

TRAVEL BUBBLE POLICY IN INDONESIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has hurt the world economy. Indonesia's tourism industry was the most affected by the air travel restrictions policy during the COVID-19 era. After the first wave of COVID-19 moved slowly, several countries began to think about recovering their economy through travel arrangements. The term travel bubble is increasingly popular to revive the economy through cooperation in the tourism sector between countries. Indonesia has launched a travel bubble arrangement in Batam and Bintan with Singapore in January 2022. This study analyzes the opportunities and challenges of the Travel Bubble policy in Indonesia. Data collection techniques used secondary data such as documentation and literature study. Data analysis was carried out in three stages: condensing data, displaying data, verifying data, and drawing conclusions. The results of this study are opportunities and challenges related to applying the travel bubble in Indonesia. The opportunities are (1) the travel bubble able to increase tourism activities, (2) the travel bubble has had success in island-based countries, (3) the travel bubble procedure is suitable to be tested and adopted, and (4) momentum for cooperation with neighboring countries. The challenges are (1) public sentiment related to the increase in COVID-19 cases, (2) there is travel anxiety to travel to Indonesia rank in the transmission of COVID-19 cases, (3) the opinion of epidemiologists regarding the variants and waves of COVID-19, and (4) the difficulty of collaborating with neighboring countries.

Keywords: travel bubble, tourism, tourists, economic recovery, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected the social, economic, and welfare of humankind in all countries (Simatupang & Ismanto, 2021). Tourism is one of the most affected sectors (Sharun et al., 2021). Air travel restrictions caused foreign travelers in 2020 to decrease by 60-80% (UNWTO, 2020). There are at least 75 million jobs in the world tourism sector, and there is a risk of losing a turnover of more than US\$2.1 trillion (WTTC, 2020).

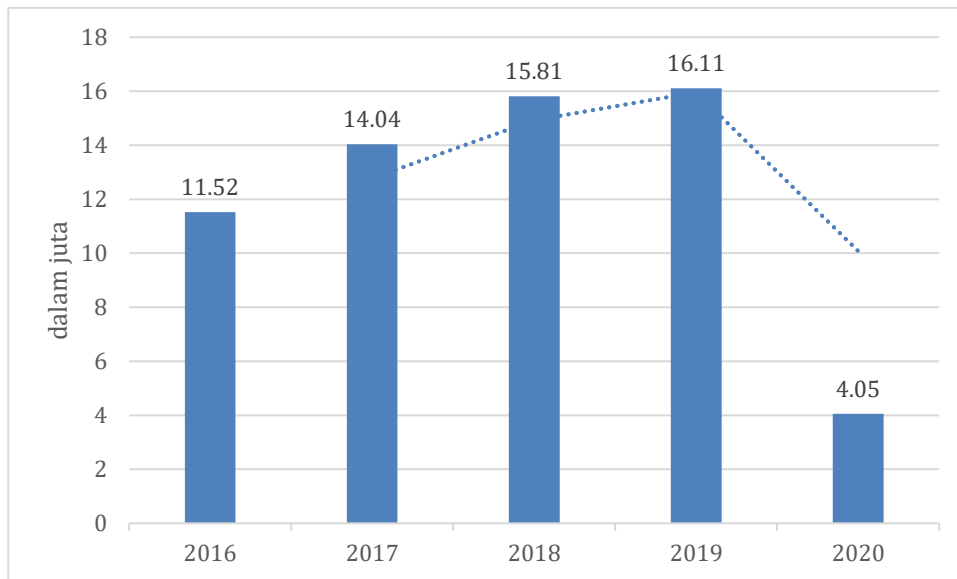


Figure 1. Foreign Travelers Arrivals in Indonesia 2016 - 2020

(Source: Kemenparekraf, 2021)

Figure 1 shows that Indonesia also lost 74.84% of foreign tourist arrivals, or around 12.06 million, from 2019 to 2020 (Kemenparekraf, 2021), whereas since 2016, tourist visits have shown an increase every year. This led to a decline in the contribution of tourism to GDP at 4.05% in 2020 and was followed by a large number of the tourism industry experiencing a slump (Paramita & Putra, 2020).

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates that the COVID-19 recovery will take a long time with high uncertainty, so international travel restrictions are no longer considered the best solution (Sun et al., 2022). The survey results also show that 60% of tourists think the air travel restriction policy lasts too long, and 75% of tourists believe that they feel suffering and stressed because of this travel restriction policy (IATA, 2021b). Some countries are starting to open their travel arrangements to recover their economies (Sharun et al., 2021). The term travel bubble is increasingly popular to revive the economy through cooperation in the tourism sector between countries (Sugihamretha, 2020). This policy is an alternative for countries in the world because the travel bubble is considered a solution for inter-regional travel, and the pandemic is expected to last a long time (Luo & Lam, 2020).

Some of the countries that have implemented this policy are Estonia – Latvia – Lithuania as the pioneers, then Australia – New Zealand, China – the Republic of Palau, Malaysia – with several countries, and India - the Maldives. Applying the travel bubble in several countries is considered to bring in foreign tourists, so this policy is a breath of fresh air for countries that have a tourism attraction to reorganize their tourism industry (Sharun et al., 2021). This policy tries to travel between countries with strict health protocols without quarantine to attract foreign tourists while traveling. The Malaysian government recorded a tourism revenue of RM 24.9 million or around 85 billion during the trial period of the travel bubble (*The*

Malaysian Reserve, 2022), with a total visit of almost 250,000 travelers. Gu et al. (2021) also show that the travel bubble strategy is the most effective way to attract foreign tourists to the Maldives compared to social distancing and tax incentives for business actors.

Indonesia, as a country that has the best tourist destinations, also has the opportunity to recover its economy, considering that Indonesia is the most beautiful country in the world (Haqqi, 2022). In the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024, the government sets ten priority tourism destinations known as the "new Bali" (Peraturan Presiden Nomor 18 Tahun 2020 Tentang Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional 2020-2024, 2020). This "new Bali" can provide economic benefits for the people in the area (Pambudi et al., 2020). Research from Chusakul & Nonthapot (2020) found that Thailand and Laos tourism are integrated and can implement a travel bubble because foreign tourists visiting Thailand, on average, will also visit Laos and vice versa. Therefore, the travel bubble can be one of the policies that the Indonesian government can adopt to bring in foreign tourists to restore the economy of the tourism sector by opening routes or limiting travel access.

By looking at the above phenomena, researchers are interested in researching the opportunities and challenges of the travel bubble policy for economic recovery in Indonesia. Studies with the theme of travel bubbles are rarely found because the number still needs to be increased (Table 1). The table below found that only one nationally indexed journal and six globally indexed international journals researched the travel bubble.

Topic	Author
Travel Bubbles in Air Transportation: Myth or Reality?	(Sun et al., 2022)
Is the travel bubble under COVID-19 a feasible idea or not?	(Yu et al., 2021)
Travel bubble policy supporting between Thailand and Laos: Evidence from tourist market integration testing	(Chusakul & Nonthapot, 2020)
Limited tourism: travel bubbles for a sustainable future	(Fusté-Forné & Michael, 2021)
International travel during the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications and risks associated with 'travel bubbles'	(Sharun et al., 2021)
Travel anxiety, risk attitude and travel intentions towards "travel bubble" destinations in Hong Kong: Effect of the fear of COVID-19	(Luo & Lam, 2020)
Covid-19 Policy Response: Revitalizing the Indonesian Economy by Opening the Travel Bubble and Intra-Indonesia Corridor	(Sugihamretha, 2020)

Table 1. Previous research about the Travel bubble

(Source: data processed by author)

This research aims to see how the travel bubble concept is developed and what opportunities and challenges will be faced with the travel bubble policy in Indonesia. This paper will contribute to stakeholders implementing travel bubble policies, such as the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Local Government, and Tourism Managers. It also will give more insight into public policy study, especially on how the government adopts a policy based on opportunity and challenge aspects.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Data collection techniques use secondary data, namely library research, such as books, scientific journals, proceedings, official reports, mass media, and other documents relevant to the research theme. Then the data analysis technique is carried out through 3 stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Condensing data begins with selecting, focusing, and simplifying information from books, scientific journals, reports, and news relevant to the travel bubble. Next, to display the data, this stage helps the author to understand what information is related to the opportunities and challenges of the travel bubble policy in Indonesia. Then verify the data and compare one source with other data sources. This research was conducted from January to March 2022.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Travel Bubble Concept

According to IATA (2021), a travel bubble can be defined as a state-level agreement that enables international air travel between two countries by reducing the restrictions or conditions compared to those that apply to travel from and to other non-travel bubble countries. This policy started with the opening international flights to accommodate business and tourism destinations between countries with specific travel rules. Then Sugihamretha (2020) defines the travel bubble as a response to international travel restrictions in the form of travel rules between countries that have agreed to it in the context of economic recovery. The same thing was said by Yu et al. (2021H), that the travel bubble is the implementation of conditional tourism activities, namely the control of cases and mutual trust between countries regarding quarantine. The International Organization for Migration/IOM (2020) added that the travel bubble allows individuals to visit a country freely without the prerequisites of quarantine upon arrival. So, it can be concluded that the travel bubble is a concept of international travel rules without quarantine carried out between countries with certain conditions, such as cases between countries being mutually controlled in the context of economic recovery as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A travel bubble offers tourists who visit without the need to quarantine (ANZ, 2021), considering that quarantine has been one of the inhibiting factors for international travel (Yang et al., 2021). Taiwan – Palau travel bubble, Trans –

Tasman bubble, and Langkawi International Travel Bubble have implemented a quarantine-free policy with several requirements, namely foreign tourists have taken the second or complete dose of vaccine, RT PCR results or foreign tourists' antigens are declared negative for COVID-19 before departure, and not tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days (CDC, 2021; Covid19, 2021; MOTAC, 2022). Some of the above requirements must be owned by foreign tourists to prevent an increase in the transmission of COVID-19. This means that this policy considers the health aspect of economic recovery activities to reduce the risk of new clusters or imported cases.

Several countries that have implemented a travel bubble are geographically similar. Among them are island-based regions, such as the Palau Islands - Taiwan, Langkawi Island - several countries, Tasman Island - New Zealand, Fiji Island - Australia, and Maldives - India. (Reksa et al., 2021). The archipelagic region is classified as the most economically affected because the area is very dependent on tourism (Gu et al., 2021). Even though the archipelago is the most affected area, its geographical condition has the potential to apply the travel bubble policy. This is because this area has a small scale so that the mobility of foreign tourists can later be adequately controlled. This is in line with the opinion of Taufan Rahmadi, a tourism activist, that the travel bubble is more likely to be carried out in island tourist destinations, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Republic of Palau, and Langkawi, Malaysia (Metrotvnews, 2022).

Travel Bubble in Tourism Recovery

The country's economy is getting weaker while the COVID-19 pandemic is still going on for a long time, and it is not sure when it will end (Moti & Goon, 2020; Luo & Lam, 2020). Communities whose livelihoods depend on tourism, such as the creative economy, local transportation, and the provision of accommodation, food and drink, and trade, are particularly hard hit (Pambudi et al., 2020). Current international travel restrictions cannot be a permanent solution (Sun et al., 2022). Therefore, governments in several countries have begun to open travel arrangements to restore the economy, considering that a good economy can be sourced from an increase in people's income. (Sharun et al., 2021; Mankiw, 2015). Economic growth and tourism also have an interdependent relationship in some European countries where tourism stimulates economic growth (Dogru & Bulut, 2018).

Langkawi International Travel Bubble, Malaysia, is one of the successful bubble travel destinations. The Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture of Malaysia recorded more than 720,000 arrivals of domestic and foreign visitors during the opening of the travel bubble and incised tourism revenue of RM 24.9 million or around IDR 85 billion (The Star, 2022). The hotel occupancy rate also increased by 40% on weekdays and 90% on weekends (The Malaysian Reserve, 2022). This policy is the right decision, considering that 90% or around 106,200 of the 118,000

population directly benefit from being involved in the tourism industry, such as culinary and transportation (The Malaysian Reserve, 2022). The Baltic bubble in Lithuania received nearly 62,000 tourists from Latvia and Estonia (Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021.) This policy dramatically helps the accommodation, culinary, and other sectors by opening up business opportunities and being an example of good regional cooperation. The Republic of Palau also stated that the travel bubble in the country was successful, with the arrival of 300 foreign tourists since the start of the trip (ABC, 2021).

Opportunities Travel Bubble in Indonesia

The Indonesian government started implementing the travel bubble on January 24, 2022, in Nongsa Batam and Lagoi Bintan with Singapore (Bisnis, 2022). Although this policy has just been tested, the author tries to analyze the opportunities and challenges of the travel bubble in Indonesia by looking at the dynamics of implementing the travel bubble in various countries.

First, this research found that the travel bubble is the best alternative for a country whose economy depends on tourism. This can be observed in several countries implementing the travel bubble and generating tourism activities such as foreign tourist visits and hotel occupancy rates (Table 2). Since its opening, last November 2021, Langkawi International Travel Bubble (LITB) Malaysia has reached more than 5.000 foreign tourists from 99 countries, including Indonesia (Chairunnisa, 2022; Ling, 2022). The PM of Malaysia also said that the travel bubble in Langkawi had generated over RM28 Million in revenue for Langkawi's economy. It was signed by hotel occupancy rates reaching 80%, especially on the weekend (Singh, 2021). In addition, other tourism activities, such as culinary and car rental, are also starting to increase in transactions (The Malaysian Reserve, 2022). It means more for people in Langkawi because most of their economy depends on tourism activity. Since its implementation, no new cluster has happened in LITB travelers (Ling, 2022). The Baltic bubble in Lithuania received nearly 62,000 tourists from Latvia and Estonia. This policy dramatically helps the accommodation, culinary, and other sectors by opening up business opportunities and being an example of good regional cooperation (Palkova & Bukovskis, 2022). The Republic of Palau also stated that the travel bubble in the country was successful, with 287 foreign tourists arriving and 113 domestic arrivals within one month from the start of the trip (ABC, 2021). Based on the table below, Thailand Sandbox Scheme has generated more than IDR 20 billion in local revenue since it launched in July 2021 and 400,000 foreign and domestic tourists (Chuenniran, 2022). This policy also created jobs and generated income for people at the grassroots level (Zhu & Yasami, 2022).

Country	Visitors	Revenue	Cluster
Malaysia	5,000 foreign tourism	IDR 85 billion	No new cluster occurred
Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania	62,000 tourists	-	No new cluster occurred.
Palau	278 foreign tourists 113 domestic tourists	-	Open-closed policy
Thailand	400,000 foreign and domestic tourists	IDR 20 billion	-

Table 2. Travel Bubble Policy in Many Country

(Source: data processed by author)

Tourism data shows that the growth of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia is increasing yearly (Figure 1), with an average gain of 11.77% (2016-2019) per year. The highest number of visits was 16.11 million visits in 2019, and most of them were foreign tourists from Malaysia, Singapore, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Air/airport entrances are also the most extensive route for foreign tourists to come to Indonesia, which decreased by 82.58% in 2020. Looking at this data, the travel bubble can be seen as an effective strategy for recovering tourism activities. This is in line with the opinion of Dogru & Sirakaya-Turk, (2017), which states that tourism supports socio-economic development by stimulating job creation, lowering unemployment, and generating taxes. Reopening international travel by land, sea, and air will encourage foreign tourists who want to travel to Indonesia. The arrival of foreign tourists will also increase hotel occupancy in tourist areas visitors have deserted. Tourism activities such as culinary, creative economy, and accommodation will also have a positive impact. This can be seen by applying the travel bubble on Langkawi Island, Malaysia, which revived tourism activities.

Second, the travel bubble has succeeded in island-based countries, such as the Maldives, the Republic of Palau, and Fiji. This island region is identical to its coastal and underwater tourism potential. It is highly dependent on tourism (Gu et al., 2021), so the territory of Indonesia, which is famous for its beautiful and exotic beaches, has the potential to become a travel bubble destination. In addition, the archipelago has a limited area. It is surrounded by the sea, making it easier for the government or tourism managers to control the mobility of foreign tourists.

Considering that this condition is similar to Indonesia's geography, this could be Indonesia's opportunity to implement a travel bubble in several island-based tourist destinations that are a priority for the Indonesian government, such as:

1. Batam and Bintan, Province of Riau Islands, which has been running for two months, are some destinations that can be attractive are Nongsa and Lagoi. To get

- to Batam, you can use air or sea transportation. However, tourists can use sea transportation at the Port of Sri Bintan Pura to get to Bintan.
2. Tanjung Kelayang, Province of Bangka Belitung Islands. This marine tourism destination can be visited via sea transportation, namely Tanjung Pandan port and H. AS Airport. Hananjoeddin (kek.go.id, 2021).
 3. Seribu Island, Capital Region of Jakarta. This region has a series of islands with charms, such as Tidung Island, Pari Island, Pramuka Island, Harapan Island, and others. To reach a thousand islands, you can use sea transportation from Jakarta (pulauseribu.co.id, n.d.).
 4. Derawan Islands, Province of East Kalimantan. This archipelago has at least four controlled islands: Maratua, Derawan, Sangalaki, and Kakaban. To get to this destination, you can use sea transportation from Balikpapan or Samarinda (kalimprov.go.id, 2017).
 5. Wakatobi, Province of Southeast Sulawesi. Destinasi ini adalah akronim dari empat pulau, yaitu Wangi-wangi, Kaledupa, Tomia, dan Binongko. Tourists can visit this location by sea at Panggulubelo port (maritim.go.id, 2017).
 6. Morotai Island, Province of North Maluku. This area has a geostrategic advantage, namely the outermost island on the northeastern side of Indonesia, which is close to ASEAN and East Asian countries. In addition to the benefits of marine tourism and beautiful beaches, Morotai is a historical place as one of the military bases of World War II. Access to this island can use sea transportation to Daruba Harbor and air transportation to Pitu. Airport (kek.go.id, n.d.-b).
 7. Mandalika, Province of West Nusa Tenggara. In addition to marine tourism and the beauty of its beaches, this area is one of the MotoGP event circuits. To get to this area, you can use sea transportation at Lembar Harbor and Zainudin Abdul Majid International Airport (kek.go.id, n.d.-a).
 8. Labuan Bajo, Province of East Nusa Tenggara. This destination is the main road to Komodo National Park, which is known as an ancient animal that is worldwide. Tourists can land for air routes at Frans Sales Lega Airport in Ruteng and H. Hasan Aroeboesman Airport in Ende. (Indonesia Travel, n.d.).

By expanding the location of the travel bubble, it is hoped that other tourist destinations will come back to life and restore the economy of the community and the tourism industry in the region.

Third, the procedures or requirements for foreign tourists using a travel bubble are easy to adopt and can be tested; some procedures have similarities to several air travel regulations in Indonesia related to COVID-19 vaccination, RT PCR or Antigen, COVID-19 history, and filling out the Care application. Application of the travel bubble in Batam and Bintan with Singapore has brought in 39 people in February and 151 open trip orders for March (Travel Tempo. co, 2022). This indicates that the government and foreign tourists can carry out the travel bubble procedure. This condition can implement the travel bubble in other destinations in Indonesia.

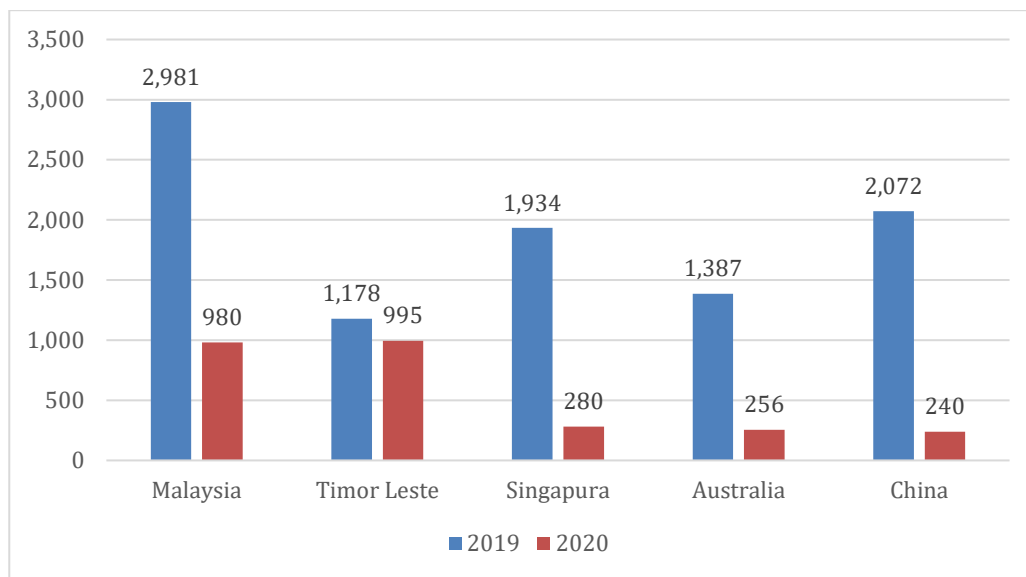


Figure 2. Highest Foreign Travelers in 2019
(Source: Kemenparekraf, 2021)

Fourth, East and Southeast Asia have a high potential for foreign tourists, given their relative proximity to Indonesia (Figure 2). By looking at 2019 vs. 2020 visits, it can be concluded that travel restrictions due to COVID-19 have reduced the number of foreign tourists visiting from Malaysia, Timor Leste, Singapore, Australia, and China. Thus, this has an impact on decreasing tourism foreign exchange earnings. This is in line with the opinion of Afdi (2010) in his research which says that the increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia will increase the growth of foreign tourism exchange. Therefore, the five countries have the potential to establish cooperation regarding the travel bubble policy in Indonesia.

Challenges Travel Bubble in Indonesia

Although applying the travel bubble is the main alternative to economic recovery, the travel bubble in several countries has also caused many problems, especially health and public fears.

First, the implementation of the travel bubble in several countries has been delayed, like the Trans-Tasman Bubble, which postponed the travel bubble due to the carelessness of the Australian government regarding the escape of quarantine patients (Sabin, 2020). This carelessness gave rise to negative sentiments or anger among Australians, especially in Victoria. Epidemiologists have also warned of the potential for a second wave to emerge. Thus, the governments of New Zealand and Australia have agreed to postpone the travel bubble until the COVID-19 situation is safe and under control. Hong Kong and Singapore also briefly delayed their policies because, in August 2021, each country's cases experienced a spike; the two countries

agreed to start a travel bubble when the COVID-19 situation was under control (straitstimes.com, 2021).

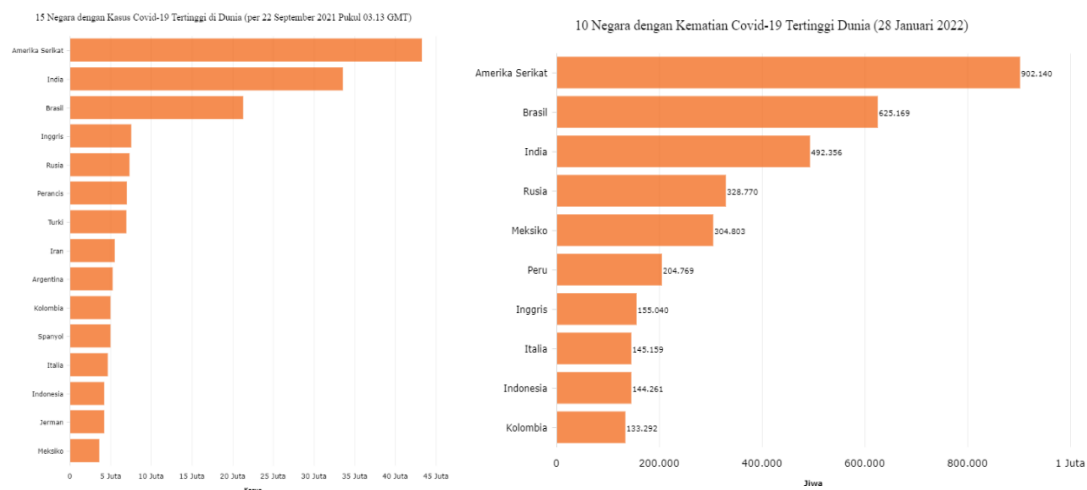


Figure 3. Indonesia's COVID-19 Case and Death Rate Ranking
(Source: Katadata, 2021)

Second, data from Worldometers, dated January 28, 2022, reported that the COVID-19 death rate in Indonesia was ranked the 9th highest in the world, with a total of 144,261 people. Then Indonesia also recorded 4,195,958 COVID-19 cases as of September 21, 2021, and was ranked 13th worldwide. If you look at the rating (Figure 3), Countries that have implemented the travel bubble, such as Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Palau, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Baltic countries, do not have the highest COVID-19 case and death rate data in the world. This is an essential point for Indonesia in implementing the travel bubble because the high number of cases and the death rate will be a consideration for foreign tourists' intentions to visit Indonesia. This is in line with Tejedor et al. (2020), who state that the increase in cases causes people's fear. So if we look at the ranking of cases and the death rate due to COVID-19 in Indonesia, it will affect the travel intentions of foreign tourists and the sustainability of the travel bubble. This is different from what was done by Taiwan - the Republic of Palau, where the travel bubble in the country was running smoothly because the improvement and handling of cases were both considered good so that they had a sense of trust between the two countries (Yu et al., 2021).

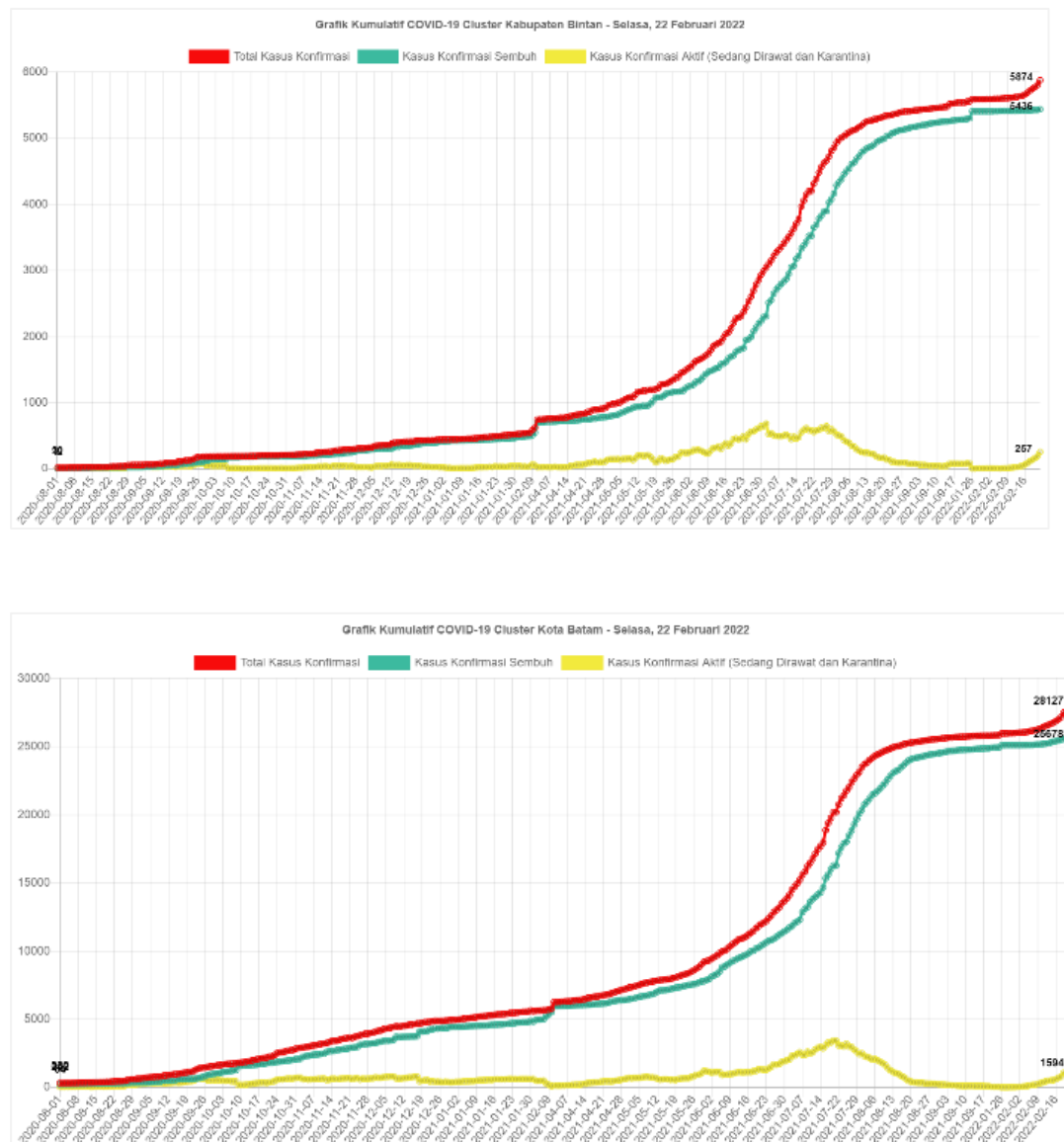


Figure 4. Cumulative Cases in Batam and Bintan
(Source: Gugus Tugas COVID-19 KEPRI, 2022)

Third, based on the covid19.go.id site dated February 23, 2022, the risk of an increase in COVID-19 cases in Batam is in the medium-risk category (level 3), and Bintan is classified as low risk (level 2). Nevertheless, graph 3 shows that Batam and Bintan continue to experience additional monthly cases. This, of course, encourages the government to be able to control the spread of cases first before implementing the travel bubble policy. Although several foreign tourists have been visiting Batam and Bintan, it seems unsafe to visit because the addition of COVID-19 cases has not been controlled. Fusté-Forné & Michael (2021) found that in the summer of 2020, many European countries relaxed their borders and offered quarantine-free travelers. Still, this policy only lasted a few weeks due to the emergence of several increases in the number of COVID-19 cases. This is also a challenge for other regions when planning

a travel bubble. It is necessary to consider the trend of increasing COVID-19 cases in their area to reduce the fear of foreign tourists visiting.

Fourth, looking at the challenge of the second point, Indonesia will have difficulty cooperating with several countries to implement the travel bubble policy. The data from graphs 2 and 3 still show that the handling of COVID-19 in Indonesia still threatens countries with good handling of COVID-19. If we look again, the travel bubble is the implementation of conditional tourism activities, namely controlling COVID-19 cases and mutual trust between countries regarding quarantine (Yu et al., 2021). This prerequisite has been implemented in Taiwan - the Republic of Palau, which both have a good handling of COVID-19 and have resulted in foreign tourist visits between the two countries.

By seeing these opportunities and challenges, Indonesia can implement the travel bubble as a strategy for economic recovery in the tourism sector. However, controlling the spread of COVID-19 cases in tourism destination areas is crucial before this policy is implemented. The aim is to reduce anxiety in Indonesia's countries that want to establish travel bubble rules. The government also needs to identify tourist destinations compatible with the application of the travel bubble, such as island-based areas where the economy of the population is highly dependent on tourism activities. Thus, economic recovery will be able to directly touch local communities that have a livelihood in the tourism sector.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the travel bubble is an opportunity to restore the tourism economy. Some options with the implementation of the travel bubble concept during the pandemic are: First, the travel bubble can fix the economy of island-based tourist destinations, including returning foreign tourists, replenishing hotel occupancy, and reviving tourism activities such as culinary, creative economy, and accommodation to improve income local tourism. Second, the travel bubble in island-based areas can make it easier to control COVID-19 cases and the mobility of foreign tourists. In addition, the archipelago depends on tourism, so it is necessary to restore the economy immediately. Several super-priority destinations can implement a travel bubble to expand economic recovery efforts. Third, the similarity of the travel bubble procedure and the ease with which it can be tested can increase the chance that it can be adopted in other regions. Fourth, countries that have the highest number of foreign tourists visiting Indonesia have the potential to cooperate with travel bubble travel regulations with Indonesia.

However, implementing a travel bubble has several challenges, especially regarding the health sector. First, applying the travel bubble needs to pay attention to public sentiment, considering that the current COVID case threatens everyone.

Second, the high number of COVID-19 cases and deaths need to be controlled to reduce the anxiety level of foreign tourists who want to visit. The trend of increasing COVID-19 cases in areas that want to implement a travel bubble is also a concern. Third, the opinion of epidemiologists regarding the potential for cases and the increasing trend of COVID-19 is considered. Reasonable control of COVID-19 cases is the first thing to do before implementing a travel bubble. Fourth, the high cases and death rates of COVID-19 in Indonesia in the eyes of the world will make it difficult for Indonesia to establish travel bubble cooperation in several countries where the transmission of COVID-19 cases has been well controlled.

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