The International Hospitality and Tourism Student Journal

# An Exploration of Risks and How These Affect the Construction of Travellers' Destination Image of Costa Rica

**Reka Meleg**

*HTMI, Hotel and Tourism Management Institute, Switzerland*

## Abstract

Costa Rica is a small country with a lot of visitors yearly, with the struggle of risks that may affect the image of the country. Every country has a destination image that could have both a negative or positive image on the country, which may cause differentiation between the number of tourists visiting. There is a gap between the answer to the question of why potential tourists may change their minds to travel to Costa Rica. On the other hand, this paper will look at the risk perception of a country, which may once again affect the way tourists choose their destinations. The researcher has conducted semi-structured interviews in order to find out and understand more about how a country's destination image may affect the potential tourists who are planning to visit. The results have shown that Costa Rica is one of the top ecotourism destinations, with practiced sustainability amongst the locals and tourists as well to preserve the country's natural beauty. Potential risks may occur during one's visit to the country, however if one is following the guidelines of the country no major risk can happen. As a result, destination image could possibly change one's destination, since social media also plays an important part in it, nevertheless Costa Rica does not have any major negative image that could result in potential tourist visiting number drops.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *1.1 Background information*

Over the last two decades, the tourism industry has been a fast expanding phenomena in Costa Rica, with a ratio of international tourists per capita of 0.46. (one of the highest rates in the Caribbean basin). As tourism grows, it is obvious that the effects will remain to be a key agent of change, particularly for Costa Rica's smaller towns. "Costa Rica's tropical beaches attract millions of tourists annually; yet increased tourism generates additional waste, threatening the "pristine" environment visitors seek" (Little, 2017). Therefore, this paper focuses on the future risks, moreover the effect on tourists' perspective and how it changes the country's image.

This investigation has demonstrated abundant evidence that the sustainable use of natural resources has been sacrificed in favour of quick and frequently poorly planned tourism-related coastal development. The paper will focus on the importance of the destination image and how it affects the travellers perspective when it comes to choosing a destination. It will also talk about the effectiveness of the "cognitive" and the "affective" images. Following the destination image this paper will consider the risk perception. It will talk about different risk potentials, when travelling, that travellers may not be aware of as well as how risk and hazards have a negative image to one's destination. When it comes to Costa Rica there has been some negative images due to illegal and unmanaged development that has led to fresh water shortages, beach and ocean water contamination, illegal logging of forests and mangroves, and, in certain cases, the restriction of public beaches.

The tourist experience is being ruined by this process, and residents of some coastal

communities are experiencing a degradation in their quality of life. This practice also harms Costa Rica's reputation as a green and sustainable travel destination. (Honey, Vargas & Durham 2010). As reported by the Centre for Responsible Travel, 42% of Costa Rica visitors think about the 'environmental and social' implications of their trip (CREST, 2015). Looking at these factors, the study will focus mainly on the traveller's perception and how it affects their decision to travel to Costa Rica.

### *1.2 Rationale of the study*

There has been research done by Eriksson and Lidström in 2013 investigating how Costa Rican ecotourism tour companies deal with the three pillars of sustainable development. Despite the fact that the situation of Costa Rica is contextual, the research has served as an example of ecotourism tour companies in impoverished nations. Another research focused on understanding younger generations views of the tourism industry (Anglin, 2014), in particular the research focused on adolescents ages 10–16 living in a Costa Rican village to investigate their views of the consequences of "tourism on their culture and community and to better understand the ways in which tourism influences the formation of cultural identity" (Anglin, 2014 p.191-207) Previous research on sustainable tourism has advocated for the promotion of community-based tourism as a method of accomplishing long-term development goals. The research demonstrates how community agency, or the formation of local ties that strengthen people's adaptive capacity within a shared location, enabled economic, social, and environmental sustainability practices. Rivera, J., 2002. Assessing a voluntary environmental initiative in the developing world: The Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism. Policy sciences, 35(4), pp.333-360

This research will investigate coastal tourism in Costa Rica from the traveller's perspective. We have seen some research about it, as have mentioned previously. Since it has been researched by other researchers focusing on the ecotourism in the country, however it was not so specifically focused on the traveller's perspective. As far as the Author's knowledge goes, there has been no research on Costa Rica from a way where researchers see from the critical factors which are affecting travellers perception, therefore this is the reason why the author is doing this research to find out the answer to this question. The questions that the researcher is going to answer is in what ways the coastal tourism in Costa Rica has been viewed from and how it is affecting the travellers perception including the risks and the changes that Costa Rica made in the last few years. The significance of the research question is to make a clear point about the travellers and how the destination image influences tourists. There will be a potential benefit for hotels to understand tourism more and help them understand the possible reasons why travellers may or may not choose Costa Rica as their destination.

### *1.3 Aim and objectives*

The aim of this research is to explore perceptions of risk and how they affect the construction of travellers' destination image of Costa Rica.
In order to achieve this this aim, following research objectives are proposed:

- to investigate the coastal tourism development through the ecotourism of Costa Rica
- an examination of the effect of the travellers on the environmental factors
- to evaluate the risk management of tourist in Costa Rica
- to investigate how Costa Rica's destination image effects the travellers decision in choosing Costa Rica as a tourist destination

### *1.4 Summary of methodology*

The Constructive worldview that was used in this paper will help to understand multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction and theory. The researchers carefully selected each person who would be a part of the sample, therefore in the interviews that were taken. In-depth interviews were anticipated under the presumption that social context is subjective, necessitating the researcher's interaction with the analysis individuals, in order to understand the traveller's perception when it comes to Costa Rica. In Vivo coding allows the researcher to be able to analyse and to understand the individuals throughout the interviews, it is a type of qualitative data analysis that emphasises the participants' real spoken words.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### *2.1 Introduction*

Research on the role and influence of destination image on consumer behaviour, image generation, and destination image scale development are among the topics discussed in destination image studies. On the other hand this research also focuses on the theory of making decisions therefore, the concepts of risk. Then as a result, evidence based evaluation of risk perception, with examples from other researchers through their studies and point of view. Therefore, in this chapter the author focuses on destination image

and risk perception to investigate the critical factors affecting travellers perception of Costa Rica.

### *2.2. Theoretical Background*

#### *2.2.1 Destination Image*

The destination image is defined as "an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination" and is a key component of the destination brand (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 870). According to Crompton (1979) one of the designations for destination image is:'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination'. This refers to a person's mental image of a location based on knowledge and other worldwide impacts. An individual's perception of a tourist destination is influenced by a variety of factors. Its origins might date back to our school period when we studied a country's geography or history. Information gleaned from classmates, family members, or the internet also adds to our overall picture. Also, our perception of a destination is formed by our very own tourist experiences. (Ekinci, 2003, p. 21) Destination image study extends beyond academics and is as relevant to destination marketers (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997). Bigné et al. (2001), consider destination image to be a major factor in comprehending tourists' post-purchase actions. According to Buhalis (2000), a tourist's perception of a location before travelling is a determining feature in his decision-making process. According to some academics, proper image development is key to a destination's overall tourism achievements. Others attribute the relevance of destination image to its influence on supply-side factors, such as brand management variables including positioning and promotion (Tasci and Gartner 2007). On the other hand, the image concept is described as "the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country" (Martin & Eroglu, 1993, p. 193), when we apply it to a country. Country image, according to Nagashima (1970, p. 68), is "the picture, the reputation, the stereotype that businessmen and consumers have of a specific country. This image is created by such variables as representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history, and traditions". Although the study on 'product-country image' and 'tourism destination image' has grown separately, these two categories overlap, according to Nadeau et al. (2008). Both images look at how people perceive places and how that affects their decisions (Nadeau et al., 2008).

Both cognitive and affective aspects of destination image have different focuses, and their effects diversify depending on the conditions. Consumers' observation of the "tourist destination image" tends to highly qualify (Gartner, 1993) because "the image concept is subjective" (Bigné et al., 2001). For instance, Kim, McKercher, and Lee (2009) examine Korean perceptions of Australia at three different time periods, previous period and then the throughout, at final the after visits—and discover that the "affective image" is more than the "cognitive image".

They argue that because "affective images" are to feelings or circumstances on a vacation. "Cognitive images", but on the other hand, usually last a longer time of period because they are defined as the basis of prior learning of a "tourism destination". Furthermore, the "cognitive image" has a strong impact on the affective one (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to Russell (1980), consumers first depend on the information they gain about the "destination environment" before developing an emotional attachment to that destination. According to the author, the cognitive image comes before the affective one (Nizar et al., 2017). In addition San Martin and Rodriguez del Bosque (2008) have looked at cognitive and affective image similarly yet different, previous research addressing the topic of tourism destination image used one of two methods: cognitive or affective. Recent researches suggests that tourists can position tourism destinations on two levels: the cognitive image level, which refers to the destination's reasonable advantages (attributes), and the affective image level, which refers to travellers' emotions to (affective-emotional reactions associated with) the location (Hosany et al., 2006, San Martin and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008). Despite the fact that emotive and cognitive aspects are acknowledged as important components of destination image (e.g., Hosany et al., 2006), many tourism image research primarily focus on the cognitive part and neglect the affective one (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993, Walmsley and Young, 1998). New studies, on the other hand, claim that combining cognitive and emotive factors into account simultaneously leads to a greater grasp of the destination image (Nizar et al., 2017).

#### *2.2.2 Risk Perception*

Risk defined by Rosa (2003) "a situation or an event where something of human value (including humans themselves) is at stake and where the outcome is uncertain". Sjöberg et al. (2004, p.8) describe risk perception as a "subjective assessment of the probability of a

specified type of accident happening and how concerned we are with the consequences". Other researchers described it as "people's beliefs, attitudes, judgments and feelings, as well as the wider social or cultural values and dispositions that people adopt, towards hazards and their benefits" (Pidgeon et al. 1992, p.89).

All are attempting to manage risk, and they are all wondering why they are dealing with risk if they would not even be dealing with risk if they knew in advance (Adams, 1995). Expressed in different words, a negative effect may or may not occur in any particular context, and causative factors skew the chances of different outcomes (Graham and Rhomberg, 1996). The issue with Reisinger and Mavondo's (2005) meaning of perceived risk is that travellers who go on vacation may be unaware of their own evaluation of potential risk; expressed in different words, travellers may not acknowledge the possible outcomes of risk, despite having a general idea of the potentials of risk. Some researchers are beginning to doubt the suitability of risk perception study in the tourism industry, given the developing research trend of risk perception (Yang and Nair, 2014). Risk has been described in different ways, only it is most commonly viewed as the likelihood that an individual will experience the effect of danger (Short Jr, 1984). While it is being discussed, there appears to be agreement on the meaning of risk as consisting of the likelihood of an unwanted outcome and the extent of its consequences. According to Rayner and Cantor (1987), while this description is appropriate for describing risk in engineering analysis, it is quite deceptive at a broader, more difficult level of large-scale societal risk management. All risk concepts share one feature: the difference between reality and possibility.

This view is consistent with the joint prescriptive differentiation amongst hazard and likeability in which hazard resides with and unknown risks, and is conceptually independent of come back, so although likeability connotes with general assessment and choice, and is connected both to risk and to expected return. A number of studies not long ago dispute that a "top-down model of risk perception" often can explain perceptions of risk and bring it back. The "top-down model" is indicative of the fact that a simple emotive response underpins complicated assessments, as well as the widely held belief in philosophy that particular perspectives and verdicts are frequently deduced from a general assessment. (Ganzach et al.,2008) The main verifiable theory of the "top-down model" would be that the connection among "perceived risk" and "perceived" back is negative, despite the connection between there own additional risk and the return, although the climate relation is mainly positive. Alhakami and Slovic (1994) and Fincucane et al. (2000) examined this theory in the sense of the "perception of risk and benefits of advanced technologies", and Ganzach (2000) examined and confirmed this theory in the "context of the perception of risk and return on financial assets". The research adds to the evidence to support this theory.

Given the recent study focus of risk perception, some academics are beginning to doubt the suitability of risk perception studies in the hospitality context (Korstanje, 2009, Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). The definition of perceived risk is ambiguous because various scholars have assigned multiple interpretations to it (Sjöberg, 1980). Odds and potential are two connected but different ideas. The author referred to measurable chances, whereas the after takes the form of fantasy (Korstanje, 2011a). Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) describe risk perceptions as "cognitive probabilities to be exposed to threats and dangers." The real concern with Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) meaning of perceived risk is that travellers that are on vacation may be unaware of their own evaluation of possible risk; expressed in different words, travellers may not realise the possible outcomes of risk, even if they have a general overview of the possible options of risk. As a result, risk perception is formed and redeveloped through narratives. This point of view is based on the idea that risk is a "fluid concept" that can be acted by the performer, who in this case is the traveller. The classification and quantification of perceived risk, as well as the difference among "cognitive perception of risk", hesitancy and the sentimentality ("anxiety, fear, excitement") attached, are not foundational. In contrast, it is an in definition that is important: "how risk perception is constructed and how it influences the actor's life and others in terms of risk taking" (Nair and Yang, 2014).

### *2.3. Empirical Research*

#### *2.3.1 Application Destination*

According to Coombe and Melki (2012, p. 58), "Dubai has built a globally resonant place brand image out of an unknown location in the context of often negative regional associations." The study (Nizar et al., 2017) focuses on Dubai in order to examine the interplay between destination image and destination personality and their effects on visitors' behavioural intentions. In this study, 75% of respondents relate Dubai's image with a "glamorous lifestyle, luxury, and modernity". In addition, Lee and Jain (2009) also identified Dubai as a luxurious city and one of the planet's greatest high class and attractive destinations, giving the exclusive extravagant travel experiences. Despite the claim that, in addition to Dubai's successes as an upscale city, its image is tainted by less attractive traits such as

"labour disputes, sex scandals, and terrorism concerns" (Nizar et al., 2017). As a result, Nizar et al (2017) stated that Dubai seems to be the best choice for testing the study's theories since it developed from an uninhabited town to founding their own commercial and tourism industry centre. Therefore, Dubai's destination image helps to shape the city's personal style (Nizar et al., 2017). It is highly recommended to compound together both negative and positive images in order to generate and confirm a consistent persona for the city of Dubai. Nevertheless, various and brief images, as well as inaccurate images, may inflict some problems in the perception of the area.

Aaker's (1997) BPS, which was originally created to evaluate brand personality in consumer products contexts, had been used to evaluate destination personality in the research. Therefore as outcome, the personality qualities utilised in the research may not represent the entire range of personality traits linked with destinations. Further study might employ qualitative studies where different ways are used such as focus groups or projective approaches to uncover destination-specific personality traits in order to offer a complete picture of the destination personality construct. Lastly, the response rate is limited, with 77 participants belonging to only one group (British respondents). Only as an outcome to that the results can be applied to a larger number of tourists. Given those certain limitations, it appears without question that perhaps the two investigations reported in this study contribute significantly to their "theoretical and empirical" knowledge of the disputed connection among "brand image and brand personality". Additional research in the same ideas could undoubtedly add to the discussion. The research also discovered that visitors' opinions of locations included cognitive, emotional, and personality characteristics. Tourism establishments must design marketing strategies that include all three aspects in order to establish a successful image. As a result, a location's situation might convert into logical benefits (cognitive pictures), like availability and vibrancy. At even a greater scale, locations could express its emotive advantages including friendliness, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and stress relief.

### *2.3.2 Perception of risk*

According to Wachinger and Renn (2010) risk and safety conceptions are supplementary: for instance, investing in risk reduction measures raises public security. Participants were asked to evaluate a set of aspects that could affect their personal well-being on a Likert scale (Wachinger and Renn, 2010). This research indicates that this is not the case (endangered x safety). While risk and its perception are connected to all of the previously mentioned factors, which are "voluntary fire brigades (4.53), provincial civil protection services (4.41), existing protection works (4.14), the home one lives in (4.02), warning systems (3.89), personal experience (3.26), fellow villagers (2.94), information received (2.73)". According to the research, safety is determined by a number of aspects, along with the existence of local firefighters corporations, the effectiveness of public security, the safe destination of one's home and/or type of employment, and the existence of a detection and alert. Therefore, it was shown that there is a difference between feeling safe and feeling endangered, therefore their research has found out and also suggest that emotions are somehow threatened which leads to the relation of to the notional structure of the risk.

As the author mentioned previously the "top-down model", therefore as an example how researchers used it alongside with the risk perception. Therefore, according to the "top-down model of risk perception", there is a mistake in Sitkin and Weingart (1995) extent, which is that perceived risk lies in unreasonably connecting the risk with (un)appeals and thus using things that do not differentiate between "perceived risk" and "perceived return". Ganzach's (2000) studies found a negative association of both "perceived return" and "perceived risk", but a positive connection of actual risk and return. Likewise, recent findings also show that the connection between "perceived return" and "perceived risk", as assessed by Sitkin and Weingart (1995), is negative, yet this association with "standard return" and "actual risk" is close to zero. That being said, in Ganzach's (2000) researches, the deviation is caused by a gap between the associated risk and its comprehension, however in the latest research, there seems to be no disparity amongst the "actual risk and its perceptions", and the discrepancy is caused by a variation amongst risk perception and its quantification by Sitkin and Weingart's (1995) instrument. When making judgments about the effect of financial investments or intending to conceptualise risk perception, well-trained researchers offer 'risk judgments' or build research methods that are inconsequential with basic factors and contention prescriptive hypotheses again about connection between "risk, return, and attractiveness" (Ganzach et al. 2008).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *3.1 Research Design*

This research paper was written through a Constructive worldview by understanding, multiple participant meanings, social and

historical construction and theory. "Constructivism or social constructivism (often combined with interpretivism) is such a perspective, and it is typically seen as an approach to qualitative research" (Creswell, 2014).
This research paper was about an examination if tourism would still exist if the environmental factors were not as ideal as they were before due to the climate and environment changes in Costa Rica. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), inductive analysis is said to begin with a particular field of study and then allow theories to emerge from the data. The objective of an inductive researcher is to infer theoretical ideas and patterns from available facts. Inductive method starts with involving and observing from which goals of exploration, there begins to grow a sense of discovery (Islam, et al., 2022). Therefore, when conducting this research the inductive approach was used, the researcher started with particular measurements before looking for concepts and patterns in the data (Creswell, 2005).
This study was undertaken using a case study design, with data collection through semi-structured interviews. Numerous case studies centre on a problem, with the case (an individual, a group of people, a program, or an event) chosen to get insight on the problem. Additionally, the analysis method in case study research entails a thorough description of the case, the placing of the case within particular factors (Creswell, et al., 2007). Instead of relying on individual stories as in narrative research, case study research uses a variety of data sources to create an in-depth, contextual understanding of the case (Yin, 2003). As Yin (2003) stated, "You would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions — believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (p. 13). " Research project used to demonstrate data analysis – leisure/tourism choice model – in-depth interview transcripts used for illustration" (Veal, 2006).

### *3.2 Sampling*

The term "sampling" refers to the process of choosing cases and data sources "that best help us understand the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 56). As an outcome, the case and undefined data sources contained within the case were sampled.
A non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling or judgmental sampling selected the sample members solely based on the researcher's expertise and judgement.
When choosing a sample using judgmental sampling, the researchers carefully selects each person who would be a part of the sample. Since the sample's participants were not selected at random, the researcher's expertise was crucial to this sampling process.
Choosing specific locations, people, or events on purpose in order to offer crucial information that cannot be learned from other options is known as judgmental or purposive sampling (Maxwell, 1996). The author has chosen the judgmental sampling method, as the author believes that by applying judgement that has led to a more accurate choice of participants and as a consequence more accurate results.

### *3.3 Data collection*

The author has chosen the in-depth interview as a data collection method. The use of in-depth interviews was anticipated under the presumption that social context is subjective, necessitating the researcher's interaction with the analysis units (individuals), which was to be accomplished via conducting in-depth interviews. For the purpose of gathering information about individual experiences and viewpoints, in-depth interviews are essential (Hofisi et al., 2014). Interviews are an activity that involves two individuals to create a connection between both parties. Therefore the author believes, doing interviews best supports the researcher to obtain optimal results.

### *3.3 Data analysis*

This research was using In Vivo coding to be able to analyse and to understand the individuals throughout the interviews. In vivo coding is a type of qualitative data analysis that emphasises the participants' real spoken words. When researchers contact individuals from a certain community or microculture, this type of coding can be very useful in highlighting how all those respondents utilise unique terms or sentences in their conversations that would have not otherwise been noticed when using other types of coding. Several people supported in vivo coding because it highlights the responses of the participants and relies on the individuals directly to provide value to the data (Manning, 2017).
The analysis applied in this study is known as 'contextualised thematic analysis' because it relies on the presentation of statements as scripts in the results (i.e., actual sentences of the respondents) that were linked to quantifiable codes (themes). This technique aimed at resolving worries that qualitative researchers may not be transparent regarding the reasoning for selecting citations to include in reports and raising codes to the rank of construct inside theoretical framework (Baxter & Eyles, 1999).

### *3.4 Ethical issues*

Researchers must protect their participants for the study, build trust with their participants, promote research integrity, protect from misbehaviour and wrongdoing that could reflect

negatively on their organisations or institutions, and deal with new and even difficult situations (Israel & Hay, 2006). It was important to write a consent form, before starting with the interviews, therefore the researcher did inform the interviewee about any possible consequences due to their engagement. According to Creswell (2014) the researcher should not compel individuals to sign an informed consent form while gathering permission for a study. Involvement in a research should always be considered as optional, and the researcher should emphasise in the consent form directions that individuals could choose not to partake.

### *3.5 Limitations*

The limitations of this paper relies mainly on the limited number of interviews that were conducted, however when reaching out to potential interviewees and contacting them, some have refused and kindly declined, some due to time differences did not participate. Therefore, the interviewee options were limited to conduct. On the other hand, there may be concern raised that the interviewer may intentionally or unintentionally, bias an interview with their own opinions about a specific subject or event and that bias affects what is extracted from the interview. Other important aspects can be taken into consideration are related interview qualities, such as different interview styles or settings that can lead to significantly different results.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The aim of this study was to explore perceptions of risk and how they affect the construction of travellers' destination image when it comes to Costa Rica. This chapter provides an overview of the analysis of findings, with the structure of four segments that aligns with the objective of the paper. These four core elements are: Coastal tourism development through the ecotourism of Costa Rica, The effect of the travellers on the environmental factors, The risk management of tourists in Costa Rica, Costa Rica's destination image effects the travellers decision in choosing Costa Rica as a tourist destination.

### *4.1 Coastal tourism development through the ecotourism of Costa Rica*

In this section, the researcher was hoping to find out more about the eco-tourism segment of Costa Rica, when asking the participants. Participant 2 said about sustainability in the country that "Focus On Sustainable Agriculture, Ecotourism, And Renewable Energy" and that the "Carbon Neutrality And Has Been Recognized Globally For Its Environmental Initiatives".

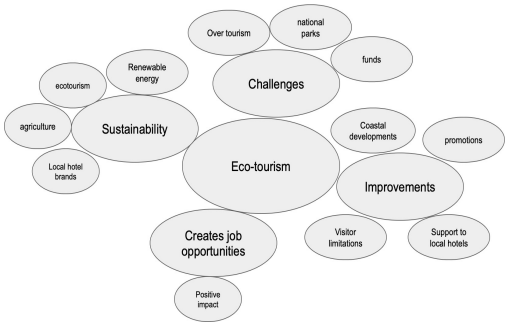


**Figure 1**: Mind map about Ecotourism in Costa Rica

As it can be seen from figure 1 many possibilities were mentioned among the participants for ecotourism practices in the country. Ecotourism is also serving locals, with creating more job opportunities for them, however the country still needs improvement in those sectors to provide and support the local hotels and restaurants instead of chain brands. The fact that tourists who travel there can also see that there is room for improvements in order to make the country more sustainability friendly, may raise some concerns that the hotels and the restaurants that may plan to open there have to take into account. As Participant 1 said "companies are not interested in the ecosystem, they just want to develop something on their own, you know too, for their own benefits", however there are many sustainable conscious traveller, that these hotel who may not care for the environment of the country could possibly lose potential customers, if serious sustainable practices are not made in their company.

### *4.2 The effect of the travellers on the environmental factors*

In this section the researcher has aimed to find out if the participants agree that Costa Rica is one of the main ecotourist destinations, as all participants have agreed that the country does live up to these promises. Participant 3 said that "I think that does live up to its standard", however Participant 1 even mentions that "they really care about nature and the environment" and that they "protect these environments".
When Participant 2 was asked about how Costa Rica attempts to keep their natural environment protected, it was thoroughly answered by saying "Costa Rica is a global leader in environmental protection and sustainable development. Its dedication to renewable energy, protected areas, and biodiversity conservation sets a strong example for other nations. The country has integrated eco-tourism and sustainability into its economy, demonstrating that environmental

protection can go hand in hand with economic growth." Therefore, the country is living up to its potential to be one of the leading ecotourism countries in the world.

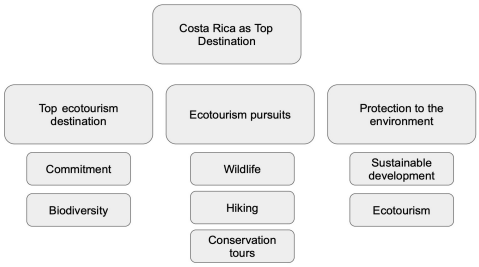


**Figure 2:** Costa Rica as Top Destination

Participants have mentioned that they have mostly taken part in some ecotourism activities, such as wildlife, hiking or conservation tours.
During these tours there are some actions taken to help keep the environment clean and to have the least amount of disturbance to the animals around these areas, such as signs that advice the tourists what can or cannot be done, as well as in the forests and hiking areas, trash cans and rehydrating points can be found.

*4.3 The risk management of tourists in Costa Rica*

In this section, the main questions were about risk and risk perception in Costa Rica. The participants were asked if they have experienced any risks and what potential risks can a tourist face when visiting Costa Rica, and if the authorities are playing any role in order to protect these tourists or raise any awareness that may happen to them during their stay.

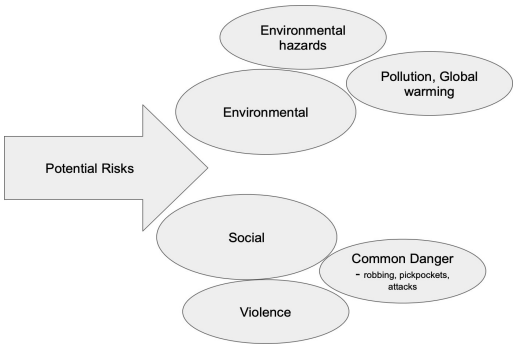


**Figure 3:** Risks and Risk perception

When Participant 2 was asked about potential risks in Costa Rica, it was answered that "Present risk management techniques in Costa Rica have been moderately successful in ensuring tourist safety, though there is room for improvement. Authorities have implemented various measures, such as lifeguards on popular beaches, warning signs for rip currents, and public education campaigns to address natural hazards." However, most if not all participants have mentioned that tourists need to be aware when travelling to Costa Rica or in fact any other Latin American country that these places are completely different from for example Europe, they need to be aware these are different cultures and as a tourist they need to act accordingly. Participant 1 has mentioned that "for example, it's not really safe to walk around the neighbourhood after 11pm, or there are some places where you shouldn't really go - it's not normal for us europeans."

*4.4 Costa Rica's destination image effects the travellers decision in choosing Costa Rica as a tourist destination*

When it comes to destination image, it may be different for some people. Positive images can be changed easily, however if a negative image may occur for a country that could be hard to change and may take a long time to do so. However, according to the participants Costa Rica doesn't have much negative image, even if some negative image could be it is mostly among the locals and does not affect the tourists. According to Participant 1 "it's just really as what you expect".

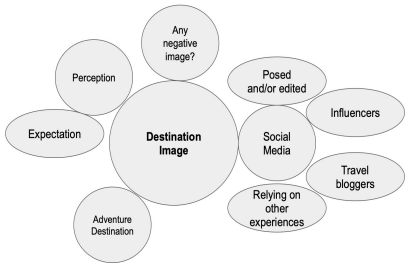


**Figure 4:** Destination Image

It can be seen in Figure 4, that nowadays Social Media platforms have a huge impact on the tourism industry and on the destination image of a country as well. Advantage for these platforms can be that potential customers and tourists could be reached and pursued in an easier way, however negative images could spread faster to the tourists as well. According to Participant 3 "before social media was more of a jungle destination for like biologists and scientists and a more educated group of people if I dare to say that".
Participant 2 said that "many people today choose travel destinations based on their perception of

the destination, and social media plays a significant role in shaping these images".

**Chapter 5: Discussion**

In this chapter the author discusses the objectives of the study, therefore to first mention the four objectives of this study that are also stated previously. Firstly, to investigate the coastal tourism development through the ecotourism of Costa Rica, then an examination of the effect of the travellers on the environmental factors, and to evaluate the risk management of tourists in Costa Rica, lastly to to investigate how Costa Rica's destination image effects the travellers decision in choosing Costa Rica as a tourist destination.
The author also provided an overview of the objectives of this study through the Application destination and Perception of risk. The recent studies on destination image where the key aim was to investigate the effects of destination image and attitude, as well as their possible connection; future research, however, can understand the importance of the precursors of travellers' behavioural intentions (Nizar et al., 2017).
As follows with the Risk and risk perception are highly multidisciplinary notions with radical meanings in several fields. The research examined significant findings and questioned individual ideas and methodologies to demonstrate their benefits and limits (Bodemer and Gaissmaier, 2015). The authors hope that the outcome of this study will answer the questions on how it is possible to change the travellers perception of Costa Rica as a tourist destination, and if it is possible to change is it going to lead more to the negative or to the positive side. As the results of the finding showed from the participants that Costa Rica's image has been affected by social media and other platforms, however there was no negative image mentioned in the answers. The investigation of coastal tourism will be heavily based on the facts that Costa Rica is relying on their natural resources when it comes to tourism, this will be supported by Costa Rica's destination image. However, the country has been taking sustainable actions in order to preserve its natural environment and animal habitats. The most important of this study and the outcome will be on how the travellers actually see and how heavily they are affected by the environmental factors, when choosing Costa Rica as their destination. Supporting this statement with the research done at the literature review section talking about the destination image. Bigné et al. (2001) believe that destination image is an important aspect in understanding tourists' post-purchase activities. As shown in section 4.2, according to the answers from the participants most of them have participated in such ecotourism pursuits, which shows us that travellers are interested in these activities and will take the time to participate in them. According to Buhalis (2000), a tourist's pre-travel assessment of a site is a decisive factor in his decision-making process. Furthermore, the decision to travel to the chosen destination and participate in these activities will be born when choosing a destination, which could be changed by the destination image of the country.
Furthermore, evaluating the risk perception of tourists in the case of this destination. Supporting the statement about the risk and its perception, the author's has done research about the challenge with Reisinger and Mavondo's (2005) definition of perceived risk is that vacationers may be unaware of their own evaluation of potential risk; in other words, travellers may fail to recognize the possible outcomes of risk, despite having a general understanding of risk. Given the expanding research trend of risk perception, some academics are beginning to question the usefulness of risk perception studies in the tourist business (Yang and Nair, 2014). As a result of the findings, the researcher has found that there are no high risks that tourists need to take into consideration before travelling there, however there should be educational actions taken prior to arriving, in order to understand the culture and the natural environment of the country.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This paper has searched to understand how travellers' perception may be affected by risk and the destination image of Costa Rica. The main objectives of this research was to investigate the coastal tourism developments through the ecotourism in the country, with the evaluation of the risk management of tourists.
In order to find the answer to these objectives, interviews were conducted. It was found that all in all Costa Rica is a growing tourist destination, where the local communities and tourism industries attempt to preserve the country's natural beauty and animal habitats. The country is still improving however, major actions were taken into account already and have been practiced for years. Risks could paint a negative picture to the country, since there isn't necessarily any 'extra' protection for tourists.
Findings have shown that there are several key objectives to be able to understand these questions and answers that were given. The author believes that so as to understand these cultures tourists need to take action to educate themselves before travelling there, in order to follow their ecotourism and sustainable lifestyle. Firstly, it needs to be realized that Costa Rica is still one of the safest countries among Latin America, and that there may be some tourists who may change their mind about their decision to travel there due to a negative image of the destination. However Costa Rica is still one of the

most popular destinations to visit, and the visitor numbers are rising, therefore in the future a possible over-tourism may occur as well.

Furthermore, this study has shown that Costa Rica needs to be protected from the natural risks that we as people do not have any control over. It needs to be acknowledged that our human food-prints are heavily affected in these areas especially.

Finally, the author encourages us to find out more information about the ecotourism practices in Costa Rica, and to understand it more clearly to conduct more interviews of people who have been there or have been living there. For the future, it is suggested that additional research may be implemented, such as data collection through collective data, or it could be suggested to implement a different approach. One's destination image may change effectively with social media nowadays, therefore it is suggested that a research is conducted focusing on how this may change the decision of travellers in the future.

**References:**


Alhakami,A., & Slovic,P., (1994) A psychological study of the inverse relationship between perceived risk and perceived benefit. Risk Analysis, 14, 1085–1096.

Asli,D.,A., William,T., Gartner,C., (2007) Destination Image and Its Functional Relationships. Journal of Travel Research, 413-146 Anglin,E.,A., (2015) Voices from Costa Rica: exploring youth perceptions of tourism and the influence of tourism on identity formation and cultural change. Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, 13(3), 191-207

Baloglu,S., McCleary,W.,K., (1999) A Model Of Destination Image formation. Annals of Tourism Research, 26 (4), 868-897.

Baxter, J. and Eyles, J., (1999) The utility of in-depth interviews for studying the meaning of environmental risk. The Professional Geographer, 51(2), pp.307-320.

Bigné,J.,E., Sánchez,M.,I., Sánchez,J., (2001) Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchase behavior: Interrelationship Tourism Management. 22 (6), 607-616.

Bodemer,N., and Gaissmaier,W., (2015) Risk Perception. The Sage handbook of risk communication

Buhalis,D., (2000) Marketing the competitive destination of the future.
Tourism Management, 21(1), 97-116. Crompton (1979) as cited in Jenkins (1999).
CREST, Center for Responsible Tourism,(2015) The Case for Responsible Tourism: Trends and Statistics.
Creswell.W.,J., (2014) Research design : qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. 4th ed.

Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D., (2005) Mixed methods research:

Developments, debates, and dilemmas. Research in organizations: Foundations and methods of inquiry, 2, pp.315-326.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007) Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. The counseling psychologist, 35(2), 236-264.
Corbin , J. & Strauss , A., (2008) Basics of qualitative research : Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory ( 3rd ed .
) Thousand Oaks , CA : Sage.

Coombe,W., Melki,J., (2012) Global media and brand Dubai Place Branding and Public Diplomacy. 8 (1), pp. 58-71

Echtner,C., Ritchie,J., (1993) The measurement of destination image: An empirical assessment Journal of Travel Research 31 (4), pp. 3-13
Ekinci,Y., (2003) From destination image to destination branding: An emerging area of research e-Review of Tourism Research (eRTR), Vol. 1, No.2,

Eriksson, F. and Lidström, M., (2013) Sustainable development in ecotourism: Tour operators managing the economic, social and environmental concerns of sustainable development in Costa Rica

Finucane, M. L., Alhakami, A., Slovic, P. & Johnson, S. M., (2000) The effect heuristic in judgement of risks and benefits. Journal of Behavioural Decision Making, 13, 1–17.

Ganzach,Y., Ellis, S., Pazy, A., and Ricci-Siag T., (2008) On the perception and operationalization of risk perception. Judgement and Decision Making,3(4), 317–324

Ganzach, Y., (2000) Judging risk and return of financial assets. Organisational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 83, 353–370.

Grey,J.,N., & Campbell,L.,M (2007) A Decommodified Experience? Exploring Aesthetic, Economic and Ethical Values for Volunteer Ecotourism in Costa Rica. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 15(5), 463-482.

Hofisi, C., Hofisi, M. and Mago, S., (2014) Critiquing interviewing as a data collection method. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5(16), p.60.

Hosany,S., Ekinci,Y., Uysal,M., (2006) Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places Journal of Business Research. 59 (5), pp. 638-642

Hosany,S., Ekinsi,Y., Uysal,M., (2007) Destination image and destination personality. International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research.

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006) Research ethics for social scientists: Between ethical conduct and regulatory compliance. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Islam, M.R., Khan, N.A. and Baikady, R. eds., 2022. Principles of social research methodology. Springer Nature.

Korstanje, M. E., (2011a) The fear of traveling: a new perspective for tourism and hospitality. Anatolia, 22(2), 222-233.

Lee,H.,J., and Jain,D., (2009) Dubai's brand assessment success and failure in brand management Place Branding and Public Diplomacy. 5 (3), pp. 234-246

Little, M.E., 2017. Innovative recycling solutions to waste management challenges in Costa Rican tourism communities. Journal of Environmental and Tourism Analyses, 5(1), pp.33-52.

Manning, J. (2017). In vivo coding. In Matthes, J. (Ed.), The international encyclopaedia of communication research methods. New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0270

Martin,I.,M., Eroglu,S., (1993) Measuring a multi-dimensional construct: Country image. Journal of Business Research, 28 (3), 191-210.

Maxwell, J. A., (1996) Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach London, Applied Social Research Methods Series.

Nagashima,A., (1970) A Comparison of Japanese and U.S. Attitudes toward Foreign Products. Journal of Marketing, 34(1), 68-74.

Nadeau,J., Heslop,L., O'Reilly,N., and Luk,P., (2008) Destination In A Country image Context. Annals of Tourism Research, 35(1), 84-106.

Nizar,S.,Ph.D., Ladhari,R.,Ph..D., Chiadmi,E.,N.,Ph.D., (2017) Destination personality and destination image. Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management vol. 32, 54-70.

Pidgeon,N.,F., Hood,C., Jones,D., Turner,B., & Gibson,R., (1992) In Risk analysis, percep- tion and management: Report of a Royal Society study group (pp. 89–134). London, England: Royal Society.

Rayner,S., and Cantor,R., (1987) How fair is safe enough? The cultural approach to societal technology choice. Risk Anal, 7, 3-9.

Reisinger,Y., & Mavondo, F. (2005) Travel anxiety and intentions to travel internationally: implications of travel risk perception. Journal of Travel Research, 43(3), 212-225.

Rivera, J., 2002. Assessing a voluntary environmental initiative in the developing world: The Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism. Policy sciences, 35(4), pp.333-360.

San Martin,H., Rodríguez del Bosque,I.,A., (2008) Exploring the cognitive-affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formation Tourism Management. 29 (2), pp. 263-277.

Sitkin, S. B. & Weingart, L. R. (1995) Determinants of risky decision making behavior: A test of the mediating role of risk perceptions and propensity. Academy of Management Journal, 38, 1573–1592.

Sjöberg, L. (1980) The risks of risk analysis. Acta Psychologica, 45(1–3), 301-321.

Sjöberg,L., Moen,B.,-E., & Rundmo,T., (2004) Explaining risk perception: An evaluation of the psychometric paradigm in risk perception research. Trondheim, Norway: Rotunde.

Short Jr,J.,F., (1984) The social fabric of risk: towards the social transformation of risk analysis. Am. Sociol. Rev., 49(Dec.), 711-725.

Stake, R. E. (1995) The art of case study research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research (2nd ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.

Veal, (2006) Research Methods for Leisure and Tourism, 3rd edition © Pearson Education Limited

Wachinger,G., Renn, O., (2010) Risk perception and natural hazards CapHaz-Net WP3 Report. DIALOGIK Non-Profit Institute for Communication and Cooperative Research, Stuttgart (available at: http://caphaz-net.org/outcomes-results/CapHaz-Net_WP3_Risk-Percep ti on.p)

Walmsley,D., Young,M., (1998) Evaluative images and tourism: The use of personal constructs to describe the structure of destination image Journal of Travel Research. 36 (3), 65-69

Yang,L.,C., Nair,V., (2014) Risk perception study in tourism: Are we really measuring perceived risk?. Social and Behavioral Sciences, 144, 322 – 327

Yin, R. K. (2003) Case study research: Design and methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA:Sage