way quarantine-free travel in a safe and calibrated manner.  |

and requires greater focus on health and safety. In this brief, expert-informed recommendations for health-focused interventions involve (i) strengthened management and planning, (ii) enhanced transmission barriers and sanitation, and (iii) well-organized public health screening, all of which require the collaboration and coordination of governments, international organizations, relevant sectors, and stakeholders (Table 4).

Adopting deep convergence policies of Batam-Bintan (Kepulauan Riau-Indonesia) Singapore facilitating and eliminating border controls, adopting the principle of mutual recognition in relation to the standards of products and services of tourism and deregulation of international transportation rules.

## 5.2 Advantages and Limitation of the Re-opening Border Framework

There is a huge requirement to restore traveler confidence and stimulate travel demand, including the development and application of: new health protocols for safe travel information and digital contract tracing apps for visitors, enhanced cleaning and sanitation procedures both in Indonesia and Singapore. Beyond the immediate responses needed, policy makers will need to learn from the lessons of the COVID-19 crisis, to improve crisis management strategies to better prepare destinations and the sector more broadly to respond to future shocks. As the situation evolves, countries are devolving resources to



**Table 4.** Singapore three -phase of approach on Re-opening border

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Learning phase                    | Singapore government has progressively implemented numerous control measures including strict travel bans, contact tracing, “Circuit Breaker,” compulsory mask-wearing, and social distancing policies, along with financial relief to businesses and workers, in a very top-down fashion. Singapore’s case points to an important lesson that learning-driven coordinated strategic approaches matter for effective crisis management in the long term. [9] |
| In trial-and-error learning phase | In new normal phase, Singapore would ease Circuit Breaker gradually with three phased: (1) Phase One (“Safe Re-Opening), (2) Phase Two (“Safe Transition”) and (3) Phase Three (“Safe Nation”). Singapore also provided fast lane to facilitate Chinese travellers to do essential business between both countries. Other than that, only Singapore residents and long-term pass holders was allowed to enter Singapore.                                     |
| Contingency learning phase        | It was said that Singapore would open most tourism business activities to resume operations in this Phase Two with several strictly limitations. This included retail, food, beverage dine-in, personal health and wellness, home-based services, and sport and other public facilities ( All businesses have also to comply with Safe Management Requirements from government. [15]   |

ensure a speedy recovery after the crisis. As recovery plans are being designed, countries identified the following areas as key priorities and challenges (Table 5).

Higher level commitment to restore the tourism sector in both countries ties during the Singapore-Indonesia Leaders’ Retreat as early as January 2022. Prime Minister Lee and President Joko Widodo emphasised the importance of Singapore and Indonesia recovering together from the COVID-19 pandemic. Prime Minister Lee and President Joko Widodo also discussed current travel arrangements, including the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) from Jakarta to Singapore and Indonesia’s decision to resume tourism travel from Singapore to specific resorts in Bintan and Batam. Both sides would discuss further expansion of these arrangements, on a reciprocal basis, taking into account the COVID-19 situation.

Despite the social and economic uncertainty and hardship created by the Covid 19 crisis, Indonesia leader can create strategies to advance its economic and prepare for a strong postcrisis emergence. Limitation of tourism industry in all of its dimensions depends on the policy of governments. This industry plays a very important role in the political development and the expansion of peace, as well as the economic growth and development. Considering that the development of tourism is directly under the political decisions of governments, the development of tourism diplomacy and its implementation can lead to the arrival of tourists, employment and economic prosperity, as a result of increased national income, and ultimately the establishment of a stable and guaranteed

**Table 5.** Key Prioritize and Challenges on Indonesia- Singapore Re-opening border for Tourism

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Strengthened Measurement                       | Facilitating and eliminating border controls, adopting the principle of mutual recognition in relation to the standards of products and services of tourism and deregulation of international transportation rules<br>Tourism industry intersects with the interests of multiple sectors and stakeholders Similarly, measures to accelerate recovery in travel and tourism in the region have required a comprehensive approach—ranging from fiscal and social protection support to the development of global protocols to ensure the health and safety of both travellers and the workforce   |
| Re-thinking the tourism sector                 | The crisis presents an opportunity to rethink the tourism system for a more sustainable and resilient future. Policy intervention will be necessary to address structural problems of the sector, avoid the return to issues of tourism management (e.g. over tourism), and advance key priorities, such as encouraging new business models, embracing digitalisation and promoting connectivity. The latter will be of key importance in an after-crisis scenario where social distancing will be still relevant and tourists will look to less crowded destinations. Sustainability should be a guiding principle in the recovery, also with the aim to limit tourism as a vector of pandemic |
| Rebuilding destinations and the tourism system | Support and recovery measures need to be comprehensive across the sector branches that make up the tourism experience. Accessibility, connectivity and transport should be high on the agenda just as accommodations, restaurants, resorts, events, travel association, travel tech companies, tour operators, and tourism associations. Work to develop strong and dynamic destinations over many years has been wiped out in a fraction of the time, and rebuilding this will be a necessary challenge to support local economies   |
| Innovating and investing in tourism            | Governments need to ensure that the sector will be ready to resume and keep on innovating and transforming. Moreover, investments will be needed to make structural and physical changes to address health requirements and visitors' expectations in the first phase of recovery and in the long term. Some countries have also put in places measures to support innovation in SMEs to ensure stronger long-term economic resilience. Tourism businesses and destinations will also need to adjust their offer to respond to changed travel behaviours.   |

peace which for Indonesia and Singapore relations become significant element in the international relations.

## 6 Conclusion

1. In general, both countries are ready to face the next phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the so-called New Normal phase. Indonesia should follow several regulations, protocols, and guidelines that successfully implemented in neighboring countries in order to excel the recovery from Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it is strongly recommended for the government, especially Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy to collaborate with other ministries and stakeholders to accelerate the regulations, not only for region-specific but also nationwide. It is also advised for all citizens in Indonesia to obey the rules made from government. [10]
2. With the growth of tourism and especially to the neighbouring destination with Singapore after implementation of reopening border and new normal activity, it would be wise for e-commerce and e-business players to prepare some adjustment in their applications. The players have to follow the government regulations so not only travellers could make use of it without worry, but also for the companies and developers to achieve better reputation and revenue.
3. In term of future research, the efficiency of new regulation during pandemic of Covid-19 on ecommerce and e-business can be conducted. It is to measure that the regulation can achieve the targeted performance during this situation. The trial and correction system in the global tourism recovery process will continue, and for this reason, it is necessary to encourage nationally aligned policies and appropriate information dissemination strategies.

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and government relations. The 3<sup>rd</sup> author compiling findings and facts into scrip narration. The authors collectively doing the analysis and interpretation of results and drafting the manuscript preparation. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript. The authors confirm sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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