

OPERATOR READINESS TOWARDS ADVENTURE TOURISM SAFETY  
PROCEDURE DURING COVID – 19. A CASE STUDY OF RAFTING  
ACTIVITIES IN GOPENG, PERAK.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my late mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time. To my beloved wife, lovely son and daughter, thank you for support and always by my side.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Safety procedure is very important in doing tourism activity especially when it involved adventure setting. Nowadays, with the cases of COVID – 19 still arising, the concern over safety is high. People are keen to travel after a long restriction because of the pandemic. It is a responsibility to the tourism operator to fulfilled their wants and delivery excellent service quality without compromising safety aspect trough out the whole process. Is tourism operator ready in term of safety procedure in their place? Therefore, this is in line with the aim of this research which to analysed operator readiness towards adventure safety procedure during COVID -19. Rafting can be considered as hard adventure tourism activities in natural setting. It required mental and physical strength. Three objectives have been out lined for this research. First, to identified the factor of safety procedure for adventure activities that has been affected the rafting activities during COVID -19. Second, to examine the factors of rafting operator readiness towards safety procedure during COVID-19. Third, to understand the challenges of adventure tourism operator in providing safety procedure during COVID -19. Qualitative approach was chosen for these research. Data was gathered through researcher observation and interview. Five rafting operators were interviewed using in- depth semi structure question. Data collection then was analyzed using thematic analysis. The finding shows that rafting operator in Gopeng, Perak are ready to serve the tourist . They have prepared what it takes to deliver safe experience to their tourist.

## ABSTRAK

Prosedur keselamatan adalah sangat penting dalam melakukan aktiviti pelancongan terutamanya apabila ia melibatkan persekitaran yang lasak. Ketika ini, dengan kes COVID-19 yang masih tinggi, kebimbangan terhadap aspek keselamatan adalah tinggi. Pelancong berminat untuk melakukan perjalanan selepas sekatan perjalanan yang agak lama disebabkan pandemik. Adalah menjadi tanggungjawab pengendali pelancongan untuk memenuhi kehendak mereka dan memberikan kualiti perkhidmatan yang baik tanpa mengabaikan aspek keselamatan. Adakah pengendali pelancongan sudah bersedia dari segi prosedur keselamatan di tempat mereka? Oleh itu, ia adalah selari dengan tujuan penyelidikan ini dijalankan iaitu untuk menganalisis kesediaan operator pelancongan terhadap prosedur keselamatan semasa COVID-19. *Rafting* merupakan aktiviti pelancongan pengembaraan yang lasak yang dilaksanakan di persekitaran semulajadi. Ia memerlukan kekuatan mental dan fizikal. Tiga objektif telah digariskan untuk penyelidikan ini. Pertama, mengenal pasti faktor prosedur keselamatan yang terjejas semasa COVID-19. Kedua, mengkaji faktor kesediaan pengendali *rafting* terhadap prosedur keselamatan semasa COVID-19. Ketiga, untuk memahami cabaran yang di hadapi oleh operator pelancongan dalam menyediakan prosedur keselamatan semasa COVID-19. Pendekatan kualitatif telah dipilih untuk penyelidikan ini. Data dikumpul melalui pemerhatian dan temu bual. Lima pengusaha *rafting* telah ditemu bual menggunakan soalan separa berstruktur. Pengumpulan data kemudiannya dianalisis menggunakan analisis bertema. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pengusaha *rafting* di Gopeng, Perak bersedia memberi perkhidmatan yang terbaik kepada pelancong. Mereka telah menyediakan apa yang diperlukan untuk memberikan pengalaman *rafting* yang selamat kepada pelancong.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
	<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>viii</b>
	<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>iv</b>
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>v</b>
	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>vi</b>
	<b>ABSTRAK</b>	<b>vii</b>
	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>viii</b>
	<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>x</b>
	<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Research Background	1
	1.3 Research Gap	3
	1.4 Problem Statement	7
	1.5 Research Aim and Objective	8
	1.6 Research Question	8
	1.7 Study Area	9
	1.8 Scope of Study	10
	1.9 Significance of Study	11
	1.10 Study Approach	12
	1.11 Limitation of Study	14
	1.12 Chapter Summary	14

<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	Tourism	15
2.3	Adventure Tourism	17
2.4	Adventure Tourism Safety	19
2.5	Operator Readiness Assesment	20
2.6	Operator Readiness Assesment	22
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1	Introduction	25
3.2	Research Design	25
3.3	Types of Data Collection	26
3.3.1	Primary Data	26
3.3.2	Secondary Data	26
3.4	In Depth Interview	27
3.4.1	Profile of Interviewee	27
3.4.2	Structure of The Interview	28
3.5	Observation	29
3.6	Chapter Sumarry	32
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1	Introduction	34
4.2	Research Finding	34
4.2.1	Theme 1 : Safety Procedure	39
4.2.2	Theme 2 : Operator Readiness	41
4.2.3	Theme 3 : Challanges	42
4.2	Chapter Summary	44

<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</b>	<b>45</b>
5.1	Introduction	45
5.2	Discussion And Finding	45
5.3	Recommedation For Future Research	50
5.4	Conclusion	50
<b>REFERENCES</b>		<b>51</b>



## **LIST OF TABLES**

<b>TABLE NO.</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Table 3.4.1	List of Interviewee	28

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

<b>FIGURE NO.</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Figure 1.1	Study Approach	12
Figure 2.1	Conceptual Framework	21
Figure 2.2	Adapted Concept of Readiness	21
Figure 2.3	Operator Readiness Indicator	22
Figure 3.1	Procedure For Safety Rafting Activity	30
Figure 3.2	Rafting Capacity	31
Figure 3.3	Transportation Capacity	31
Figure 4.1	Theme Of Operator Readiness	34
Figure 4.2	Theme 1 : Safety Procedure	35
Figure 4.3	Theme 2 : Operator Readiness	39
Figure 4.4	Theme 3 : Challenges	42

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the overall view of the research, which include research background, problem statement, objectives, research question, study are, and scope of study area. The component in this chapter is important for readers to get the general understanding of the focus and the purpose of this study.

### 1.2 Research Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly severe impact on the tourism industry. The statistics are alarming after a few years of the outbreak. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourism destinations received one billion fewer foreign visitors in 2020 than in 2019. A sharp drop in international travel resulted in a loss of almost USD 1.3 trillion in export income, more than 11 times the loss seen during the previous economic downturn in 2009. A total of 100 to 120 million tourism jobs were jeopardised, the majority of which were in small and medium-sized businesses. The COVID-19 epidemic has caused uncertainty and spillover effects in practically all industries, and the lingering crisis in worldwide tourism is a major concern. The tourism industry contributes to the country's economic growth, accounting for 10.4% of GDP and 10% of global employment (Joppe, 2020).

Adventure tourism is a popular form of tourism that attracts a huge number of visitors. There are destinations that meet the needs of adventure tourists while also being popular for leisure and/or relaxation. Adventure tourism has grown in popularity in today's worlds, particularly among those affluent travellers seeking an adventure rather than simply sitting and relaxing in a destination.

The phrase "adventure" refers to an activity that creates a sense of personal thrill. Adventure tourism is a fast expanding tourism offering that encompasses activities like hiking, camping, river rafting, backcountry bicycling, and many others.

Due to COVID-19, most of the countries implemented travel restriction in order to control the spreading of the virus. Border closure implemented by most of the countries had badly impact tourism operator. People will always be wanted to travel once the pandemic is over. Once the economic is open to operate as usual, people who unable to travel for quite some time will take this opportunity to start the gear. Today's travel main concern is about safety procedure or so call as new norm of traveling to ensure they have safe travel experience. All sectors not only tourism is discussing this topic. Adventure tourism operator such as rafting operator need to strengthen the strategy on safety precaution measure to ensure the safety and health of the tourist is being taken care of. This is very important to increased tourist trust and confident to take part in tourism activities.

Health, safety, and trust are crucial in this new century, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Report 2020. In the short to medium term, consumer behaviour will be guided by personal experiences, fears of being stuck in another nation, and concerns about distancing.

Social distancing measures and strengthened safety protocols are two of the most typical precautions that all adventure travelers want from their final destination. Besides that, the survey indicated that adventure travellers in the United States are more concerned about their safety when visiting a popular or crowded metropolis than when visiting a small town, backcountry, or national park. This is an excellent opportunity for adventure activities to take place in order to fully satisfy their desires.

This is in line with the aim of this research which to analyzed operator readiness towards adventure safety procedure during COVID- 19. Gopeng, Perak is the selected area to conduct the research as this area is well known for rafting activity not only in Malaysia but also internationally.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

Adventure tourism has been a topic of a research since years ago. Previous research has been focusing on tourist safe need, safety tips, risk management, tourist motivation in pursuing adventure activity, Challenge and prospect of adventure tourism and many more. Less research has been made focusing on operator readiness towards adventure safety procedure during COVID-19. This research will focus on rafting activity in Gopeng, Perak. What are the precaution safety procedure that operator apply to enhance tourist trust and confidence while doing the activity.

Authors	Adventure Tourism - Safety			Research Gap
	Title	Objectives	Methods	
Pimmada Wichasin , Nuntiya Dounghummes (2012)	A Comparative Study of International Tourists' Safety Needs and Thai Tourist Polices' Perception towards International Tourists' Safety Needs	<p>To compare international tourists' safety needs and Thai tourist polices perception towards the tourists' safety</p> <p>To determine what measure should be taken to assure the tourist of Thailand's secure environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- quantitative and qualitative methods</li> <li>- two questionnaires. The first one was distributed to 434 international tourists</li> <li>- The second set of questionnaire was self-administered which was disseminated to 389 Thai tourist polices and local polices</li> <li>- The quantitative data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics</li> <li>- The qualitative approach using an in-depth interviewing technique</li> </ul>	<b>Operator readiness towards adventure safety procedure during COVID-19</b>
Yalın Aygün ,Şakir Tüfekçi, (2020)	Leisure and SCUBA diving safety tips during and after COVID-19	to bring together safety tips to be followed when pursuing leisure and Recreational SCUBA Diving during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and strengthen divers' commitment to and interest in the underwater world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualitative method using thematic analysis</li> </ul>	

Authors	Adventure Tourism - Safety			Research Gap
	Title	Objectives	Methods	
Bentley et. al, (2019)	Adventure and Ecotourism Safety in Queensland: Operator experiences and practice	To identifies the client injury experience and safety management practices of Queensland adventure and ecotourism operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative method ( Descriptive analysis of quantitative data was undertaken using SPSS for Windows (version 13) and consisted of frequency distributions and cross tabulations of categorical data, and calculations of means and other measures of central tendency for different grouping variables.</li> <li>- Quantitative methods (Semi-Structured Face-to-Face Interviews, interview was tape recorded with the permission of the respondents)</li> </ul>	<b>Operator readiness towards adventure safety procedure during COVID-19</b>
(Zhan et al, 2020)	A risk perception scale for travel to a crisis epicentre: Visiting Wuhan after COVID-19	To investigate the risk perceptions among Chinese residents associated with future travel to Wuhan - the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak in China	Measured risk perceptions among Chinese residents related to travelling to Wuhan after the outbreak of COVID-19	

Authors	Adventure Tourism - Safety			Research Gap
	Title	Objectives	Methods	
(Anastasiya et al,2020)	COVID-19 pandemic and tourism: The impact of health risk perception and intolerance of uncertainty on travel intentions	To investigate the role of health risk perception and intolerance of uncertainty on travel intentions for 2020 and 2021.	Assess the effect of the expected duration of the pandemic, and of some sociodemographic measures (age, educational level, and income) on these intentions	<b>Operator readiness towards adventure safety procedure during COVID-19</b>
(Nurhidayah, 2012)	Tourist's perception of safety at gunung stong state park, kelantan darul naim	To identify safety level of tourists towards mountain based adventure tourism activity at Gunung Stong State Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To identify market segmentation of tourists who join mountain based adventure tourism activity.</li> <li>- To determine the expectation of tourist's toward safety level while climbing the mountain.</li> <li>- To study the threats that impacted tourist's safety in the mountain based adventure tourism activity.</li> </ul>	

Table 1.1 shows the review of other research that related to safety procedure in adventure tourism.

## 1.4 Problem Statement

Prior to the epidemic, adventure travel was thriving all over the world. In 2018, the worldwide adventure tourism market was worth USD 586.3 billion, with a forecast of USD 1,626.7 billion in 2026. (Allied Market Research, 2020). The development of the travel and tourism industry encourages the market need for adventure tourism to rise. Adventure tourism refers to vacationing or exploring with a certain amount of danger, and it includes activities such as climbing, hiking, caving, rafting, and other similar activities.

After the pandemic hit the world started late in December 2019, the movement of people has been restricted. Traveling has become more challenging due to the concern over the spreading of COVID – 19. Today, people around the globe get used to the term ‘new norm’ of life. Social distancing, hand sanitizing and wearing mask in a public area are becoming normal almost every way. This new norm is also applicable in adventure tourism. Health and safety procedure are the important element when travelling. Indulging in rafting activities for instance, not only it is a high risk activities, but also involved operator readiness to align with the safety procedure during COVID-19.

Traveling has become more challenging and more people nowadays are keen to travel to a remote area in order to reduce the risk of getting affected by the virus. Health and safety procedure are the important element when travelling. Despite normal health and safety procedure are applicable for all recreation activities including adventure tourism, the aspect of operator readiness in fulfilled this requirement is still uncertain. Therefore this research will try to fill the gap and look into how COVID - 19 changed the safety procedure and how ready tourism operator tap with the changes.

This research will try to analyzed three aspect of operator readiness as the provider of the service to ensure all safety procedure meet tourist expectations. These include operational and staff preparedness, delivering safe experience and ways to gain



tourist trust and confidence during the pandemic (UNWTO,2020). Gopeng, Perak is the study area for conducting the research as this area is well known as white water rafting activity among Malaysian as well as international tourists.

### **1.5 Research Aim and Objective**

The aim of this study is to analyzed adventure tourism operator readiness towards safety procedure during COVOD-19. The objectives of the study are as below:

- 1) To identify the factors of safety procedure for adventure activities that has been affected the white water rafting activities during COVID -19.
- 2) To examine the factors of white water rafting operator readiness towards safety procedure during COVID-19.
- 3) To understand the challenges of adventure tourism operator in providing safety procedure during COVID -19.

### **1.6 Research Question**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are the factors of safety procedure for adventure activities that has been affected the white water rafting activities during COVID -19?
2. What are the factors of whitewater rafting operator readiness towards safety procedure?
3. What are the challenges of adventure tourism operator in providing safety procedure?

## 1.7 Study Area

Perak, is a popular tourist destination for both domestic and international visitors. Domestic tourists visiting Perak recorded about 21.1 million, according to a 2019 study by the Malaysian Department of Statistics. From 2012 to 2014, the state of Perak had the greatest number of domestic tourist arrivals in the country (Ili Aqilah, 2015). Perak also ranked 5th in term of domestic tourism receipts amounting to RM 7.8 billion in 2019.

Perak, a state in Malaysian with a wealth of tropical natural resources, as well as a rich history and culture. It is Peninsular Malaysia's second-largest state (21,035 km<sup>2</sup>), with many natural tourist attractions such as White-Water Rafting, Gua Tempurung, Peninsular Malaysia's largest limestone cave; Royal Belum State Park, Peninsular Malaysia's oldest virgin rainforest; and the Lenggong UNESCO World Heritage Site (Rasoolimanesh, Dahalan, & Jaafar, 2016). Perak is still one of Malaysia's greatest tourist spots today. On top of that, Perak was chosen as one of the top ten destinations in the "Best in Travel 2017" category by the famous publication Lonely Planet (Nuradzimmah, 2016). According to department statistics of Malaysia (2019), Perak ranked number five in term of receiving domestic tourist in 2019. About 21.1 million of domestic tourist recorded in 2019. This indicates that Perak is among the top tourist destination in Malaysia.

Gopeng used to be known for its tin mining business, but now it is known for eco-tourism and outdoor adventure. Jungles, rivers, waterfalls, mountains, caverns, ponds, and villages surround the town of Gopeng. As a result, Gopeng is a fantastic adventure location. The Kampar River's clean water (Class I-III) is ideal for anyone who is physically fit and looking for a little technical experience while rafting safely.

Gopeng also a house of rafting operator that has been proven as one of the world class white water rafting organizer. Kampar River Festival 2019 was a biggest white-water festival in Malaysia, endorsed by the International Rafting Federation

(IRF) and Indonesia White Water Federation (FAJI). Received about 400 participant around the globe.

This is the reason why this research being conducted in Gopeng, Perak. It will create value added to the area once the research being published. Therefore, will further promote Gopeng as a destination of choice among the rafting community throughout the globe.

## **1.8 Scope of Study**

COVID-19 has changed the way of travel. New norm of traveling has been introduced to ensure tourist is safe while doing activities. Tourism operators must take precautions to re-establish trust and confidence with visitors through efficient communication and marketing, informing them of the protocols in place and the assurances that are available to keep them safe. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) 2020, has released worldwide norms for the new normal, specifically for adventure tourism. As travel and tourism progresses from crisis management to recovery, the guideline aims to establish industry best practises. It also emphasises the importance of putting the safety, health, and security of travellers and the travel and tourism workforce at the forefront of global protocol development.

This research will be focusing the readiness among rafting operator in Gopeng Perak in coping with these protocols. There are three aspect that will be look into. The elements include operational and employee preparedness, providing a safe experience, and re-establishing trust and confidence. As adventure tourism businesses reopen, they should make sure they have the resources to improve operational quality and delivery, as well as skilled personnel to design and execute operational plans. It's also critical for adventure tourism operators to provide a safe environment for their employees and visitors by improving cleanliness and hygiene standards. Transparency and communication with guests will result in increased trust and confidence. Safety procedure that affectedrafting activity also will be identify. Among the factor that will look into are hygiene procedure, rafting capacity, transportation, screening procedure as well as social distancing.

## **1.9 Significance of Study**

COVID – 19 has reported the first case in Malaysia in January 2020. Since then the number of cases increasing day by day. To overcome this pandemic from spreading, Malaysia Government had enforced Movement Control Order (MCO) which restricted movement of people. All business except essential service has to stop their operation. Tourism is one of the sector most affected by the pandemic. The outbreak of COVID-19 has exposed a major risk to Visit Malaysia 2020 (VM2020) campaign as 50% of Malaysia's tourists are originate from Singapore and China. The increasing cases of COVID-19 in both countries has led to the cancellation of many tours, which has already led to a large drop in the number of tourists to Malaysia.

Once the MCO ended tourism operator start to receive customer but with new norm. Hand sanitizer, wearing mask, social distancing and temperature check has become new way of life and people get used to it. Rafting activity, for instance, is one of adventure tourism that received huge demand. Rafting operator need to be ready with the safety procedure to ensure tourist get excellent service and they are safe through out the activity. This research aim is to analyzed operator readiness towards safety procedure during COVID – 19. Therefore the finding of the research can be used as a benchmark or guideline for other tourism operators in preparing their safety procedure. Besides that, the finding will also increase tourist confident to indulge in rafting activities.

## 1.10 Study Approach

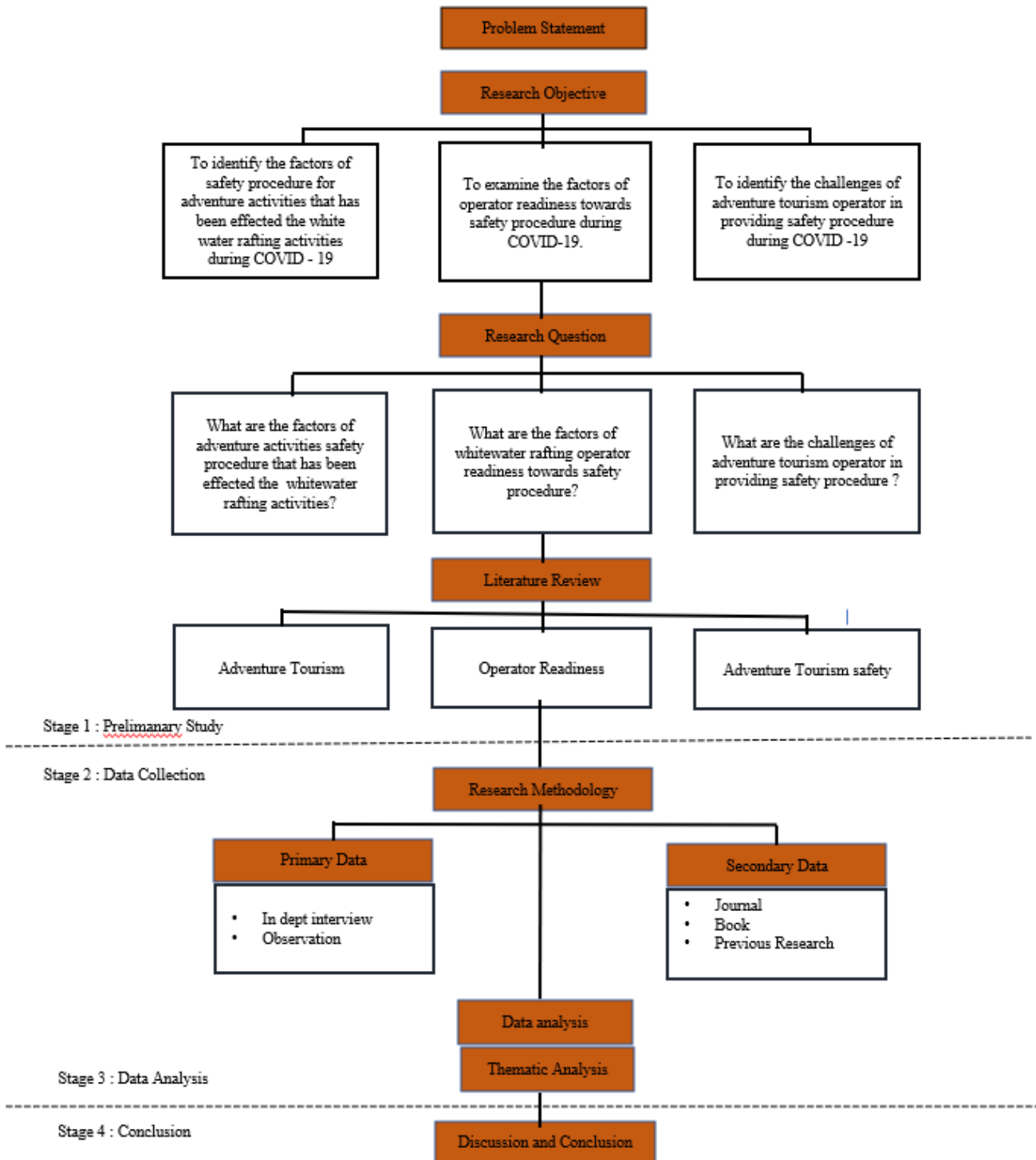


Figure 1.1 Study Approach

## **Stage 1 & 2 Preliminary Study**

The early study in stage 1 contain identification of issue and problem of the research. After that, continued with research objective and research objective which based on the problem statement and what to achieved from the research. This stage discuss the main topic Then, in stage 2 involve a review of ;

Literature review related to adventure tourism, safety procedure, operator readiness and challenge operator faced during the pandemic. Second, Relevant case study from related journal also gathered. Data were based on secondary source such as report, publication and previous research.

## **Stage 3 – Data collection & Analysis**

Stage 3 is data collection phase and data analysis, and the research instrument that were applied are as follows;

Primary data – This research using qualitative approach. Primary data collected from in depth interview with rafting operator in Gopeng, Perak..

Secondary data – All secondary data captured from journal, book and article  
The data was carried out using thematic analysis to analysis the data. The result of the study will provide the data for next stage. Data collection and analysis took about four months. Opinion and view from the respondent will be gathered to match the basis literature and achieve the objective of the study.

## **Stage 4 – Conclusion**

The final stage is the conclusion of the finding or outcome of the research. It is expected that the explanations of the findings would be relevant to the research questions topics, hence achieving the research aim and objective.

### **1.11 Limitation of Study**

This research conducted qualitative analysis. The interview session very time consuming. Researcher has to search for the correct and available individual that can be a respondents. In addition, the finding of this research are based on interview of 5 respondents of local operator and not generalized in the views of all operators. Besides that, there are limited sources of literature review related to operator readiness because mostly are focus on community readiness and not to tourism operator.

### **1.12 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter has presented an introduction to the thesis. It has outline the background of the research, problem statement, stated the research objective and research question. The significance of the research has also been indicated, the initial conceptual framework has been introduce and lastl, summary of the overall research will be provided.

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