



# **The Impact of COVID-19 on Travelers' Destination Choice in Austria**

---

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

Bachelor of Business Administration in

Tourism and Hospitality Management

Submitted to Dr. Bozana Zekan

Sabrina Kind

61904144

Vienna, June 8 2023

## **Affidavit**

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed. In particular, I did not use any text generators or other paraphrasing tools. My thesis was not proofread.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

08/06/2023

Date

## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on many areas of our daily lives, with some areas being affected more than others. Major changes that occurred during the pandemic can be observed in the travel behavior of travelers, especially when it comes to deciding where to spend their next vacation. This thesis not only describes these changes but also identifies possible factors that have led to these shifts. For this purpose, the two constructs of the Protection Motivation Theory, namely “Perceived severity” and “Perceived vulnerability”, and their influence on destination choice are discussed. Moreover, the effects of more general factors such as “Travel restrictions”, “Destination marketing”, and the “Growing awareness towards sustainability” are presented. The objective was to find out whether there is a correlation between the above-mentioned independent variables and the changes in destination choice that occurred in Austria during the pandemic. This information is of importance in providing destination managers with recommendations on what they should pay attention to when marketing their destinations in a possible future (health) crisis, in order to attract more guests and thus have to experience fewer economic losses.

Therefore, a survey was conducted with 124 participants, all of whom had spent at least one vacation in Austria during the pandemic. The analyses using Spearman's correlation test revealed that the extent to which travelers considered COVID-19 to be severe, the likelihood of being infected with the disease, the travel restrictions in place during the pandemic, the marketing campaigns developed during the pandemic, and the growing awareness towards sustainability had a significant impact on the choice of destination in Austria during the pandemic. Thus, all alternative hypotheses that resulted from the literature review could be accepted. In addition, it was found that the growing interest in the topic of sustainability was not only observable during the pandemic, as 53.23% of the people who developed more sustainable lifestyles during that time also plan to continue the new habits in the post-COVID-19 period. The analysis of the obtained data shows that in a future possible crisis, destination managers should pay attention to conveying a sense of security to the travelers by providing a transparent communication and the use of adapted marketing campaigns. Moreover, in general, they should address the new trend of sustainability.

## Table of Contents

Affidavit.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
List of Tables .....	6
List of Figures .....	7
1 Introduction .....	8
2 Literature Review .....	11
2.1 Austrian Tourism Before, During, and After the Pandemic .....	11
2.2 Destination Choice .....	13
2.2.1 Shifts in Destination Choice as a Result of COVID-19 in Austria .....	17
2.3 Possible Factors Influencing Destination Choice During the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	21
2.3.1 Travel Restrictions.....	21
2.3.2 Fear - Protection Motivation Theory .....	23
2.3.3 Destination Marketing .....	26
2.3.4 Growing Awareness Towards Sustainability .....	29
2.4 Conceptual Framework.....	32
3 Methodology.....	34
3.1 Research Methods .....	34
3.2 Introduction to Surveys.....	35
3.3 Survey Development.....	37
3.4 Data Collection Process and Analysis.....	40
4 Findings and Discussion .....	42
4.1 Destination Choice .....	43

4.2	Travel Restrictions.....	45
4.3	Perceived Severity.....	45
4.4	Perceived Vulnerability.....	46
4.5	Destination Marketing.....	46
4.6	Growing Awareness Towards Sustainability.....	47
4.7	Hypothesis Testing and Discussion.....	48
4.7.1	Hypothesis 1.....	49
4.7.2	Hypothesis 2.....	50
4.7.3	Hypothesis 3.....	50
4.7.4	Hypothesis 4.....	51
4.7.5	Hypothesis 5.....	52
4.8	Linear Regression Analysis.....	55
5	Conclusion and Recommendations.....	57
	Bibliography.....	61
	Appendices.....	73
	Appendix 1: Survey.....	73
	Appendix 2: Instagram stories posted on the author’s account.....	84

## List of Tables

Table 1: Descriptives of the individual items .....	48
Table 2: Cronbach's alpha for the computed variables .....	54
Table 3: Descriptives for the computed variables .....	54
Table 4: Spearman's rank correlation results for all independent variables with regard to the dependent variable "Destination choice" .....	55
Table 5: Linear regression model coefficients .....	56

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Model of the destination choice process.....	16
Figure 2: Vienna’s monthly overnights in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and comparison of the years .....	19
Figure 3: Vorarlberg’s monthly overnights in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and comparison of the years.....	19
Figure 4: Tyrol’s monthly overnights in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and comparison of the years.....	20
Figure 5: The constructs of the threat appraisal and coping appraisal as parts of the PMT .....	24
Figure 6: Marketing campaign to boost winter inlands tourism and destinations in the nature.....	27
Figure 7: Marketing campaign shown in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands and Czech Republic to boost summer tourism and destinations in the nature .....	28
Figure 8: Screenshot of the homepage of the Austrian official tourism web page ....	29
Figure 9: Newspaper article showing the environmental changes occurred in Venice .....	31
Figure 10: Conceptual framework used in this study .....	32

## **1 Introduction**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first months of 2020 radically changed people's habits. Society now faced new fears, threats, and other barriers such as lockdowns that affected and changed daily life (Fischer et al., 2021). While these new emotions and obstacles negatively impacted many different sectors through lower demand and less availability of supply (Deyá-Tortella et al., 2022), the tourism industry was one of the most affected industries around the world (Rather, 2021). This is clearly shown by the example of Austria whose tourism has been growing steadily over the last 50 years and whose tourism sector was one of the fastest-growing sectors in the pre-COVID-19 period (Gruber & Varnaite, 2021). With 31.9 million foreign tourists, Austria was the seventh most popular European destination in 2019 and the impact tourism had on GDP was estimated at approximately 7.5% (Gruber & Varnaite, 2021; Statistics Austria, 2022a).

Then, with the outbreak of the pandemic, the number of arrivals throughout Austria decreased by 45.82% in 2020 compared to the previous year and by another 11.53% in 2021 (Statistics Austria, 2022b). However, tourism activity did not only decline in general, but shifts in booking patterns were also observed, especially when it comes to destination choice (Gruber & Varnaite, 2021; Statistics Austria, 2022b; Tauber & Bausch, 2022). Gruber and Varnaite (2021) present in their market report that during the pandemic, tourists in Austria were longing for calm destinations in nature, domestic tourism was booming, and the car became the preferred modes of transportation, meaning that the chosen destinations were closer to home of the individuals. The fact that the choice of destination changed during the pandemic can also be noticed globally. 43.3% of 701 respondents from Europe and the US who participated in a study carried out by Tauber and Bausch (2022) stated to have changed their travel plans and chosen an alternative destination because of the pandemic. In this regard, Nigg (2011) as well as Ritchie and Jiang (2019) claim that changes in destination choice have already occurred during other crises, not only during COVID-19, and that various factors caused these variations.



Studies indicate, among other things, the high perceived severity of COVID-19 to be one of the reasons that destination choice has changed during the latest pandemic in countries like Turkey and the U.S. (Apaolaza et al., 2022; Ju & Jang, 2022; Kevser Çınar et al., 2022). Perceived severity is one of four constructs of the protection motivation theory, in the following referred to as PMT and can be defined as the degree to which individuals consider a certain threat to be serious (Rogers, 1975). In the context of a pandemic such as COVID-19, a threat's severity is determined by how significantly it affects a person's health or well-being (Menard et al., 2017). Based on the PMT, the perceived severity of risk affects risk perception and thus, significantly influences the behavior of people. For instance, it leads to taking preventive measures to avoid dangers (Rogers, 1975), such as choosing a destination in the mountains with fewer tourists over an overcrowded destination or one that is accessible by private transportation and does not require a flight or other public mode of transportation to get there.

Other constructs of the theory are the perceived vulnerability of a threat as well as response and self-efficacy and together, they describe how people perceive and react to possible harm. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, the PMT gained a lot of attention (Neuburger & Egger, 2020; Zhan et al., 2020). However, even though several reports state that perceived severity and vulnerability had an impact on destination choice during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ju & Jang, 2022; Kevser Çınar et al., 2022), there is no study on whether this also applies to the shifts observed in the Austrian tourism industry. Furthermore, very little literature exists on what or if other factors which generally influence a tourist's destination selection decision such as marketing campaigns (Wu et al., 2023), also had an influence on the changes in guest's travel behavior during the latest pandemic. To fill this research gap, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What impact did the constructs of the PMT's threat appraisal have on the changes in choice of destination that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria?

RQ2: Which other, more general factors also influenced destination choice during the pandemic?

To answer the research questions, the constructs of the PMT's threat appraisal path will be adopted in this study to determine a possible correlation between them and the changes in destination choice. In addition, the aim is to identify and test a potential correlation of other factors that may have led to these shifts. For this purpose, quantitative research in the form of an online survey will be carried out with people who have spent at least one vacation in Austria between March 2020 and the end of 2022. Information revealed by the survey and the statistical tests performed may be used to identify, as early as possible, which factors have an influence on the destination choice in the case of a further future health crisis. This way, the managers of destinations that are most affected by such a crisis can act quickly and market the destinations accordingly in order to suffer fewer economic losses. With the knowledge gained through this study, managerial recommendations will be given.

This thesis is divided into five main chapters. In the introduction section, the reader gains a first overview of the topic, the research gap is identified, and the research questions as well as the analytical approach are presented. In the second chapter, the literature review, the impacts of the pandemic on the tourism industry are discussed in more detail. While the Austrian tourism industry before, during and after the pandemic is first presented in depth, the second part briefly addresses the process of destination choice and its most prominent models. Then, the changes in destination choice in Austria that occurred during the pandemic are presented and analyzed. The last section of the literature review describes possible factors that may have led to these changes, including travel restrictions, perceived severity as well as vulnerability, destination marketing and the growing awareness towards sustainability. As a third chapter, the methodology provides an introduction to surveys and discusses the survey development as well as the data collection process and analysis of this study. The fourth chapter of the thesis describes and discusses the findings. The conclusion, which is the last chapter of the thesis, highlights the most important findings and states the practical implications as well as limitations of the study.

## **2 Literature Review**

The following literature review presents as a first point the development of tourism in Austria until today, including the period during the pandemic. Then the term destination choice is clarified, and the best-known models used for choosing a destination are presented. Section 2.2.3 shows the changes in destination choice in Austria that emerged in the course of the pandemic. This is followed by a discussion of the possible factors that could be responsible for these changes. More specifically, the travel restrictions that were in place in Austria during the pandemic and the changes they brought with them are described, followed by a discussion of the feeling of fear developed during the pandemic, which is explained with the help of the Protection Motivation Theory. Finally, the aspects of destination marketing during the pandemic and the growing awareness towards sustainability are addressed.

### **2.1 Austrian Tourism Before, During, and After the Pandemic**

In the following, the Austrian tourism and its development over the time will be discussed. For this thesis, the pre-pandemic period is defined as everything that happened before the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 and the during-pandemic period covers the time from March 2020 to December 2022. The time after the pandemic is defined as the period from the end of December 2022, when most of the restrictions that affected daily life were removed (Maguire, 2022).

Tourism in Austria can look back on a long history. The first tourism activities in the form of pilgrimages to Austrian destinations can be traced back to the 14th century. Then, in the 15th century, spa stays became more common, for example in Baden and Badgastein, and in the 18th century, educational trips took place. Later, the Congress of Vienna in 1814/1815 was the starting signal for congress tourism (Holidays in Austria, n.d.). The importance of tourism was recognized very soon and thus already in 1884 the first delegates' meeting for the promotion of tourism took place in Graz (Österreich Werbung, n.d.). As a result of the meeting, leisure tourism quickly evolved, and ski tourism also became more popular. The first ski lift in Central Europe opened in 1907 in Vorarlberg (Vorarlberg, n.d.). These early developments are one reason why Austria was the seventh most popular European destination in 2019 (Gruber &

Varnaite, 2021). Other important factors are the good location and the diversity of the country. This is one of the results of the ANTO's annual T-MONA online guest survey with over 86,000 responses (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.).

Today, guests coming to Austria can enjoy 12 UNESCO world heritages, six national and 48 nature parks, thousands of kilometers of hiking and biking trails, numerous mountain peaks higher than 3,000 meters, and around 75 thermal spas. At the same time, before the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, over 12,900 plays were held annually, as well as concerts and many festivals. Museum lovers are delighted to see about 745 museums (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). In 2019, all these attractions and opportunities attracted 46.2 million guests, of which 31.9 million were international travelers. Together, they spent around 37.9 billion euros and stayed 152.7 million overnights in over 11,823 hotels, 9,515 holiday and other short-stay accommodations, and 613 camping grounds. In this respect, the core markets were Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.; Gruber & Varnaite, 2021; Statista, 2022; Statistics Austria, 2022b). Since 1995, when the number of arrivals totaled 24,175,214, the number grew by over 190% to 46,195,388 annual arrivals by 2019 (Statistics Austria, 2022c) with an annual growth rate of 4% between 2015 and 2019 (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). The number of overnight stays grew by 130% during the same period (Statistics Austria, 2022c).

Then, in March 2020, tourism figures completely plummeted with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed lockdown. Ski resorts had to close prematurely, and hotels were also no longer allowed to accommodate guests (Pollak et al., 2020). As a result of these drastic measures, the number of arrivals in Austria dropped to the level of 1998, and tourists spent in the first year of the pandemic only 21.3 billion euros. While tourism contributed 7.5% to Austria's GDP in 2019, it declined to 4.5% one year later, according to Statistics Austria (2022a).

In the second year of the pandemic, arrivals dropped by another 11%, reaching 22,144,098 and thus underperforming even the figures of 1995 which is the first year of records (Statistics Austria, 2022c). The number of annual tourist expenditures

dropped by another 300 million euros (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). However, the core markets remained the same during the pandemic as they were before. It was not until the third year of the pandemic that tourism recovered, and the number of arrivals returned to over 37 million, close to the number before COVID-19 (Statistics Austria, 2022c).

The numbers are now relatively stable again and, according to Statistics Austria (2023), tourism will continue to recover. However, previous pandemics and crises have already shown that such exceptional situations also bring long-term changes regarding the behavior of tourists (Campos-Soria et al., 2015; Eugenio-Martin & Campos-Soria, 2014). For instance, between 2019 and 2021, the federal states of Tyrol and Salzburg were at the top of the most visited destinations in Austria and the capital Vienna was in third place. However, Vienna's market share decreased from 11% in 2019 to 6% in 2021 and Tyrol gained much more market share (Statistics Austria, 2022c).

Comparing the tourism intensity per inhabitant of the last three years, it is also evident that provinces such as Styria, Carinthia, and Upper Austria have almost reached the pre-pandemic figures again, while Vienna is still more than 26% away from reaching this level (Statistics Austria, 2023). This is a result of changes in the destination choice that occurred during the pandemic. In chapter 2.2.3, changes in Austria's destination choice will be discussed in more detail. Before that, however, the next part will explain what a destination is and discusses the process of destination choice.

## **2.2 Destination Choice**

Before elaborating on the process of destination choice, it is first explained what a destination is. Generally, it can be said that there is no single agreed-upon definition of how a tourism destination is defined, which is why many different ones exist (Wu et al., 2023). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a destination is “a unique place where a visitor spends at least one night and exhibit tourism products such as attractions, support services, and tourism resources complete with defined management, physical and administrative boundaries, and a

well-known image” (as cited in Mutuku, 2013, p. 6). Other authors further elaborate on this definition and include that a destination can be a state, province, region, or city (Pawlikowska Piechotka et al., 2017) and it is usually characterized by a combination of a set of heritage resources, a good infrastructure and attractive services (Lopes et al., 2022).

The term destination choice describes the process of selecting a destination from a number of options by evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each (Crompton, 1992). According to Dellaert et al. (1998), this process is influenced by various factors. In their study on the destination choice of international visitors in Vietnam, Wu et al. (2023) list ten specific factors that are generally crucial for choosing a destination. These factors include:

- Attributes of a destination such as weather conditions as well as the price
- Activities
- Services
- Accessibility
- Tourism resources
- Reference groups
- Size and composition of a group’s demographic characteristics
- Perceived value
- Destination experience
- Marketing communications

In another study carried out by Brau (2008), it was further revealed that environmental quality is another key destination attribute and Segumpan et al. (2010) found that safety also plays a central role in choosing a vacation destination.

In the literature, there are several different models that try to demonstrate the decision of where to spend the next vacation. According to Crompton (1992), the most prominent models are those suggested by Um and Crompton (1990), Moutinho (1987) and Woodside and Lysonski (1989). The main idea of these models is the concept of choice sets. This concept describes with three core stages how a tourist decides to choose one destination over another. It starts with the awareness set which Foist and

Loy (2022) define as all destinations the person knows about, regardless of whether he or she has a bad or positive association with the place. Woodside and Sherrell (1977, p. 15) add to this definition that the “available set includes the travel destinations which the traveler believes he or she has the ability to visit within some period, for example, a year”. This extension of the definition is necessary because of the high number of possible destinations in the awareness set.

The second stage of the concept is the evoked set and refers to destinations that the traveler is really considering visiting (Howard, 1963). Many factors play a role in the selection of an evoked set, whereby internal and external factors can be distinguished. Examples of variables related to the tourist (=internal factors) are values, motivation, and personal needs whereas features of a destination such as safety influence the image of a destination (=external factors) (Baloglu, 2001; Klenosky et al., 1993). The last step in the destination choice process is deciding on a final destination (Crompton, 1992). This step implies an in-depth information search. When searching for information, a prospective tourist can make use of a wide variety of means, such as the Internet, but he or she can also rely on opinions from reference groups. Sirakaya and Woodside (2005) claim that, because of the intangibility of tourism, the choice of a destination is very risky, and therefore information search is an important part of the process. With the information found, the alternatives are then evaluated, which ultimately leads to a decision on where to spend the next vacation.

Throughout the decision-making process, the attributes previously pointed out such as accessibility and tourism resources play a major role (Lancaster 1966, as cited in Um & Crompton, 1990). However, in the models suggested by Moutinho (1987), Woodside and Lysonski (1989), and Um and Crompton (1990), most of the attributes of destinations are completely neglected, including the one of desired and existing activities. Moscardo et al. (1996), however, state that activities are one of the most important attributes of a destination, as they satisfy direct needs from the travelers and thus establish a connection between the destination and the traveler. Perdue and Meng (2006) as well as Tasci and Gartner (2007) also claim that a destination that is best perceived in terms of activities offered is most likely to be chosen by travelers.

Pearce (2005) is one of the first authors presenting a more advanced model which takes into account the desired and available activities in a destination. His model is based on the model of Um and Crompton (1990), including extensions by Moscardo et al. (1996) and Morrison et al. (1996) and is presented in Figure 1. It also shows that internal and external factors influence the decision of which destination to choose. In addition, as mentioned, Pearce created an activity-mediated choice model as indicated by the arrows A1 and B1 in Figure 1. Internal and external input, combined with desired activities and activities available help the tourist to select an awareness set. If individual constraints such as money and time flow into the decision, it leads to the selection of an evoked set and after a further search for information a final destination can be selected.

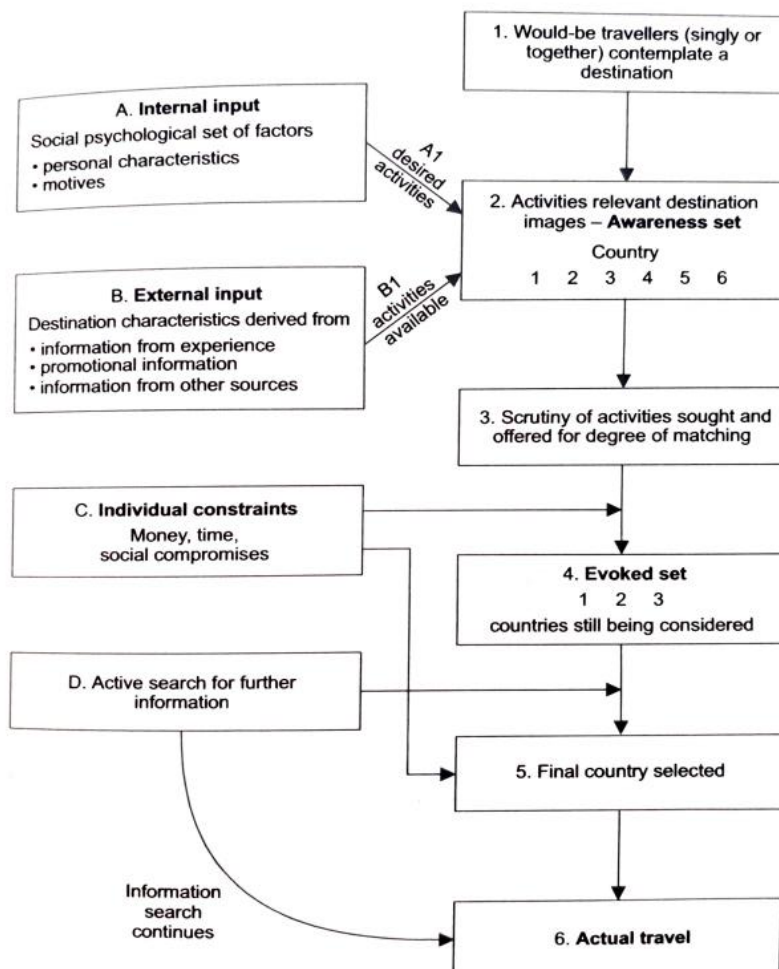


Figure 1. Model of the destination choice process (Pearce, 2005, p. 109)



As indicated by Wu et al. (2023), and Brau (2008), the model presented by Pearce (2005) also demonstrates that destination choices are shaped by economic and social factors and are therefore constantly changing. The COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of this. In fact, it showed to which extent the destination choice can change when both economic and social factors are influenced by an extreme event. Mainly the evoked set was changed by the pandemic. Destinations could either no longer be considered due to travel restrictions or the perceived risks changed the perception of the destinations (Tauber & Bausch, 2022). According to Russell et al. (1981), previous pandemics have already demonstrated how much the perception of a destination can change in the wake of a health crisis. The precise changes in destination choice in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria will be discussed in the following.

### **2.2.1 Shifts in Destination Choice as a Result of COVID-19 in Austria**

First of all, it can be observed that domestic tourism boomed during the pandemic, while the number of inbound tourism to Austria decreased significantly. Whereas the number of international trips reached 6,662,000 in 2019, it decreased by more than 70% to 1,924,000 in the year of the pandemic outbreak. The number of domestic trips remained relatively constant at 3,222,000 in 2019, 3,089,000 in 2020, and 2,898,000 in 2021, thus performing much better than international trips (Statistics Austria, 2022c).

The next change that can be noticed concerns the increase in tourism in natural areas. Gruber and Varnaite (2021) present in their report that the Austrian areas that have experienced the most growth in terms of arrivals are quiet, peaceful destinations with a range of offerings in sports and outdoor activities. Whereas in 2015, less than 10% of overnight stays booked through Airbnb could be attributed to rural vacations, in 2020, that number more than doubled (Airbnb, 2021). The analysis of the data from Statistics Austria (2022c) also shows that tourists opted for more alpine regions instead of city trips during the pandemic. While arrivals in Styria, Carinthia, and Vorarlberg decreased by 32.28%, 27.54%, and 36.61% on average in 2020 compared to the year before, a decline of 74.68% was noticeable in the capital Vienna. All these

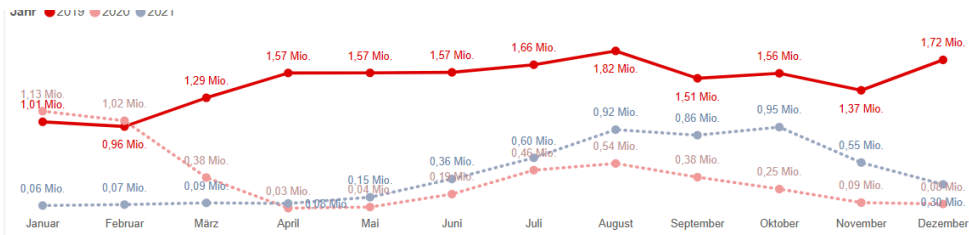
rural regions recovered in 2021 and recorded more arrivals again. The number in Vienna, however, dropped even further by 3% compared to the first pandemic year.

The fact that Vienna required much more time to recover from the decline in tourists becomes evident in Figure 2 presented below. It shows the number of overnight stays in Vienna in 2019, 2020, and 2021 as well as the percentage change from one year to another. In the summer months (June to September) of 2020, when most travel restrictions were temporarily removed, the capital city of Vienna experienced an average percentage decrease of arrivals compared to the previous year of 76.25% and in 2021 during the same period, a percentage decrease of 58.25% compared to 2019 (Österreich Werbung, 2023).

Figures 3 and 4 show the same data for the federal states of Tyrol and Vorarlberg. It was decided to point out Tyrol and Vorarlberg because they are among the rural states of Austria. However, it must be mentioned that the diagrams of the remaining federal states are very similar to those of Tyrol and Vorarlberg.

In Tyrol, the percentage decrease in overnight stays in the summer months (June to September) in 2020 compared to the year before was 24% and in Vorarlberg 17.75%. In the year thereafter, compared to 2019, the figures stood at -10.25% in Tyrol and -7.5% in Vorarlberg. In Tyrol and Vorarlberg, as well as in all other federal Austrian states except Lower Austria and Vienna, even better numbers of overnight stays were achieved in at least one summer month in 2021 compared to 2019. In Vienna, in contrast, the best month of 2021 in percentage terms was October, with a percentage decline in overnight stays of still 43% compared to 2019.

Overnight stays per month



Percentage change compared to 2019

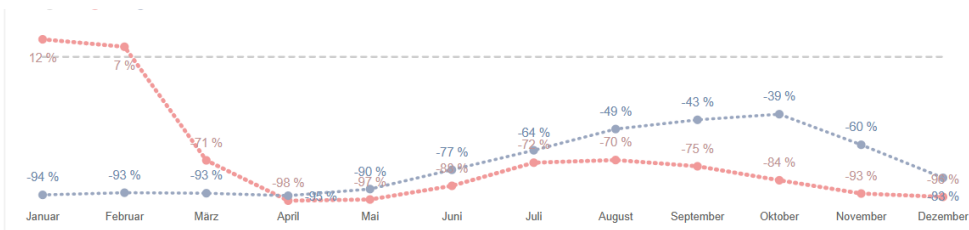
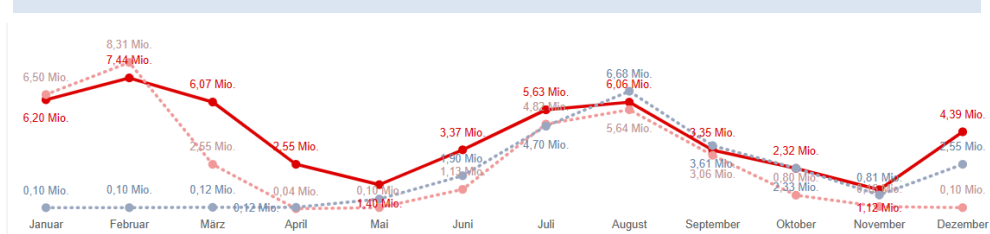


Figure 2. Vienna's monthly overnights in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and comparison of the years (Österreich Werbung, 2023).

Overnight stays per month



Percentage change compared to 2019

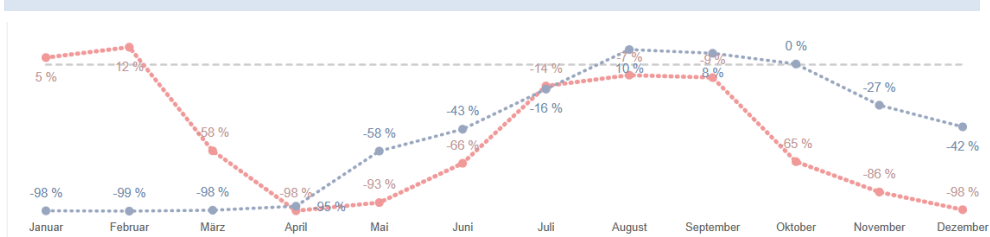


Figure 3. Tyrol's monthly overnights in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and comparison of the years (Österreich Werbung, 2023).

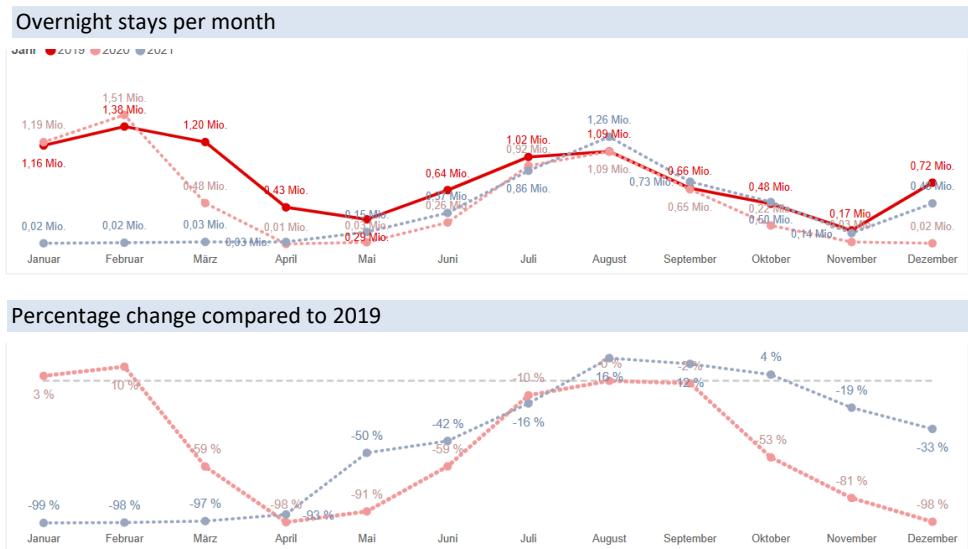


Figure 4. Vorarlberg’s monthly overnights in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and comparison of the years (Österreich Werbung, 2023)

When comparing the numbers of means of transport used, it is evident that the car has gained greatly as the preferred mode of transport during the pandemic. In 2018, people in Austria relied on the car on 54% of vacation trips and on the plane on 30.4%. Two years later, with the outbreak of the pandemic, 72.3% of the tourists took the car, almost 33% more than before COVID-19, and only 12.9% chose the plane. Also in the second year of the pandemic, more people (65.2%) used cars than before the pandemic, and fewer (20%) used airplanes (Statistics Austria, 2022a). Based on these figures, it can be concluded that guests preferred destinations that were not located so far from home.

When it comes to accommodation type, the COVID-19 crisis resulted in a shift to apartments and vacation homes of both commercial and private providers. While overnight stays in hotels dropped by 37% in 2020, overnight stays in vacation apartments and houses decreased by only 11.3%, with this trend being observed in all provinces. In Styria, overnight stays in vacation apartments even increased by 11.2% (commercial) and 6.3% (private) compared to the year before the pandemic (Fritz & Ehn-Fragner, 2020). Although occupancy rates were highest overall in the 4 and 5-star hotel segment in 2020, the top hotel segment still experienced the largest

discrepancies relative to pre-crisis levels throughout Austria (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus, 2020).

To understand why the above-mentioned changes occurred, possible factors that may have influenced the destination choice during and after the pandemic are listed and described in the following.

## **2.3 Possible Factors Influencing Destination Choice During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### **2.3.1 Travel Restrictions**

From March 16, 2020, a lockdown was in place throughout Austria, which meant that all stores (except essential services), universities, schools, and gastronomic establishments, including hotels, were required to close. Already at that time, air traffic in Austria was limited to return flights of Austrians from abroad, and three days later, Austrian Airlines stopped operating completely. Only on May 29 of the same year, after more than two months of lockdown, the Austrian hotel industry was allowed to reopen (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus, 2020).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, domestic tourism in the summer months of July, August, and September achieved very good figures in most of the federal states, recording only a minus of 14.4% across Austria (excluding Vienna) compared to the previous year. In Vienna, by contrast, the number of domestic tourists fell by 63.7% in the same period, and the number of international tourists also declined much more in Vienna than in other provinces (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus, 2021; Statistics Austria, 2022c).

According to Matthias Winkler, hotel manager of the famous Hotel Sacher in Vienna, the reason for this is that Vienna appeals to a different target group than other Austrian destinations do. In his opinion, hotels in urban areas highly depend on international tourists, and it is clear that this segment can only travel to a very limited extent during a global pandemic (Kremser, 2021). Oversea tourists, who are normally

frequent visitors to Vienna, completely stopped arriving due to the travel restrictions. Moreover, the cancellation of major events as well as congresses and the resulting decline in business travel also caused demand in Vienna to drop drastically. In the other federal states, it was much easier after the lockdown to attract guests again thanks to tourists from the core markets that are closer to Austria (Fritz & Ehn-Fragner, 2020).

From November 2020 to spring 2021, the hotel industry was closed again for half a year, and in May 2021, hotels reopened before having to close for the last time in November 2021 (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus, 2020). It is interesting to note that hotels in Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Carinthia, and Burgenland were already allowed to reopen on December 8, 2021. The federal states of Upper Austria, Salzburg, Lower Austria, and Styria only allowed their lodging accommodations to open on December 17, and in Vienna, hotels opened again on December 20, i.e. immediately before Christmas (Lockdown-Ende: Tirol öffnet breitflächig, 2021). Hence, the federal states of Vienna, Upper Austria, and Salzburg with the three largest Austrian cities Vienna, Linz, and Salzburg, were in lockdown for a longer period of time. Even if it was only for a few days, potential guests were nevertheless legally forbidden from vacationing in these regions, while they could spend a vacation in rural areas such as Tyrol.

To summarize, it can be said that the travel restrictions prevented certain target groups from entering Austria and some destinations felt these effects more than others (Kremser, 2021). In addition, certain destinations suffered more from prolonged hotel closures than others where hotels were allowed to open earlier (Lockdown-Ende: Tirol öffnet breitflächig, 2021). Event center shutdowns and the associated drop in business tourism also affected destinations like the capital Vienna to a way larger extent than rural regions (Fritz & Ehn-Fragner, 2020). These facts lead to the following hypothesis, which will be tested in this study.

H1: Travel restrictions had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2.3.2 Fear - Protection Motivation Theory**

As a factor mainly responsible for changes in guests' behavior, including destination choice, several studies mention the fact that if a health crisis is perceived as severe, it results in the emergence of a sense of fear leading to travel-avoiding behavior (Kevser Çinar et al., 2022; Lu and Wei, 2019; Ruan et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2021). The development of fear through the perception of a disease is a construct of the protection motivation theory.

PMT is a theory developed by Rogers (1975) and its former aim was to explain people's behavior when it comes to health-related topics (Floyd et al., 2000). More precisely, it describes with two pathways, the threat as well as coping appraisal, someone's motivation to engage in health-protective behavior (Shillair, 2020). The threat appraisal concerns itself with the degree of perceived severity and how one feels to be vulnerable to a specific threat (see Figure 5). More specifically, perceived severity is about how significantly a person considers a particular danger to be, whereby the threat can have financial, physical, psychological, and social effects on the person's life (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). Perceived vulnerability, often referred to as perceived susceptibility, describes how high an individual assesses the probability of becoming a victim of a certain risk (Scarpa & Thiene, 2011). The third construct of the threat appraisal path is about extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (=maladaptive rewards). In contrast to perceived severity and vulnerability, the maladaptive rewards address positive feelings (Menard et al., 2017). In the example of traveling during the Covid-19 pandemic, all the benefits that result for an individual from the trip would be referred to as rewards, and they may reduce the perception of severity and vulnerability.

The second pathway of the theory encompasses response-efficacy and self-efficacy (see Figure 5). These two constructs describe how a person perceives measures to combat the threat to be helpful and assesses him/herself to be able to apply the measures and existing actions (Westcott et al., 2017).

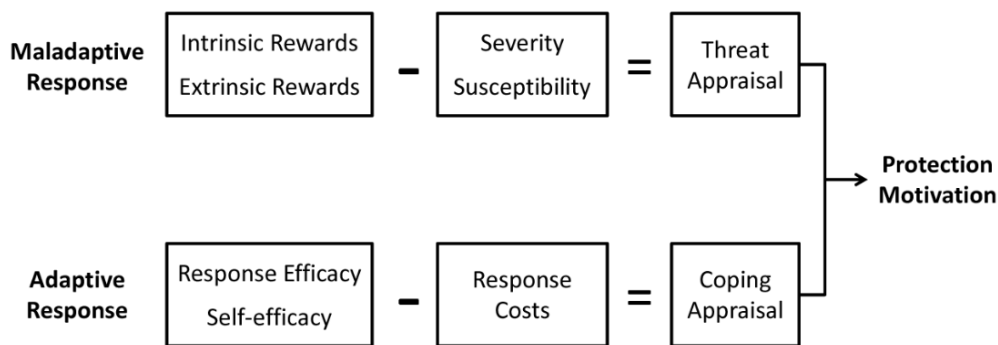


Figure 5. The constructs of the threat appraisal and coping appraisal as parts of the PMT (Floyd et al., 2000)

Nowadays, the theory is applied not only in the health field anymore, but in numerous other areas to describe various behaviors of individuals. For instance, the relationship between constructs of the PMT and crises in the tourism sector has also been the subject of several studies. Ruan et al. (2020) found that perceived severity has the biggest negative effect on tourists' behavior in China regarding the threat of air pollution. The same factor was crucial in a study carried out by Lu and Wei (2019) investigating what contributes to Chinese avoiding overcrowded holiday destinations. Kevser Çınar et al. (2022) studied the correlation between protection motivation and holiday intention as well as holiday avoidance and they concluded that there is a positive one between the motivation to protect oneself and the intention to travel to a specific destination, and the protection motivation and holiday or destination avoidance are negatively correlated. Another study by Zheng et al. (2021) confirms this result and also claims that high perceived severity and vulnerability can raise the fear of traveling to a specific destination.

As described above, the majority of the studies that investigated the relationship of PMT on travel behavior focused on the two constructs of the threat appraisal pathway, namely perceived severity and perceived vulnerability. Therefore, it was decided for this thesis to also present only these two constructs and their possible impacts on the changes in destination choice that occurred during the pandemic in Austria. The following section explains why the two constructs could also be applied in the case of the variances in destination choice in Austria.



First and foremost, the capital Vienna has by far the highest population density in Austria, with 4.779 inhabitants per square kilometer. Other quite densely populated cities are Salzburg with 2.367 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and Linz with 2.087 (Bevölkerungsdichte Linz, n.d.; Stadtregion Salzburg, 2019; Statista, 2023). By contrast, more rural regions such as Tyrol and Vorarlberg have population densities of only 61 and 156, respectively (Statista, 2023). Also, in a city, a lot of time is spent indoors, e.g., in museums or other cultural institutions, whereas in a more rural region, time is more likely to be spent outdoors, where it is much less likely to meet larger crowds. Both factors, i.e., the higher population density in cities as well as more attractions inside, result in a higher risk of contagion than in more rural regions with the possibility of doing most activities outside (Biglieri et al., 2020). In addition, over 23% of all 6 million COVID-19 cases recorded in Austria since the outbreak of the pandemic have been registered in Vienna (AGES, 2023). As of April 2023, just over three years after the first case was reported in Austria, the 7-day incidence per 100,000 population is quite low, averaging 99.5. However, it is noticeable that in six of eight federal states, the 7-day incidence per 100,000 inhabitants of the respective capital is higher than the average for the rest of the federal state, and Vienna, with an incidence of 187.9, is also significantly above the Austria-wide average. Comparing these values with the other months of the pandemic, similar results become apparent (AGES, 2023).

Thus, overall, case numbers are and have been higher in urban areas than in rural regions, implying higher risks and a higher rate of infection. Based on the PMT and its two constructs "Perceived severity" and "Perceived vulnerability" of the threat appraisal path, this would lead to guests avoiding these destinations due to fear and risk-adverse behavior. This would explain the shifts in destination choice that occurred in Austria during the pandemic. The aim of the following two hypotheses is to test this claim.

H2: Perceived severity of COVID-19 had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the pandemic.

H3: Perceived vulnerability had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was soon recognized that the feeling of safety played a major role throughout the crisis, which is why great emphasis was placed on marketing campaigns that were specially developed to convey this feeling to potential guests (April, n.d.). The importance of destination marketing will therefore be discussed in the following section.

### **2.3.3 Destination Marketing**

According to Wahab et al. (1976, p. 24), destination marketing is “the management process through which the National Tourists Organizations and/or tourist enterprises identify their selected tourists, actual and potential, communicate with them to ascertain and influence their wishes, needs, motivations, likes and dislikes, on local, regional, national and international levels and to formulate and adapt their tourist products accordingly in view of achieving optimal tourist’s satisfaction thereby fulfilling their objectives”.

The main functions of destination marketing include the promotion of the destination, involving branding and image, the creation of campaigns, unbiased information services, and customer relation management (UNWTO, 2007). In today's highly competitive tourism sector, it is even more important to market destinations well and constantly try to reach new potential guests (Pike & Ryan, 2004). Moreover, tourism destinations are highly susceptible to crises and need tailored marketing strategies to convince guests to visit a destination during a challenging period (Backer & Ritchie, 2017; Itani & Hollebeek, 2021; Möller et al., 2018; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Whereas prior to COVID-19 the emphasis was on fun, creative campaigns to promote a destination, the goal of marketers during the pandemic became to communicate confidence and a sense of security (April, n.d.). The branding firm Bloom Consulting (2020) revealed with a survey conducted in the first months of the pandemic that 53% of respondents prefer a destination where they feel the crisis is/was well managed and therefore they feel secure.

Austria's response to the COVID-19 crisis after the first lockdown was a marketing campaign worth 40 million euros with the goal of boosting inland tourism in Austria and attracting mainly Germans and tourists from Austria's neighboring countries. The focus was primarily on giving potential guests a sense of security and it was managed by Österreich Werbung (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.).

Part of the campaign to promote domestic tourism was an 84-second video with the slogan "Urlaub in Österreich – Ein guter Grund, nach vorne zu blicken" (see Figure 6), with which it is meant that it is worth carrying on and taking the risk of being a tourist again when spending a vacation in Austria. The clip ran daily for over a month on domestic TV channels (Leadersnet, 2020) and was again designed to take away any sense of fear among Austrians and remind them how wonderful a vacation in their home country can be.

The film shows a family spending a carefree day at a ski resort. Emotional background music and constant smiles play a big role. Everyone involved seems happy and, above all, lighthearted. The viewer only gets to see Austrian nature, mountains, and sporting activities and it looks as if the family in the video is spending the night in a vacation home or apartment, not in a hotel. The video was also shared on YouTube in October 2020 with a link that leads users directly to offers for a winter vacation in Austria (Holidays in Austria, 2020).



Figure 6. Marketing campaign to boost winter inland tourism and destinations in the nature (Urlaub in Österreich, 2020)

Another campaign was developed for the summer season, which was launched in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and the Czech Republic under the slogan "A good summer awaits you". Again, similar to the campaign for the winter, purely pictures from nature were shown, conveying a sense of tranquility and security and intended to create a desire to spend a vacation in Austria.



Figure 7. Marketing campaign shown in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands and Czech Republic to boost summer tourism and destinations in the nature (Mein Montafon, 2020)

When visiting the official website of Austrian tourism [austria.info](http://austria.info) nowadays, visitors will first and foremost notice pictures of beautiful nature (see Figure 8). In addition, the portal recognizes one destination a year as the Austrians' favorite destination. In 2020, 2021 and 2022, a mill in Styria, the Wiegensee Lake in Vorarlberg and the Friedenskircherl, which is a small church, in Styria were awarded (Holidays in Austria, 2023). With these examples, it becomes once again clear that there was a great focus on promoting the countryside and authenticity in Austrian's marketing strategy during the pandemic.

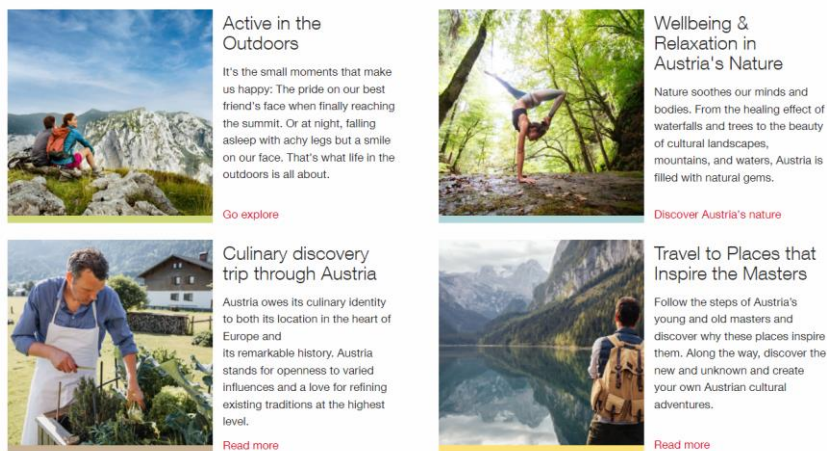


Figure 8. Screenshot of the homepage of the official tourism web page for Austria (Holidays in Austria, 2023)

Since statistics show that guests primarily chose the characteristics that appear in the video (nature, domestic tourism, vacation apartment) when booking their vacation in Austria during the pandemic (Statistics Austria, 2022c; Statistics Austria, 2023), it can be assumed that the marketing campaigns highly influenced tourists. This leads to the next hypothesis:

H4: Destination marketing had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.3.4 Growing Awareness Towards Sustainability

In the following, the aspect of sustainability is addressed. The growing attention paid to sustainability could again be a contributory factor to the fact that people relied less on air travel and destinations in the countryside were booming as vacation destinations during the pandemic.

Stankov et al. (2020) claim that tourists became more sustainably aware thanks to the pandemic and therefore now place more emphasis on sustainability when choosing a destination. Benjamin et al. (2020) also see a potential that COVID-19 could have changed the destination choice in a sustainable way in the long term. Statistical evidence for this is provided by two studies conducted by the consulting firm

McKinsey & Company as well as Essity. The McKinsey survey (2021) with over 5,000 respondents from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland shows that sustainability had become more important for 22% of respondents since the pandemic when it comes to consumer behavior and tourism.

Essity's Green Response Study (2021) with over 10,000 respondents from ten countries shows an even higher result. The aim of the study was to find out whether the pandemic had led to more sustainable thinking and action. Indeed, 40% of Germans, who are among the core markets in Austria (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus, 2020) have indicated that for them the pandemic resulted in a rethinking and a more sustainable lifestyle. 47% of the respondents stated that they traveled less by plane and car and 91% of the respondents who changed their lifestyle to a more sustainable one stated that they intend to continue their new habits also after the pandemic.

As the main reason for the more sustainable attitude, the majority stated that they had more time to think about and reflect on their lifestyle during the lockdown, and as a result, they became aware of the need to act more sustainably for the sake of our planet (Essity, 2021). Also Crossley (2020) identifies ecological grief as the reason why there has been a change in the mindset of tourists. Cities such as Venice, where the water in the canals suddenly became clear and fish could be seen again due to the absence of tourists (Brunton, 2020), showed for instance the negative impact that tourist crowds have on the environment. Through the publication of incidents like this in numerous international media, many people became aware and realized the damage that tourism can cause (see Figure 9).

## 'Nature is taking back Venice': wildlife returns to tourist-free city

**With the cruise ships gone and the souvenir stalls closed, the coronavirus lockdown has transformed La Serenissima's waterways**



Seaweed can be seen in clear waters in Venice as a result of the stoppage of motorboat traffic.  
Photograph: Andrea Pattaro/AFP via Getty Images

Figure 9. Newspaper article showing the environmental changes occurred in Venice (Brunton, 2020)

In addition, it was not until the crisis and the resulting improved technical capabilities that people realized that many business trips and meetings could be replaced by online video conferences, which in turn led again to more sustainable thinking (Rauschecker, 2020). The more sustainable mindset again corresponds with the increase in stays in destinations closer to home and the decrease in planes as the transportation mode in Austria during the pandemic, which is why the following hypothesis was developed:

H5: The growing awareness towards sustainability had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

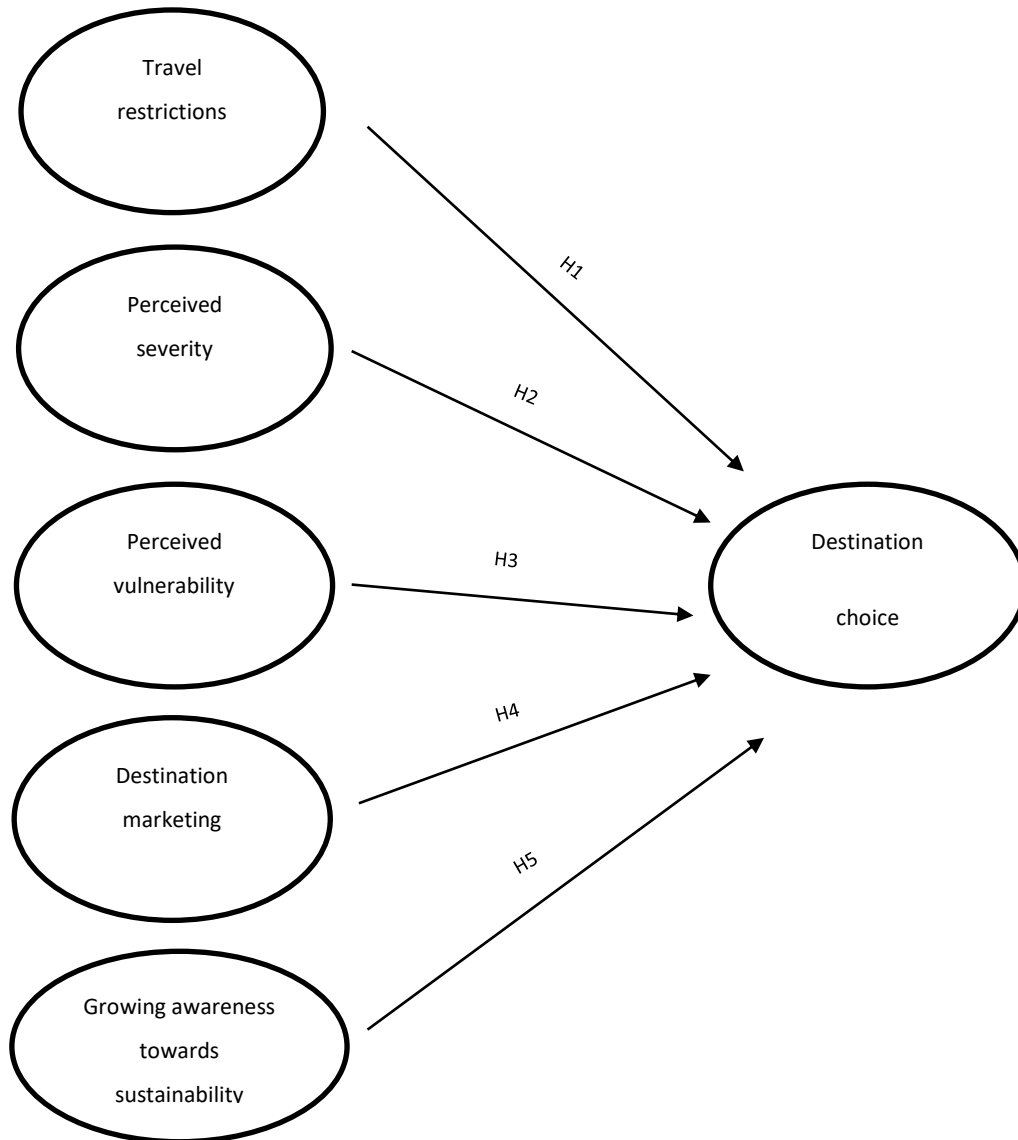


Figure 10. Conceptual framework used in this study

Travel restrictions such as lockdowns and entry barriers had a major impact on tourism in Austria, reducing the number of arrivals and overnight stays (Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus, 2020; Statistics Austria, 2022c). Since the restrictions did not have the same impact on all Austrian



regions because of different target groups, the first hypothesis aims to find out to what extent they affected the destination choice during the pandemic.

The next two constructs, perceived severity and perceived vulnerability, are components of the PMT, and studies from other countries already showed that they have an influence on people's decisions during crises. With H2 and H3 it is intended to test whether the two constructs also contributed to the fact that guests chose other destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria.

Destination marketing was identified as another possible factor influencing the choice of destination. During the pandemic, campaigns showed the beauty of Austria and motivated locals to spend a vacation in their own country. Thereby, always quiet, authentic places in nature were presented which are exactly these kinds of destinations that were booming during the pandemic. Therefore, the aim of H4 is to find out to what extent these marketing strategies influenced the decisions of the guests when it comes to the destination choice.

Lastly, several studies show that the subject of sustainability has become more important during the pandemic as a result of people rethinking their own lifestyles. Whether this is one of the reasons why guests were longing for quiet destinations in nature, relied less on the airplane as a means of transport, and spent more of their vacation in their own country will be found out with H5.

### **3 Methodology**

In the following chapter, the research method used for this study is discussed. First, the three different research approaches, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research are briefly defined, followed by a detailed explanation of what surveys are. Then, sections 3.3. and 3.4 describe the processes of survey development as well as data collection and analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Methods**

In research, primary data can be obtained in three different ways, namely with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research involves analyzing non-numerical data. This includes, for example, unstructured interviews with experts as well as focus groups, and the goal is to identify new theories based on subjective statements and opinions. In most cases, open-ended questions are asked, although these answers cannot be generalized to a large sample size. The results of the study are usually analyzed in words (Creswell, 2014). In quantitative research, in contrast, numerical data is analyzed. More precisely, it aims to test causal relationships between two or more variables, whereby the results can also be generalized to wider populations. In quantitative research, the researcher usually makes use of surveys or experiments. Surveys can deliver information on the attitudes or opinions of the target group. Experiments, in contrast, seek to illustrate whether a stimulus is likely to have an impact on a certain outcome (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The third approach, mixed methods, contains both qualitative and quantitative research and is used to gain an even greater understanding of a topic by combining both methods (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; George, 2022). According to Williams (2007), the choice of which research method to use is highly dependent on the research question and the overall goal of research. To test the hypotheses developed as a result of the literature review of this thesis, it was decided to conduct quantitative research in the form of a survey.

### **3.2 Introduction to Surveys**

According to Scheuren (2004, p. 9), surveys are “a method of gathering information from a sample of individuals”. They allow to address a large sample size in a short time and straightforwardly analyze a great number of results. This is done with the help of a statistical program to detect possible correlations and reveal information concerning the target group’s beliefs and opinions (Creswell, 2014). There are different options to conduct a survey, such as person-administered surveys, telephone-administered surveys, and self-administered ones (Fink, 2003).

Compared to other research methods, conducting a survey has a number of advantages. One of the main benefits is that the use of standardized measurements ensures comparable responses. Moreover, probability sampling, which will be defined later in this chapter, prevents bias from occurring and thus allows for reliable generalizability (Fowler, 2002). The disadvantages of surveys, however, are that the researcher does not know how honestly respondents are answering and that answers may be skipped, leading to invalid responses (Shukla, 2008). Further advantages of online surveys, which is the chosen method for this study, are the cost as well as time effectiveness and flexibility regarding time and location (Sincero, 2012). Moreover, online surveys are simple to administer, and they can be conducted completely anonymously. The two biggest disadvantages of online surveys are that they exclude non-users of the internet and as mentioned above, there is a chance of getting incomplete responses (Fowler, 2002).

In the development of a survey, the researcher must be aware of sampling, question design, and data collection and these three components will be discussed in the following. With sampling it is meant selecting a group of individuals which will participate in the research. It is used as most of the time, it is impossible to collect data from the whole population. When it comes to the sampling method, it can be distinguished between two primary types, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling (McCombes, 2023). Probability sampling is a method in which survey participants are randomly selected, meaning that each person is given an equal probability of being chosen and is considered to be the more credible method (Fowler,

2002; Nikolopoulou, 2022). Types of probability sampling include simple random sampling, which is the most commonly used method, stratified sampling, involving the collection of data from a random sample within a specific subgroup, and systematic sampling in which units are chosen by dividing the population into different subgroups and selecting then samples from each. The last probability sampling method is cluster sampling where groups of individuals are identified instead of selecting individuals. In order to avoid bias, these groups must be homogenous (Hayes, 2022; Nikolopoulou, 2022).

In non-probability sampling, in contrast, persons are chosen based on non-random criteria such as expert knowledge, leading to a higher risk of research biases (Nikolopoulou, 2022). When it comes to non-probability sampling, there are the following methods: convenience sampling, judgment sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling (Shukla, 2008). Convenience sampling describes the method of selecting persons out of convenience like geographical proximity or existing contact within the population of interest (Hair et al., 2021). In judgmental sampling, as the name indicates, the judgment of the researcher leads to the selection of the respondents. When using quota sampling, the population is first divided into subgroups that share specific characteristics and then samples are drawn from each subgroup. In contrast to stratified sampling, the quota sampling selection is non-random (Hair et al., 2021; Nikolopoulou, 2022). In the last method, snowball sampling, an initial random group of participants is chosen and after having completed the interview or survey, the participants are asked to suggest other possible individuals who may be part of the target population (Hair et al., 2021).

No matter what method is used, care should always be taken to ask questions objectively and clearly, and double negatives should be avoided. The questions can either be open-ended, meaning the respondent is allowed to express his or her opinion freely, or closed-ended, which implies predetermined choices, and the respondent selects the answer that best suits him or her (Hyman & Sierra, 2016). Closed-ended questions can include multiple choices, checklists, rankings, basic yes or no questions, and Likert scale questions. Likert scales are a measurement that has the goal of measuring the level of agreement or attitudes of individuals regarding a

specific topic. Respondents usually have the possibility to express their opinion or attitude on a five or seven-point scale (Leung, 2001; Yamashita, 2022).

Regarding the process of data collection, the researcher can put the survey into practice by either using a questionnaire or an interview. Interviews can either be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured and involve at least two people, the interviewer, and the interviewee (George, 2022). Questionnaires, in contrast, are always standardized with predefined questions (Fowler, 2002).

### **3.3 Survey Development**

As mentioned in 3.1, an online survey was chosen as the research type for this study. It was developed with the aim of answering the two research questions of the thesis, namely what impact the constructs of the PMT's threat appraisal had on the changes in destination choice during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria and which other, more general factors also influenced destination choice during the pandemic. The survey consists of 6 parts and 34 both open-ended and closed-ended questions. It was developed in English and can be found in Appendix 1. At the beginning of the survey, respondents are informed about the purpose of the survey and are assured that the data collected will be treated confidentially. They are also informed that participation in the survey is voluntary.

The first part of the survey (questions 1-10) is about the general travel behavior of the respondents during the pandemic. First and foremost, respondents are asked how many trips they made during the pandemic (March 2020 to the end of 2022) and how many of them they spent in Austria. Questions 4 and 5 focus on whether the trips mainly took place in an Austrian city or in the countryside and in which province. They seek to find out whether the answers of the respondents are consistent with the general findings of Statistics Austria (2022c) and the claims of Gruber and Varnaite (2021) that more vacations were taken in rural areas than in the capital Vienna. Regarding the question in which period the respondents spent a vacation in Austria, four options are provided. They are ranging from March 2020 to May 2020, from June 2020 to October 2020, from November 2020 to May 2021, and from June 2021 to December 2022, representing the periods of the two lockdowns and the other months

in which almost no restrictions were in place. Like question 6, which asks about the purpose of the vacation that was spent, it simply seeks to describe the travel behavior of the sample in more detail.

Questions 7 to 10 require the respondents to answer on a 7-point Likert scale how much they agree with four statements. The four statements all refer to the changes in destination choice in Austria presented in the literature review and are based on the observations of Gruber and Varnaite (2021) and the analysis of the data of Statistics Austria (2022c). Respondents are asked to what extent COVID-19 has influenced their decision about where to spend their vacations in the past two years, to what extent they agree that they spent more vacations closer to home than in the past because of COVID-19, to what extent that they have chosen destinations with fewer guests during the pandemic, and to what extent they agree to have avoided trips to crowded cities because of COVID-19. With these four questions, it is intended to measure the construct “Destination choice”.

In the second part of the survey, the focus shifts to the factors that may be responsible for the changes in destination choice. In this context, questions 11 to 13 attempt to determine the influence of travel restrictions on the changes in destination choice. Respondents are again asked to indicate their level of agreement regarding the statements “When considering where to spend a vacation in Austria during the pandemic, travel restrictions highly influenced my decision”, “My originally intended destination was not accessible because of the pandemic”, and “Since my preferred destination was not available because of the travel restrictions, I opted for another destination in Austria”. The second and third statements are adopted from a study carried out by Tauber and Bausch (2022) who found that the unavailability of a destination was one of the top five reasons that travelers chose a different destination than initially intended. Together, the three statements form the construct “Travel restrictions”.

The first research question, namely what impact the constructs of the PMT's threat appraisal had on the changes in destination choice during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria, is examined in part 3 and questions 14 to 19. Again, respondents are asked to

answer on a 7-point Likert scale to what extent they agree with six statements. The statements “COVID-19 is highly contagious”, “I see COVID-19 as a serious threat to my well-being” and “Getting infected by COVID-19 would carry severe risks” refer to the constructs “Perceived severity” and the other three statements “There is a high chance of getting infected if I travel during the COVID-19 pandemic”, “Social distancing is vital when traveling during the COVID-19 pandemic” and “In general, I felt less comfortable traveling during the pandemic” are used to measure the construct “Perceived vulnerability”. These items were adopted and adjusted from a study carried out by Kevser Çınar et al. (2022) to determine whether perceived severity and perceived vulnerability are also responsible for changes in destination choice in Austria, as it has already been reported in other countries (Kevser Çınar et al., 2022; Ruan et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2021).

The next part of the survey addresses the second research question and deals with the topic of destination marketing. The respondents are again asked about their level of agreement regarding three statements. “Destination marketing influenced my choice of where to spend the next vacation during the pandemic” is taken as a general measure of whether respondents feel they were influenced by destination marketing during the pandemic. The other two statements, namely “When considering visiting an Austrian destination during the pandemic, it was important for me to which extent the marketing campaign developed for this area could convey a sense of security” and “Marketing campaigns developed during the pandemic, showing the beauty of Austrian nature, encouraged me to spend my vacation in these peaceful areas” are based on the claims of April (n.d.) that marketing campaigns had the goal to communicate confidence and a sense of security during the pandemic. Together, the three statements above form the construct “Destination marketing”. Question 23, which asks “Do you know the marketing campaign “Urlaub in Österreich – ein guter Grund nach vorne zu blicken” that was developed during the pandemic to attract more guests?” aims to check how many people are familiar with it.

Questions 24 to 29 also attempt to answer the second research question, with this part focusing on the issue of sustainability. The first two questions of this section aim to find out how many people would have described their lifestyle as sustainable

before the pandemic and whether they would describe themselves as more sustainable now after the pandemic. By doing so, the findings of Stankov et al. (2020) and Benjamin et al. (2020) that tourists started to travel more sustainably in the wake of the pandemic are examined. Then, the respondents are again asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point-Likert scale regarding the following three statements: “The pandemic encouraged me to think more about the issue of sustainability”, “The pandemic encouraged me to use means of transportation other than the plane out of my personal beliefs and not just because traveling by plane was not possible”, and “Technological improvements during the pandemic made me aware that many business trips could be replaced by online meetings”. These statements are based on claims made by Rauschecker (2020) and Crossley (2020). Together, these three statements form the construct “Growing awareness towards sustainability”. Lastly, the question "Do you intend to continue your new sustainable habits also after the pandemic?" intends to confirm the results of Essity's Green Response Study, which states that 91% of respondents who developed more sustainable lifestyles during the pandemic plan to maintain them after the pandemic.

The last part of the survey is about demographic questions. More specifically, respondents are asked about their gender, age, nationality, level of education, and current status of employment.

### **3.4 Data Collection Process and Analysis**

The survey was created with the online tool Google Forms and the link of the survey was distributed via the Internet to reach a large number of people. Besides distributing the link in different groups on WhatsApp, it was additionally posted twice in the author's Instagram story. The posts were created on May 12, 2023, as well as on May 14, 2023, and can be found in Appendix 2. Thus, the chosen sampling method was convenience sampling. Generally, the target group was everyone who had access to the link whereby mainly younger people over 18 were targeted because of the chosen distribution channels.

The survey was accessible from May 12, 2023 to May 20, 2023, thus for eight days. During this period, 124 valid responses were collected. After the survey was closed,



the data was statistically analyzed using the program Jamovi, with correlations between the variables being checked in order to test the individual hypotheses. This was done by running a Spearman's correlation test. Finally, a linear regression analysis was performed with the aim of testing the entire research model. The results of the analysis are presented in the next chapter.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

Overall, 124 valid responses were collected on Google Forms. Of these, 64.52% were female and 35.48% were male. Most respondents, namely 84.68% were between 19 and 25 years old. 10.48% were between 26 and 35 years old and 4.84% were over 50. None of the respondents were under 18 years old or between 36 and 50. The respondents came from 15 different countries, with Austria representing the largest number of respondents. Indeed, 53 respondents indicated that they are Austrians, which corresponds to 42.74%. 19 of the respondents came from Italy (15.32%) and 11 from Germany (8.87%). The nationalities Hungary, Greek, Thai, Russian, Albanian, French, South African, Serbian, Slovakian, Romanian, American, and Dutch represent a total of 26.62%. Moreover, eight respondents did not indicate any nationality, accounting for 6.45% of the respondents.

Looking at the level of education, 56.45% of the respondents indicated that they have a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest degree. 30.65% have an undergraduate degree and 8 respondents each indicated that they did an apprenticeship or have a graduate degree as their highest level of education, accounting for 6.45%, respectively. None of the survey participants reported compulsory schooling or a PhD degree as their highest level of education. When it comes to the current status of employment, the analysis of the responses revealed that the majority of the respondents were students (70.97%), followed by employees (24.19%), unemployed and looking for a job (3.23%), and employer (1.61%). None of the respondents were retired or unemployed and not looking for a job.

Since it was a requirement to have spent a vacation in Austria in the period from March 2020 to December 2022 to participate in the study, each respondent indicated that they had spent at least one vacation in Austria during this period. 43.55% indicated that they had spent only one vacation in Austria during this period, 24.19% two vacations, 12.9% three vacations, and 19.36% more than three vacations. The most vacations were spent between June 2021 and December 2022 (82 responses) and the least between March 2020 and May 2020 (18 responses).

The majority, 82 respondents, indicated leisure as the purpose of the vacation spent in Austria. This is followed by family visits (28 answers), sports (24 answers), education (20 answers), business (13 answers), and other (2 answers). These numbers total more than 124 responses because it was possible for respondents to pick more than one purpose.

In the following, the descriptives for the items which were used to measure the agreement of the respondents regarding specific statements are presented. For this purpose, the mean was calculated as a first step to determine and compare the average level of agreement for all individual items. Like described in section 3.3, the level of agreement was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranking from “Strongly agree” with a value of 1 to “Strongly disagree” with a value of 7. Thus, an average value above 4 indicates that respondents were more likely to agree with the statement, and an average value below 4 suggests that respondents tended to disagree with the statement. In addition, a Shapiro-Wilk test was performed for all items to determine whether the results were normally distributed. These calculations were supplemented by the calculations of the skewness as well as the kurtosis. Both tests provide more information concerning the distribution of the data and thus help in determining the correct test for subsequent hypothesis testing.

#### **4.1 Destination Choice**

For the first item of the construct “Destination choice”, intended to measure the level of agreement regarding the statement “COVID-19 affected my decision on where to go on holiday during the last two years” a mean of 5.15 was calculated (see Table 1). This value implies that the respondents on average reported that COVID-19 somewhat affected their decision on where to spend their holiday during the last two years. The skewness value of -0.81 suggests that the data is left skewed, and kurtosis has a negative value of -0.24 (see Table 1), displaying a platykurtic distribution. This means that the distribution has fewer extreme positive or negative events than a normal distribution. Moreover, a Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to find out whether the data is normally distributed or not. The p-value of  $< 0.001$  (see Table 1) indicates the distribution is not normally distributed.

Similar results were calculated for the second item of the construct “Destination choice” (DC2), asking the level of agreement regarding the statement “Due to COVID-19, I spent more vacations closer to home than I used to in the past”. The calculated mean of 4.42, presented in Table 1, shows that again, on average, the respondents somewhat agreed to this statement. However, it must be said that the value is quite close to the value 4 which suggests that, on average, respondents had an almost neutral view towards this topic. The data is left skewed which is shown by the negative skewness value of -0.23 and the kurtosis of -1.14. The p-value of the Shapiro-Wilk test of  $< 0.001$  stipulates that the data is not normally distributed. These results are again presented in Table 1.

Respondents also responded quite neutrally on average to the statement “I deliberately chose destinations in nature with few other guests during the pandemic” (DC3). This is shown by the mean of 3.90. The data is slightly left skewed, indicated by the value of -0.17 and the distribution is again strongly platykurtic. The p-value of  $< 0.001$  calculated by applying the Shapiro-Wilk test again shows that the distribution is not normally distributed (see Table 1).

The last item of the construct “Destination choice” (DC4) asked the level of agreement regarding the statement “Because of “COVID-19, I preferred to avoid traveling to crowded big cities”. The mean of 3.74 shows that, on average, respondents on average reported that they somewhat disagree with this statement. The distribution is very slightly right skewed with a skewness of 0.06 and extremely platykurtic with a kurtosis of -1.38. The Shapiro-Wilk test with a p-value of  $< 0.001$  again revealed that the data is not normally distributed (see Table 1).

In addition, respondents were asked whether they spent the vacation(s) mainly in the countryside, in the city, or equally in the countryside and city. The majority of the respondents, namely 56, indicated that they spent their vacation(s) in the countryside, followed by 40 who spent the vacation(s) in a city and 28 reported that they spent their vacation(s) equally in the countryside and in a city. Regarding the federal states, almost half of the respondents, more precisely 46.77%, said that they spent a vacation during the pandemic in Tyrol. This is followed by the capital Vienna with 35.48% and

Salzburg with 29.84%. These figures do not coincide with the facts from Statistics Austria (2022c), showing that in 2020 the fewest arrivals were observed in Vienna across Austria, and also in 2021 only two provinces recorded fewer arrivals than the capital Vienna.

## **4.2 Travel Restrictions**

On average, the respondents agreed with the statement “When considering where to spend a vacation in Austria during the pandemic, travel restrictions highly influenced my decision”. This is shown by the mean of 5.02 for TR1, as presented in Table 1. Moreover, the distribution is negatively skewed and platykurtic, indicated by the skewness value of -0.8 and a kurtosis of -0.47. Concerning the statements “My originally intended destination was not accessible because of the pandemic” (TR2) and “Since my preferred destination was not available because of the travel restrictions, I opted for another destination in Austria” (TR3), the respondents were quite neutral with a very slight tendency towards the answer “Somewhat disagree”, indicated by the mean values of 3.84 and 3.39. Both distributions are positively skewed and strongly platykurtic with skewness values of 0.07 and 0.38 and kurtosis values of -1.5 and -1.12. All three distributions are not normally distributed, shown by the p-value of  $< 0.001$  for the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results can be found in Table 1.

## **4.3 Perceived Severity**

The means of 4.03, 4.40, and 4.56 for the items intended to measure the construct “Perceived severity” indicate that on average, the respondents had a quite neutral view towards the statements “COVID-19 is highly contagious (PS1)”, “I see COVID-19 as a serious threat to my well-being (PS2)” and “Getting infected by COVID-19 would carry severe risks (PS3)”, with a slight tendency to somewhat agree with the statement. All three distributions are not normally distributed, indicated by the p-value of  $< 0.001$  for the Shapiro-Wilk test and left skewed. The kurtosis values of -1.19 and -0.81 show that PS2 as well as PS3 are platykurtic while the distribution of the results for PS1 is leptokurtic with a kurtosis of 0.34 (see Table 1). A leptokurtic distribution is likely to have a great number of outliers.

#### **4.4 Perceived Vulnerability**

When looking at the items intended to measure the construct of “Perceived vulnerability” individually, it can be said that all three items show similar results in terms of the mean. The means of 4.56, 4.81, and 4.53, as shown in Table 1, indicate that the respondents on average somewhat agreed with the statements “There is a high chance of getting infected if I travel during the COVID-19 pandemic” (PS1), Social distancing is vital when traveling during the COVID-19 pandemic” (PS2) and “In general, I felt less comfortable traveling during the pandemic” (PS3). All three distributions are left skewed and while the data concerning the first and third statements results in platykurtic distributions, the second distribution is a leptokurtic one. All three items show a p-value of  $< 0.001$  for the Shapiro-Wilk test, meaning that they are not normally distributed.

#### **4.5 Destination Marketing**

On average, the respondents reported that they somewhat disagree with the statement “Destination marketing influenced my choice of where to spend the next vacation during the pandemic”. This is shown by the mean of 3.61 (see Table 1) for the first item intended to measure the construct of “Destination marketing” (DM1). The analysis of the statements “When considering visiting an Austrian destination during the pandemic, it was important for me to which extent the marketing campaign developed for this area could convey a sense of security” (DM2) and “Marketing campaigns developed during the pandemic, showing the beauty of Austrian nature, encouraged me to spend my vacation in these peaceful areas” (DM3) show similar results with mean values of 3.5 and 3.95. All three distributions are very slightly left skewed with skewness values of -0.12, -0.01, and -0.04 and they are all strongly platykurtic, indicated by the skewness values of -1.32, -1.39, and -1.12. Again, all three items show a p-value for the Shapiro-Wilk test of  $< 0.001$  and the data is therefore not normally distributed (see Table 1).

#### **4.6 Growing Awareness Towards Sustainability**

The items intended to measure the last independent variable “Growing awareness towards sustainability” show quite different results. The mean of the first item of 4.63, asking for the level of agreement regarding the statement “The pandemic encouraged me to think more about the issue of sustainability” (GAS1) indicates that on average, the people reported that they somewhat agree with this statement. The data is left skewed and slightly platykurtic with a kurtosis of -0.19. The mean of 3.76 calculated for the statement “The pandemic encouraged me to use means of transportation other than the plane out of my personal believes and not just because traveling by plane was not possible” (GAS2) shows that on average, the respondents were more likely to indicate that they disagreed with the statement. The distribution is slightly left skewed and strongly platykurtic. The data for the third item, asking the level of agreement regarding the statement “Technological improvements during the pandemic made me aware that many business trips could be replaced by online meetings” (GAS3) shows with 5.73 the highest mean. This value suggests that, on average, respondents agreed with the above-mentioned statement. The distribution is again strongly left skewed and leptokurtic, indicated by the skewness value of -1.08 and the kurtosis of 0.85. Again, all results can be found in Table 1.

	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	p
DC1	5.15	-0.81	-0.24	< .001
DC2	4.42	-0.23	-1.14	< .001
DC3	3.90	-0.17	-1.05	< .001
DC4	3.74	0.06	-1.38	< .001
TR1	5.02	-0.80	-0.47	< .001
TR2	3.84	0.07	-1.50	< .001
TR3	3.39	0.38	-1.12	< .001
PS1	5.29	-1.00	0.34	< .001
PS2	4.03	-0.03	-1.19	< .001
PS3	4.40	-0.45	-0.81	< .001
PV1	4.56	-0.53	-0.77	< .001
PV2	4.81	-1.03	0.34	< .001
PV3	4.53	-0.47	-1.04	< .001
DM1	3.61	-0.12	-1.32	< .001
DM2	3.50	-0.01	-1.39	< .001
DM3	3.95	-0.04	-1.12	< .001
GAS1	4.63	-0.66	-0.19	< .001
GAS2	3.76	-0.16	-1.25	< .001
GAS3	5.73	-1.08	0.85	< .001

Table 1. Descriptives of the individual items

#### 4.7 Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

In the following section, the five hypotheses are tested by checking whether there is a correlation between the dependent variables and each of the five independent variables. For this purpose, the individual items, which are intended to measure a respective construct, are combined into one variable. Then, they are tested for internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha test (see Table 2). With this test, it can be checked whether the combined items measure the same characteristic. After presenting the descriptives for these latent variables, a Shapiro-Wilk test is performed to determine if the data is normally distributed. The results for this test as well as the descriptives for the new latent variables can be found in Table 3. A Spearman's correlation test is then performed to reveal a potential correlation between the dependent and independent variables and to accept or reject the hypothesis (see Table 4). It was opted for this test since all distributions are not normally distributed, the sample size is quite small, and the Spearman's rho allows to interpret whether the



correlation is positive or negative. The results are then compared to the existing literature.

The dependent variable, against which all independent variables are tested, is called "Destination choice" and consists of four individual items. As a first step, the four items were tested for internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha test and it showed a value of 0.68, representing an acceptable value to proceed with further calculations. Then, they were combined to create the new latent variable DC\_comp. This new distribution has a mean of 4.3 on a seven-point Likert scale, a skewness of -0.04, and a kurtosis of -0.62. The two latter values indicate that the distribution is left skewed and platykurtic. The p-value of 0.045 for the Shapiro-Wilk revealed that the data is not normally distributed.

#### **4.7.1 Hypothesis 1**

H1: Travel restrictions had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This first hypothesis attempts to test the extent to which travel restrictions had an impact on the changes in destination choice observed in Austria during the pandemic. For this purpose, three items were looked at, which all intend to measure this potential impact. The results for Cronbach's alpha showed a value of 0.79 (see Table 2), meaning that the questions are very reliable. Therefore, they were combined to create the independent variable "Travel restrictions" (TR\_comp) with a mean of 4.08 on a seven-point Likert scale and a negative skewness of -0.04. The Shapiro-Wilk test revealed a p-value of 0.002 (see Table 3). Since the distribution is not normally distributed, like the distribution of the dependent variable, a Spearman's correlation test was performed to check a potential correlation between the independent variable "Travel restrictions" and the dependent variable "Destination choice". Indeed, Spearman's correlation test showed a p-value of  $< 0.001$  (see Table 4), indicating that there is a correlation between these two variables, and the alternative hypothesis H1 can therefore be accepted. The Spearman's rho of 0.46 (see Table 4) indicates that the correlation is moderate and positive, meaning that the more travel restrictions are in place, the more changes in destination choice can be observed.

These findings are in line with the statements of Tauber and Bausch (2022) that the unavailability of a destination is one of the most common reasons why a different destination is chosen than originally intended. The various restrictions have led to the fact that some destinations were no longer in the evoked set of travelers and therefore they have chosen another.

#### **4.7.2 Hypothesis 2**

H2: Perceived severity of COVID-19 had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the pandemic.

The aim of H2 is to test whether people's perception of how severe the pandemic was, had an impact on the changes in destination choice that occurred during the pandemic. In order to test the second hypothesis, again three items were combined to create the new variable intended to measure the construct "Perceived severity" (PS\_comp). The Cronbach's alpha showed a value of 0.82 (see Table 2) which means that the internal consistency of these three items is very good. Since the data is not normally distributed, indicated by the p-value of 0.004 for the Shapiro-Wilk test (see Table 3), a Spearman's correlation test was performed. It revealed a p-value of < 0.001 and a Spearman's rho of 0.54 (see Table 4), meaning that there is a positive, moderate correlation between the extent to which people see COVID-19 as a severe threat and the shifts in destination choice in Austria that occurred during the pandemic. The alternative hypothesis H2 can therefore be accepted. The implications of the acceptance of H2 will be discussed in 4.7.3, together with the results found for H3.

#### **4.7.3 Hypothesis 3**

H3: Perceived vulnerability had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This hypothesis attempts to measure whether the second construct of PMT's threat appraisal, namely "Perceived vulnerability", had an influence on the shifts in destination choice which could be observed in Austria during the pandemic. The analysis of the construct "Perceived vulnerability" (PV\_comp) shows similar results to the one of the first construct of the PMT's threat appraisal. This construct again

combines three items, whereby the internal consistency of the items of 0.74 (see Table 2) can be considered as acceptable. The data is not normally distributed, which is shown by the p-value for the Shapiro-Wilk test of  $< 0.001$  and has a mean of 4.63. Also, it is negatively skewed with a skewness value of -0.72 and the kurtosis value of 0.15 indicates a leptokurtic distribution (see Table 3). The Spearman's correlation test revealed a p-value of  $< 0.001$  and a positive Spearman's rho of 0.63 (see Table 4). The alternative hypothesis H3 can thus be accepted.

Together with the acceptance of H2, these results support the findings of Kevser Çınar et al. (2022), Lu and Wei (2019), Ruan et al. (2020), and Zheng et al. (2021). They all claim that the constructs of PMT's threat appraisal, perceived severity, and perceived vulnerability, had an impact on the destination choice during crises in other countries. They do not only suggest that a high perceived severity as well as vulnerability may lead to a low intention to travel to a specific destination but can even raise the fear of traveling to a visit a destination. On the one hand, the acceptances of H3 and H4 confirm these claims and on the other hand, they deliver the answer to the first research question. Specifically, they suggest that the constructs of PMT's threat appraisal did have a positive influence on the changes in destination choice during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria. The positive relation between "Perceived vulnerability" and "Destination choice" implies that the more vulnerable people were feeling to contracting COVID-19, the more likely they were to choose a different Austrian destination than they would usually have done. The positive relation between "Perceived severity" and "Destination choice" implies that the higher the level of how severe people considered COVID-19 to be, the more likely they were again to choose a different destination.

#### **4.7.4 Hypothesis 4**

H4: Destination marketing had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This hypothesis aims to check whether there is a correlation between the campaigns developed during the pandemic, showing the beauty of the Austrian nature, and changes in destination choice that occurred during the pandemic. For this purpose,

three items were combined to create the independent variable “Destination marketing” (DM\_comp). Cronbach’s alpha for these three items lies at 0.83 (see Table 2), which indicates a high internal consistency. The data has a mean of 3.69, meaning that on average, the respondents indicated that they did not feel that they chose other destinations because of these campaigns. The distribution is slightly left skewed and platykurtic. Furthermore, the Shapiro-Wilk test also shows that it is not normally distributed, which is indicated by the p-value of 0.001 (see Table 3). However, Spearman’s correlation test with a p-value of  $< 0.001$  showed that the dependent variable “Destination choice” is influenced by the independent variable “Destination marketing” and the alternative hypothesis H4 can be accepted. The correlation can be considered as positive and moderate, which is shown by Spearman’s rho of 0.51 (see Table 4).

Accepting H4 infers that the marketing campaigns developed during the pandemic to attract more guests had a positive influence on the shifts in destination choice during the pandemic. The positive correlation means that the more campaigns were developed for a destination and were able to convey a sense of security, the more people visited this destination. These findings are in line with the statements of April (n.d.) that the most important thing marketers had to be aware of during the pandemic was to communicate confidence and a feeling of safety. Even though only 14 respondents stated that they are familiar with the marketing campaign “Urlaub in Österreich – ein guter Grund nach vorne zu blicken”, developed in the wake of the pandemic, they were still unconsciously influenced by it or other destination marketing initiatives, as the results of the survey show.

#### **4.7.5 Hypothesis 5**

H5: The growing awareness towards sustainability had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The last hypothesis aims to test to which extent the independent variable “Growing awareness towards sustainability” had an influence on the dependent variable “Destination choice” in Austria during the pandemic. The independent variable GAS\_comp consists again of three items and Cronbach’s alpha for them lies at 0.61

(see Table 2). The mean for the combined data is 4.7, meaning that on average, the respondents indicated that they were thinking more about the topic of sustainability during the pandemic. Moreover, the left-skewed distribution is platykurtic and shows a p-value of  $< 0.001$  for the Shapiro-Wilk test, meaning that it is not normally distributed (see Table 3). The Spearman's correlation test performed with the variables "Destination choice" and "Growing awareness towards sustainability" indicates a p-value of  $< 0.001$ . Thus, there is indeed a correlation between these two variables, and the alternative hypothesis H5 can be accepted. The Spearman's rho of 0.57 (see Table 4) indicates that the relationship is moderate and positive.

The positive relationship between the variables GAS\_comp and DC\_comp infers that the more sustainable habits were developed during the pandemic, the more likely a person was to choose another destination than usual. These findings support the claims made by Stankov et al. (2020), Benjamin et al. (2020) as well as the results of the McKinsey Survey (2021) and Essity's Green Response Study (2021) that the pandemic led to a more sustainable lifestyle and therefore now, greater emphasis is placed on choosing a sustainable destination.

Moreover, the respondents were asked whether they would have described themselves as a sustainable person before the pandemic and whether they would describe themselves now, "after" the pandemic, as a more sustainable person. While 50 respondents indicated that they lived a sustainable lifestyle before the pandemic, 72 reported that they would describe themselves as more sustainable now after the pandemic. Moreover, 53.23% of the respondents indicated that they want to continue their more sustainable lifestyles developed during the pandemic now in the post-COVID-19 period. These findings again correspond to Essity's Green Response Study (2021). In this study, 91% of the respondents who implemented more sustainable habits in their daily lives indicated that they want to maintain them also after the pandemic.

By conducting the study and accepting H1, H4, and H5, it was found that the travel restrictions that were in place during the pandemic, destination marketing, and the fact that more people developed more sustainable lifestyles during the pandemic

were all three factors that led to the changes in destination choice occurred during the pandemic in Austria. This information provides the answer to the second research question of this thesis.

	Cronbach's $\alpha$
DC1_comp	0.68
TR_comp	0.79
PS_comp	0.82
PV_comp	0.74
DM_comp	0.83
GAS_comp	0.61

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha for the computed variables

	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	p
DC1_comp	4.30	-0.04	-0.62	0.045
TR_comp	4.08	-0.04	-1.01	0.002
PS_comp	4.58	-0.30	-0.62	0.004
PV_comp	4.63	-0.72	0.15	< .001
DM_comp	3.69	-0.09	-0.97	0.001
GAS_comp	4.70	-0.44	-0.27	< .001

Table 3. Descriptives for the computed variables

Correlation Matrix

		DC1_comp
TR_comp	Spearman's rho	0.46
	p-value	< .001
PS_comp	Spearman's rho	0.54
	p-value	< .001
PV_comp	Spearman's rho	0.63
	p-value	< .001
DM_comp	Spearman's rho	0.51
	p-value	< .001
GAS_comp	Spearman's rho	0.57
	p-value	< .001

Table 5. Spearman’s rank correlation results for all independent variables with regard to the dependent variable “Destination choice”

#### 4.8 Linear Regression Analysis

After the individual hypotheses were analyzed, the conceptual framework was tested. To do so, a linear regression analysis was performed to test to which extent the independent variables all together have an influence on the dependent variable. The test revealed that the coefficient of determination has a value of 0.57. This means that 57% of the independent variables “Travel restrictions”, “Perceived severity”, “Perceived vulnerability”, “Destination marketing” and “Growing awareness towards sustainability” have an influence on the dependent variable “Destination choice”. As shown in Table 5, the independent variables “Perceived vulnerability”, “Destination marketing” and “Growing awareness towards sustainability” have a p-value below < 0.05 and therefore have a significant influence on the changes in destination choice in Austria that occurred during the pandemic. The variables “Perceived severity” and “Travel restrictions”, in contrast, are not significant for the model as a whole since they have p-values of 0.098 and 0.393 and thus greater than 0.05. The positive estimates of 0.24, 0.27, and 0.24 for the constructs “Perceived vulnerability”, “Destination marketing” and “Growing awareness towards sustainability” imply that

a high perceived vulnerability of getting infected by the virus, a high number of marketing campaigns and an increase in the awareness towards the topic of sustainability led to more shifts in the destination choice, as already discussed in 4.3.

Predictor	Estimate	p
Intercept	0.19	0.588
TR_comp	0.05	0.393
PS_comp	0.14	0.098
PV_comp	0.24	0.022
DM_comp	0.27	< .001
GAS_comp	0.24	0.008

$R^2 = 0.57$

Table 5. Linear regression model coefficients



## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The facts and numbers presented by Statistics Austria (2022c) show that people who spent a vacation in Austria during the pandemic tended to choose different destinations than they did in the past, at a time when there was no health crisis. The aim of this thesis was to find out which factors were decisive for these changes in destination choice to give managerial recommendations on how to better promote a destination in a future potential crisis in order to suffer fewer economic losses.

Several studies conducted in other countries have already shown that the extent to which people perceive a health crisis to be severe, referred to as “Perceived severity”, and the likelihood that they will be infected with the disease, referred to as “Perceived vulnerability”, have led to changes in travel behavior. To test whether this was also the case in Austria during the pandemic, these two topics were discussed in the literature review as part of the PMT. Moreover, two hypotheses were developed, intended to test whether there is a correlation between the independent variables “Perceived severity” as well as “Perceived vulnerability” and the dependent variable “Destination choice”.

In addition, the literature review identified three further factors that may have had an influence on the choice of destination in Austria during the pandemic. As a result of the literature review, three further hypotheses were formulated with the aim of testing a possible correlation between the independent variables "Travel restrictions", "Destination marketing", and "Growing awareness towards sustainability" and the dependent variable "Destination choice". For this purpose, a survey was developed and carried out, whereby the distribution mode was convenience sampling. The collected data was then statistically analyzed by using the software Jamovi. The main part of the analysis section consisted of testing the raised hypotheses using the Spearman correlation test.

The analysis of the collected data showed that all p-values for the Spearman correlations tests were  $< 0.05$ . The null hypotheses can therefore be rejected and the alternative hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 accepted. Thus, the five constructs

listed above had an influence on destination choice in Austria during the pandemic. The findings that travel restrictions influence the destination choice (H1) are in line with the claims of Tauber and Bausch (2022). The acceptances of H2 und H3, implying that the extent to which respondents consider a pandemic to be severe and the probability of getting infected by the virus had an influence on the destination choice in Austria during the pandemic, correspond to the results of the studies carried out by Kevser Çınar et al. (2022); Lu and Wei (2019), Ruan et al. (2020), and Zheng et al. (2021). Furthermore, the fact that respondents were influenced in their choice of where to spend the next vacation by marketing campaigns trying to convey a sense of security, is in accordance with the claims of April (n.d.). Lastly, the confirmed correlation between the variables "Growing awareness towards sustainability" and "Destination choice" support the claims made by Stankov et al. (2020) as well as Benjamin et al. (2020) and the results of the McKinsey survey (2021) and the Essity's Green Response Study (2021). For four of the five hypotheses, a positive and moderate relationship was found as measured by Spearman's rho, and for H3, which intended to measure the correlation between "Perceived vulnerability" and "Destination choice", the relationship is even strong and positive.

Another key finding of the study is that 53.23% of the respondents developed more sustainable lifestyles during the pandemic and plan to maintain them after the pandemic. These findings are consistent with those of Essity's Green Response Study (2021), and the statements of Benjamin et al. (2020).

The only finding of the survey that does not coincide with the data from Statistics Austria (2022c) presented in the literature review, is the fact that 35.48% of respondents indicated that they had spent a vacation in Vienna during the pandemic. This makes Vienna the second most visited destination among the respondents, in the official ranking of Statistics Austria (2022c) the arrivals of the capital come much further behind.

Finally, the entire research model was tested using linear regression analysis. It was revealed that the model is significant as a whole with a p-value of  $< 0.05$  and 57% of the independent variables "Travel restrictions", "Perceived severity", "Perceived

vulnerability", "Destination marketing" and "Growing awareness towards sustainability" together have an influence on the independent variable "Destination choice".

As for any other study, there are a few limitations that need to be taken into account. The first limitation concerns the sample size. Although the sample size of  $n = 124$  can be accepted for this thesis, a higher number of responses would be preferred. Moreover, it must be mentioned that more than 84% of the respondents were between 19 and 25 years old and almost 71% of the respondents were students. The reason for this is the fact that convenience sampling was chosen as the distribution method of the survey. By using a method that falls into the category of probability sampling, more diversity could be achieved, and bias could be excluded.

Secondly, the survey was carried out in the spring of 2023, at which time almost all safety measures had already been removed and most people considered the pandemic to be over (Gallup Institute, 2023; Kittner, 2023). Although the survey asked respondents to recall how they felt during the pandemic and what fears they experienced at that time, it may still be the case that many have forgotten how exactly they felt at that time or, looking back, the whole situation seems less severe to them because they have now returned to their normal lives.

Thirdly, since most studies so far focused only on the two constructs of the PMT'S threat appraisal path, and due to time constraints, it was decided to focus only on these two constructs in this study. However, it would be interesting to test in a further study whether the other constructs of the theory, namely response and self-efficacy, also had an influence on destination choice in Austria during the pandemic. This would enable researchers to find out how the measures taken to combat the pandemic were perceived. In addition, a further study might examine whether differences are noticeable when comparing the various age groups and or nationalities. With these findings, more customized marketing strategies for the respective age groups and nationalities could be developed. Fourthly, this study focused only on factors that were significant for the changes in destination choice during the pandemic. However, it would certainly be interesting to test to what extent the changes can still be

observed now, and if any can still be identified, then which factors are now influencing these changes. Lastly, it would be interesting to replicate this study, but also extended studies taking into account the factors that are still influential now in the post COVID-19 period, in another country.

The thesis aims to give practical implications for tourism practitioners and managers which will be discussed in the following. One of the core findings of this study is that during a health crisis, safety concerns increase significantly, and travelers tend to avoid destinations where they do not feel safe due to risk-averse behavior. For this reason, in a possible future health crisis, it is very important to emphasize transparent communication right from the start and provide people with accurate information about what is being done at the destination to ensure the safety of visiting the destination. This information could include details about health protocols, hygiene practices, and social distancing measures. In addition, it was found that marketing campaigns positively influence potential travelers in their destination choice. Combining the fear experienced by travelers during a pandemic with the fact that marketing campaigns have a positive impact on people's choices, tailored campaigns should be developed to emphasize the destination's commitment to health and safety. In this way, a sense of safety may be conveyed to the people and risks could be mitigated.

Also, as other studies have already shown, the topic of sustainability is becoming increasingly important to more and more people (Benjamin et al., 2020; Stankov et al., 2020). The analysis of the survey carried out for this thesis revealed that the growing awareness towards sustainability was not only a phenomenon observable during the pandemic, but more than half of the respondents indicated that they intend to maintain their sustainable lifestyles developed during the pandemic even now in the post COVID-19 period. It is therefore important that managers respond to this new, rapidly growing trend and design destinations in a more sustainable way. This could be done by developing a long-term vision plan for sustainable tourism. Such a plan would not only make the destination more sustainable in the long term but could also, together with appropriate marketing strategies, attract more guests who increasingly attach importance to this issue.

## Bibliography

- AGES. (2023). *AGES Dashboard COVID19*. <https://covid19-dashboard.ages.at/?area=10>
- Airbnb. (2021). *Airbnb report on travel & living*. <https://news.airbnb.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/05/Airbnb-Report-on-Travel-Living.pdf>
- Apaolaza V., Paredes, M. R., Hartmann, P., García-Merino, J. D., & Marcos, A. (2022). The effect of threat and fear of COVID-19 on booking intentions of full board hotels: The roles of perceived coping efficacy and present-hedonism orientation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103255>
- April, J. P. (n.d.). Destination marketing in the COVID-19 era: how can DMO's attract more visitors? *Smartvel*. <https://blog.smartvel.com/blog/stimulating-tourism-how-can-dmos-attract-visitors-in-the-covid-19-era>
- Backer, E., & Ritchie, B. W. (2017). VFR travel: a viable market for tourism crisis and disaster recovery? *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 19(4), 400-411. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2102>
- Baloglu, S. (2001). Image variations of Turkey by familiarity index: Informational and experiential dimensions. *Tourism Management*, 22(2), 127-133. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00049-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00049-2)
- Benjamin, D., Dillette, A. & Alderman, D. H. (2020). "We can't turn to normal": Committing to tourism equity in the post-pandemic-age. *Tourism Geographies*, 22, 476-483.
- Bevölkerungsdichte Linz. (n.d.). *Similio*. <https://simil.io/politisch/linz-stadt/linz/bevoelkerungsdichte>

- Biglieri, S., De Vidovich, L., & Keil, R. (2020). City as the core of contagion? Repositioning COVID-19 at the social and spatial periphery of urban society. *Cities & Health*, 5, 63-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2020.1788320>
- Bloom Consulting. (2020). *How destination should prepare for the post-Covid-19*. Bloom Consulting Journal. <https://www.bloom-consulting.com/journal/how-destination-brands-should-prepare-for-the-post-covid-19/>
- Brau, R. (2008). Demand-driven sustainable tourism? A choice modelling analysis. *Tourism Economics*, 14(4), 691-708.
- Brunton, J. (2020, March 2020). Nature is taking back Venice: wildlife returns to tourist-free city. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/nature-is-taking-back-venice-wildlife-returns-to-tourist-free-city>
- Bundesministerium für Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus. (2020). *Tourismus Österreich 2020*. [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Tourismusbericht%202020\\_barrierefrei.pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Tourismusbericht%202020_barrierefrei.pdf)
- Campos-Soria, J. A., Inchausti-Sintes, F., & Eugenio-Martin, J. L. (2015). Understanding tourist's economizing strategies during the global economic crisis. *Tourism Management*, 48, 164–173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.10.019>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Crompton, J. (1992). Structure of vacation destination choice sets. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19(3), 420-434.
- Crossley, É. (2020). Ecological grief generates desire for environmental healing in tourism after COVID-19. *Tourism Geographies*, 22, 536-546.

- Dellaert, B. G. C., Ettema, D. F., & Lindh, C. (1998). Multi-faceted tourist travel decisions: a constraint-based conceptual framework, to describe tourists' sequential choices of travel components. *Tourism Management*, 19(4), 313-320.
- Deyá-Tortella, B., Leoni, V., & Ramos, V. (2022). COVID-led consumption displacement: A longitudinal analysis of hotel booking patterns. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103343>
- Essity (2021). *Essitys Green Response Study*. <https://www.essity.de/nachhaltigkeit/green-response-study/>
- Eugenio-Martin, J. L., & Campos-Soria, J. A. (2014). Economic crisis and tourism expenditure cutback decision. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 44, 53–73.
- Federal Ministry Republic of Austria. (n.d.). *National data*. <https://www.bmaw.gv.at/en/Topics/tourism/tourism-s/national-data.html>.
- Fink, A. (2003). *The survey handbook*. (2nd ed.). Sage Publications
- Fischer R., Bortolini, T., Pilati, R., Porto, J., & Moll, J. (2021). Values and COVID-19 worries: The importance of emotional stability traits. *Personal and Individual Differences*, 182. 10.1016/j.paid.2021.111079
- Floyd, D. L., Prentice-Dunn, S., & Rogers, R.W. (2000). A meta-analysis of research on protection motivation theory. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30(2), 407–429.
- Foist, L., & Loy, B. (2022). *Evoked set in marketing*. <https://study.com/learn/lesson/evoked-set-in-marketing-explanation.html>
- Fowler, F. J. Jr. (2002). *Survey research methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Fritz, O., & Ehn-Fragner, S. (2020). COVID-19-Krise stoppt dynamische Expansion im Tourismus. *WIFO*.

[https://www.wifo.ac.at/jart/prj3/wifo/resources/person\\_dokument/person\\_dokument.jart?publikationsid=66655&mime\\_type=application/pdf](https://www.wifo.ac.at/jart/prj3/wifo/resources/person_dokument/person_dokument.jart?publikationsid=66655&mime_type=application/pdf)

Gallup Institut. (2023). *Corona-Pandemie: In den Köpfen schon vorbei*.

<https://www.gallup.at/de/unternehmen/studien/2023/corona-pandemie-in-den-koepfen-schon-vorbei/>

George, T. (2022). Mixed methods research. Definition, guide & examples. *Scribbr*.

<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/mixed-methods-research/>

Gruber, B., & Varnaite, R. (2021). Austria: Hotel market. *Horwath HTL*.

[https://cdn.horwathhtl.com/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2/2021/10/Austria\\_Hotel-Market.pdf](https://cdn.horwathhtl.com/wpcontent/uploads/sites/2/2021/10/Austria_Hotel-Market.pdf)

Hair, J., Ortinau, D., Harrison, D. E., Celsi, M., & Bush, Ro. (2021). *Essentials of marketing research*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Hayes, A. (2022). Systematic sampling: what is it, and how is it used in research?

*Investopedia*. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/systematic-sampling.asp>

Holidays in Austria. (2020, October 15). *Marketing campaign to boost inlands tourism and destinations in the nature*. [Screenshot]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptp6aXrRG3o>

Holidays in Austria. (2020, October 15). *Marketing campaign to boost inlands tourism and destinations in the nature*. [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptp6aXrRG3o>

Holidays in Austria. (2023). *Explore Austria*. <https://www.austria.info/en/service-and-facts/about-austria>

Holidays in Austria. (n.d.) *History*. <https://www.austria.info/en/service-and-facts/about-austria/history>



Howard, J. A. (1963), *Marketing Management Analysis, and Planning*, Homewood, IL: Irwin.

Hyman, M. R., & Sierra, J. J. (2016). Open- versus close-ended survey questions. *Business Outlook*, 14(2).  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282249876\\_Open-\\_versus\\_close-ended\\_survey\\_questions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282249876_Open-_versus_close-ended_survey_questions)

Itani, O., & Hollebeek, L. (2021). Consumers' Health Locus-of-Control and Social Distancing in Pandemic-Based E-tailing Services. *Journal of Services Marketing*. DOI:10.1108/JSM-10-2020-0410

Jacoby, J., & Kaplan, L. B. (1972). *The components of perceived risk*. In *proceedings of the annual conference of the association for consumer research*, Chicago, IL, USA, 3-5 November 1972.

Ju, Y., & Jang, S. (2022). The Effect of COVID-19 on hotel booking intentions: Investigating the roles of message appeal type and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 108.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103357>

Kevser Çınar, K., Kavacık, S. Z., Biskin, F., & Çınar M. (2022). Understanding the behavioral intentions about holidays in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic: Application of protection motivation theory. *Healthcare*, 10, 1623.

Kittner, D. (2023). Am 30. Juni endet die Pandemie: Wie aus Corona eine normale Krankheit wird. *Kurier*. <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/am-30-juni-endet-die-pandemie-wie-aus-corona-eine-normale-krankheit-wird/402312140>

Klenosky, D., Gengler, C. E., & Mulvey, M. S. (1993). Understanding the factors influencing ski destination choice: A means-end analytic approach. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 25(4), 362-379. 10.1080/00222216.1993.11969934

Kremser, B. (2021, December 27). Corona-Lockdown setzte Wiener Hotel Sacher zu. *Vienna.at*. <https://www.vienna.at/corona-lockdown-setzte-wiener-hotel-sacher-zu/7240993>

Leadersnet (2020). *Österreich Werbung: Kampagne für Winterurlaub im Inland gelauncht*. <https://www.leadersnet.at/news/46416,oesterreich-werbung-kampagne-fuer-winterurlaub-im-inland.html>

Leung, W.-C. (2001). How to design a questionnaire. *BMJ*, 9, 187–189. 10.1136/sbmj.0106187

Lockdown-Ende: Tirol öffnet breitflächig. (2021). *Tirol ORF.at*. <https://tirol.orf.at/stories/3133559/>.

Lopes, E. R., Santos, P. A., & Simoes, J. T. (2022). Cultural Tourism and the Tourist Experience in the Digital Era. *IGI Global*. 10.4018/978-1-7998-8528-3.ch001

Lu, S, & Wei, J. (2019) Public's Perceives Overcrowding Risk and Their Adoption of Precautionary Actions: A Study on Holiday Travel in China. *Journal of Risk Research*, 22, 844-864.

Maguire, H. (2022). 8 things to know if you're visiting Austria in December. *TheLocal.at* <https://www.thelocal.at/20221129/8-things-to-know-if-youre-visiting-austria-in-december>

McCombes, S. (2023). Sampling methods. Types, techniques & examples. *Scribbr*. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/sampling-methods/#:~:text=Sampling%20means%20selecting%20the%20group,the%20characteristics%20of%20a%20population.>

McKinsey & Company. (2021). *Corona-Pandemie verstärkt den Trend zu nachhaltigem Konsum*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/de/news/presse/2021-05-17-pm-nachhaltiger-konsum>

- Mein Montafon. (2020, June 18). *Een mooie comer wacht op je! | Montafon | Vorarlberg*. [Screenshot]. YouTube.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BZOM0GM\\_3o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BZOM0GM_3o)
- Menard, P., Bott, G. J., & Crossler, R. E. (2017). User motivations in protecting information security: protection motivation theory versus self-determination theory. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 34(4), 1203–1230.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07421222.2017.1394083>
- Möller, A. K., Lukas, P. M., & Horne, J. S. (2018). Three novel methods to estimate abundance of unmarked animals using remote cameras. *Ecosphere*, 9(8).  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.2331>
- Morrison, A. M., Yang, C-H. O’Leary, J. T., & Nadkarni, N. (1996). Comparative profiles of travellers on cruises and land-based resort vacations. *Journal of Tourism Studies* 7(2), 15-27.
- Moscardo, G., Morrison, A. M., Pearce, P. L., Lang, C. T., & O’Leary, J. T. (1996). Understanding vacation destination choice through travel motivation and activities. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 2(2), 109-122.  
[10.1177/135676679600200202](https://doi.org/10.1177/135676679600200202)
- Moutinho, L. (1987). Consumer Behaviour in Tourism. *European Journal of Marketing*, 21(10), p. 3-44.
- Mutuku, C. (2013). *Tourism destinations. Definitions, changes and trends*. München, GRIN Verlag, <https://www.grin.com/document/381273>
- Neuburger, L., & Egger, R. (2020). Travel risk perception and travel behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic 2020: a case study of the DACH region. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24, 1003-1016. [doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1803807](https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1803807)
- Nigg, S. (2011). *Changing travel booking patterns in European travel agencies*. In: Conrady, R., Buck, M. (eds) *Trends and Issues in Global Tourism 2011*. Springer.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-17767-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-17767-5_2)

- Nikolopoulou, K. (2022). What is probability sampling? Types & examples. *Scribbr*.  
<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/probability-sampling/>
- Österreich Werbung. (2023). *Die Tourismusforschung der Österreich Werbung*.  
<https://www.austriatourism.com/tourismusforschung/>
- Österreich Werbung. (n.d.). *Geschichte des Tourismus in Österreich*.  
<https://www.austriatourism.com/ueber-uns/geschichte-des-tourismus-in-oesterreich/>
- Pawlikowska Piechotka, A., Lukasik, N., Ostrowska Tryzno, A., & Sawicka K. (2017). Holistic technical solutions to enhance accessible tourism in the UNESCO world heritage sites. *Handbook of research on holistic optimization techniques in the hospitality, tourism, and travel industry*. 10.4018/978-1-5225-1054-3.ch001
- Pearce, P. L. (2005). *Tourist Behaviour: Themes and Conceptual Schemes*. Channel View Publications.
- Perdue, R. R., & Meng, F. (2006). Understanding choice and rejection in destination consideration sets. *Tourism Analysis*, 11 (6), 337–348.  
10.3727/108354206781040759
- Pike, S., & Ryan, C. (2004). *Destination Marketing: An integrated marketing communication approach*. Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, Burlington, Massachusetts.
- Pollak, M., Kowarz, N., & Partheymüller, J. (2020). Chronologie zur Corona-Krise in Österreich – Teil 1: Vorgeschichte, der Weg in den Lockdown, die akute Phase und wirtschaftliche Folgen. *Universität Wien*. <https://viecer.univie.ac.at/corona-blog/corona-blog-beitraege/blog51/>
- Rather, R. A. (2021). Monitoring the impacts of tourism-based social media, risk perception and fear on tourist's attitude and revisiting behaviour in the wake of

COVID-19 pandemic. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1884666>

Rauschecker, L. (2020). 11 Dinge, die wir in der Corona-Krise über Nachhaltigkeit lernen können. *Utopia*. <https://utopia.de/ratgeber/11-dinge-die-wir-von-corona-ueber-nachhaltigkeit-lernen-koennen/>

Ritchie, B. W., & Jiang, Y. (2019). A review of research on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management: Launching the annals of tourism research curated collection on tourism risk, crisis and disaster management. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 79.

Rogers, R. W. (1975). A protection motivation theory of fear appeals and attitude change. *The Journal of Psychology*, 91(1).

Ruan, W.; Kang, S., & Song, H. (2020). Applying protection motivation theory to understand international tourists' behavioural intentions under the threat of air pollution: A case of Beijing, China. *Current Issues of Tourism*, 23, 2027-2041.

Russell, J. A., Ward, L. M., & Pratt, G. (1981). Affective quality attributed to environments: a factor analytic study. *Environmental Behavior*, 13, 259-288.

Scarpa, R., & Thiene, M. (2011). Organic food choices and protection motivation theory: Addressing the psychological sources of heterogeneity. *Food Quality and Preference*, 22(6), 532-541.

Scheuren, F. (2004). What is a survey? *American Statistical Association*. <http://www.rickweil.com/s2211/whatisasurvey.pdf>

Segumpan, R. G., Abu Zahari, J. S., & Jamaluddin, M. M. (2010). Tourism among families in Northern Peninsular Malaysia. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 8(2), 129-139.

- Shillair, R. (2020). *Protection motivation theory*. The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology, J. Bulck (Ed.).  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0188>
- Shukla, P. (2008). *Essentials of Marketing Research*. Bookboon.  
<http://bookboon.com/en/marketing-research-an-introduction-ebook>
- Sincero, S. M. (2012). Advantages and disadvantages of surveys. *Explorable*.  
<https://explorable.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-surveys>
- Sirakaya, E., & Woodside, A. G. (2005). Building and testing theories of decision making by travellers. *Tourism management*, 26(6), 815-832.  
10.1016/j.tourman.2004.05.004
- Stadtregion Salzburg. (n.d.). *Stadtregionen.at*.  
<https://www.stadtregionen.at/salzburg/bev%C3%B6lkerung>
- Stankov, U., Filimonau, V., & Vujicic, M. D. (2020). A mindful shift: An opportunity for mindfulness-driven tourism in a post-pandemic world. *Tourism Geographies*, 22, 703-712.
- Statista (2022). *Number of travel accommodation establishments in Austria in 2016 to 2020, by type*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/413451/number-of-short-stay-accommodation-establishments-in-austria/>
- Statista (2023). *Bevölkerungsdichte in Österreich nach Bundesländern zu Jahresbeginn 2023*.  
<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/687135/umfrage/bevoelkerungsdichte-in-oesterreich-nach-bundeslaendern>
- Statistics Austria (2022a). *National tourism satellite accounts*.  
<https://www.statistik.at/en/statistics/tourism-and-transport/tourism/tourism-satellite-accounts/national-tourism-satellite-accounts>

Statistics Austria (2022b). *Ankünfte und Übernachtungen nach Unterkunftsarten im Tourismusjahr 2022*. [Data file]. <https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/tourismus-und-verkehr/tourismus/beherbergung/ankuenfte-naechtigungen>

Statistics Austria (2022c). *Arrivals, overnight stays and average duration of stay by federal provinces (1995-2021)*. [Data file]. <https://www.statistik.at/en/statistics/tourism-andtransport/tourism/accommodation/arrivals-overnight-stays>

Statistics Austria (2023). *Tourismusintensität pro Einwohner:in*. [Data file]. <https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/tourismus-und-verkehr/tourismus/beherbergung/ankuenfte-naechtigungen>

Tasci, A. D. A., & Gartner, W. C. (2007). Destination image and its functional relationships. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4), 413-425. 10.1177/0047287507299569

Tauber, V., & Bausch, T. (2022). Will COVID-19 boost sustainable tourism: wishful thinking or reality? *Sustainability*, 14, 1686. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su/14031686>

Um, S., & Crompton, J. L. (1990). Attitude determinants in tourism destination choice. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(3), 432-448. 10.1016/0160-7383(90)90008-f

UNWTO. (2007). *A Practical Guide to Tourism Destination Management*. UNWTO Publications. <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284412433>

Urlaub in Österreich. (2020, October 15). *Urlaub in Österreich: Ein guter Grund, nach vorne zu blicken*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptp6aXrRG3o>

Vorarlberg. (n.d.) *Auf den Spuren der Skigeschichte*. <https://www.vorarlberg.travel/aktivitaet/skifahren-skigeschichte/>

- Wahab, S., Crampon, L. J. & Rothfield, L. M. (1976). *Tourism Marketing*, Tourism International Press, London.
- Westcott, R., Ronan, K., Bambrick, & H. Taylor, M. (2017). Expanding protection motivation theory: investigating an application to animal owners and emergency responders in bushfire emergencies. *BMC Psychol*, 13(5). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-017-0182-3>
- Williams, C. (2007). Research Methods. *Journal Of Business & Economic Research*, 5(3), 65–72. 10.19030/jber.v5i3.2532
- Woodside, A. G. & Sherrell, D. L. (1977). Traveler evoked, inept, and inert sets of vacation destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 16(1): 14-18. 10.1177/004728757701600105
- Woodside, A. G., & Lysonski, S. (1989). A General model of traveler destination choice. *Journal of Travel Research*, 27(4), 8-14. 10.1177/004728758902700402
- Wu, C. K., Ho, M.-T., Le, T. K. T., & Nguyen, M.-U. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and factors influencing the destination choice of international visitors to Vietnam. *Sustainability*, 15, 396. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010396>
- Yamashita, T. (2022). Analyzing likert scale surveys with Rasch models. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2022.100022>
- Zhan, X. Zeng, A.M. Morrison, H. Liang & J.A. Coca-Stefaniak (2020). A risk perception scale for travel to a crisis epicentre: visiting Wuhan after COVID-19. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1-18. 10.1080/13683500.2020.1857712
- Zheng, D., Luo, Q., & Ritchie, B.W. (2021). Afraid to travel after COVID-19? Selfprotection, coping and resilience against pandemic ‘travel fear’. *Tourism Management*, 83, 104261.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey

#### The Impact of COVID-19 on Travelers' Destination Choice in Austria

Dear participant,  
I am a student at Modul University Vienna and as part of my bachelor thesis, I am investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on destination choice in Austria. To gather data for my research, I would highly appreciate if you would take five minutes to answer the following questions. Kindly note that in order to participate in the study, it is important that you have spent a vacation in Austria in the period between March 2020 and the end of 2022.

Participation in the survey is voluntary and all the information collected will be handled confidentially and anonymously.

In case you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me: [61904144@modul.ac.at](mailto:61904144@modul.ac.at).

Thank you for your time and participation!

kindsabrina01@gmail.com [Konto wechseln](#)



Nicht freigegeben

\* Gibt eine erforderliche Frage an

By clicking on the "Start" button below you indicate that you have read the information above, and you voluntarily agree to participate. \*

Start

### General Travel Behavior

In the following, I am interested in your general travel behavior when it comes to destination choice during the pandemic. Please answer the following questions.

How many vacations did you take between March 2020 and the end of 2022? \*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- More than 3

How many of these did you spend in Austria? \*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- More than 3

When did you take the vacation(s) in Austria? In case you spent more than one vacation in Austria during this time, please select all answers that apply. \*

- Between March 2020 and May 2020
- Between June 2020 and October 2020
- Between November 2020 and May 2021
- Between June 2021 and December 2022

Where in Austria did you spend your vacation(s) during this period? \*

- Primarily in a city
- Primarily in the countryside
- Equally in a city and in the countryside

In which federal state did you spend your vacation(s) during this period? In case \*  
you spent more than one vacation in Austria during this time, please select all  
answers that apply.

- Vienna
  - Burgenland
  - Carinthia
  - Lower Austria
  - Salzburg
  - Styria
  - Tyrol
  - Upper Austria
  - Vorarlberg
- 

For which purpose did you travel during this period? In case you spent more than \*  
one vacation in Austria during this time, please select all answers that apply.

- Leisure
  - Business
  - Family visit
  - Education
  - Sport
  - Other
- 

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following \*  
statement.

COVID-19 affected my decisions on where to go on holiday during the last two  
years.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statement. \*

Due to COVID-19, I spent more vacations closer to home than I used to in the past.

- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statement. \*

I deliberately chose destinations in nature with few other guests during the pandemic.

- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statement. \*

Because of COVID-19, I preferred to avoid traveling to crowded big cities.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Travel Restrictions

Travel restrictions are certainly one of the main factors why variations in destination choice can be seen when comparing the time before and during the pandemic.

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

When considering where to spend a vacation in Austria during the pandemic, travel restrictions highly influenced my decision. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

My originally intended destination was not accessible because of the pandemic. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Since my preferred destination was not available because of the travel restrictions, I opted for another destination in Austria. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The next section is about what feelings you had in general regarding COVID-19. For this purpose, please try to remember how you felt during the process of deciding where to spend your vacation in Austria and then indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

---

COVID-19 is highly contagious. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

---

I see COVID-19 as a serious threat to my well-being. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

---

Getting infected by COVID-19 would carry severe risks. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

There is a high chance of getting infected if I travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. \*

- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Social distancing is vital when traveling during the COVID-19 pandemic. \*

- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

In general, I felt less comfortable traveling during the pandemic. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Destination Marketing

Now I am interested in the influence of destination marketing on your travel behavior during the pandemic. Again, kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements.

Destination marketing influenced my choice of where to spend the next vacation \*  
during the pandemic.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

When considering visiting an Austrian destination during the pandemic, it was \*  
important for me to which extent the marketing campaign developed for this area  
could convey a sense of security.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Marketing campaigns developed during the pandemic, showing the beauty of \*  
Austrian nature, encouraged me to spend my vacation in these peaceful areas.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree



Do you know the marketing campaign "Urlaub in Österreich – ein guter Grund nach vorne zu blicken" that was developed during the pandemic to attract more guests? \*

Yes

No

---

Would you have described yourself as a sustainable person before the pandemic? \*

Yes

No

---

Now, "after" the pandemic, do you consider yourself to be a more sustainable person? \*

Yes

No

---

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statement. \*

The pandemic encouraged me to think more about the issue of sustainability.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neutral

Somewhat agree

Agree

Strongly agree

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statement. \*

The pandemic encouraged me to use means of transportation other than the plane out of my personal beliefs and not just because traveling by plane was not possible.

- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Kindly indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statement. \*

Technological improvements during the pandemic made me aware that many business trips could be replaced by online meetings.

- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Do you intend to continue your new sustainable habits also after the pandemic? \*

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable (no new sustainable habits were developed during the pandemic)

Personal questions

Please indicate your gender:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Please indicate your age group:

- 18 or below
- 19 to 25
- 26 to 35
- 36 to 50
- Above 50

Please indicate your nationality:

Meine Antwort \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your highest level of education:

- Compulsory schooling
- Apprenticeship
- High school degree or equivalent
- Undergraduate degree
- Graduate degree
- PhD degree

Please indicate your current status of employment:

- Student
- Employee
- Employer
- Retired
- Unemployed, looking for a job
- Unemployed, not looking for a job
- Other

## Appendix 2: Instagram stories posted on the author's account

