

Investigating antecedent constructs affecting potential Australian travellers' destination image of Fiji amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Abstract

This study examines six antecedent constructs affecting potential Australian tourists' destination image of Fiji. Data were collected from 416 respondents and analysed using covariance-based structural equation modelling. Results revealed that five constructs—impressions of Fiji, trust in the Fijian government, crisis management, solidarity, and COVID-19 mitigation practices—were positively associated with respondents' cognitive and affective destination image formation. Xenophobia also moderates the positive association between cognitive and conative images. These findings contribute theoretically to understanding salient constructs contributing to destination image formation amidst the pandemic. Study insights will be useful to practitioners in developing effective marketing strategies and tourism recovery.

Keywords: destination impression; destination image; trust in government; crisis management; healthcare; emotional solidarity; COVID-19 mitigation practice

Introduction

The novel coronavirus COVID-19 has profoundly affected the global economy, levying debilitating consequences for the tourism industry in nearly every nation (Gallego & Font, 2021; Higham et al., 2021). Restrictions on mobility and the closure of international borders have severely impacted the tourism industry (Gössling et al., 2020; Rastegar et al., 2021a). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourist arrivals have decreased by more than 1 billion, with between 100 and 200 million jobs lost since the beginning of the pandemic (Hall & Seyfi, 2021). In efforts to re-senergise economies and ensure that social life is restored, destinations are diligently working to recover and restore tourism to pre-pandemic levels (Cheng et al., 2021). Therefore, the timing of this study is critical as it becomes important to understand the factors that can aid in this recovery. As countries re-open international borders, such information is crucial for businesses to attain financial stability and for governments' efforts to assist in such endeavours (Elgin et al., 2020).

Most recently, the tourism literature has highlighted the important role that destination image can play in post-pandemic tourism recovery (Ahmad et al., 2021; Lu & Atadil, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). One aspect of this recovery is assessing and managing tourists' perceptions of the destination (Chemli et al., 2022). The study by Chemli et al. (2022) revealed that media largely influenced potential tourists' awareness of destinations. Similarly, Yang et al. (2021) found that media affected visitor arrivals and the destination image of China. Aiello et al. (2022) found that tourists' choice of accommodation was influenced by regional contagion, available accommodations, and destination security. Zheng et al. (2021) demonstrated that susceptibility and severity influenced tourists' protective travel behaviour and protection motivation amidst the pandemic. Such fear was found in tourists adopting cautious travel behaviour and psychological resistance (Zenker et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Rastegar et al. (2021b), Yang et al. (2021), and Bhati et al. (2021) also found that health risks at destinations influenced travel behaviour.

Despite prior studies shedding light on understanding pandemic travel behaviour, there remain crucial gaps in the literature which need to be addressed. According to Avraham and Beirman (2022), the tourism pandemic recovery literature has focused more on the actual management of pandemics, with minimal attention on destination image repair and recovery

marketing. Though previous work has highlighted the importance of destination image in recovering from the pandemic, no study appears to have explored the impact of various pandemic-related contributing factors to destination image (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative) formation. Additionally, researchers have called for more studies to explore the influence of impressions of destinations among tourists (Fakfare et al., 2021; Lv & McCabe, 2020). This largely is represented by how potential visitors perceive a destination based on various features offered. Numerous authors (c.f., MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2017) have indicated that destination image is developed based not only on a destination's individual characteristics but also on tourists' overall evaluation of the destination. Researchers also suggest that tourists' xenophobia may also impact individuals' perceived image of a destination (Kock, et al., 2019). The evolutionary tourism paradigm was used by Kock et al. (2020) to link the COVID-19 pandemic to xenophobia. Zenker and Kock (2020) also highlighted the importance of the concept when understanding tourists' behaviour amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Kock et al. (2019), it is critical to explore the role of xenophobia in studying tourists' dispositions toward foreign travel, as relying solely on destination image may give an incomplete understanding. This is especially true when considering travelling to a developing country where COVID-19 mitigation may be more lax than in the tourists' home country (Movono & Scheyvens, 2022).

To expand the hierarchical theoretical model of destination image, this work, focusing on potential Australian tourists to Fiji, examines six COVID-19-related predictor constructs (i.e., impressions of Fiji, trust in the Fijian government, and crisis management, healthcare, solidarity, and COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji) of cognitive and affective destination image. This work further contributes to theory by examining how such COVID-19-related constructs factor into tourists' destination image formation in potentially selecting a place to visit—something that has rarely been done in considering recovery from the pandemic (see Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), which is extremely vital to consider among Australians (who comprise the largest percentage of tourists to Fiji). Though these constructs have been considered in previous work, they have not been considered in the context of COVID-19 nor as antecedents of destination image. In essence, this work is exploratory in nature to expand the traditional hierarchical destination image framework. Additionally, this research considers how cognitive and affective destination image can explain conative destination image while considering notions of xenophobia (as a moderator). This is also something that been sparingly undertaken.

In addition to these theoretical contributions, this paper addresses two key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): #3—*good health and well-being*; #8—*decent work and economic growth*. Given that Australia was the top tourism market for Fiji before the pandemic (World Tourism Organization, 2022), gauging how potential visitors perceive Fiji will have significant implications for marketing to stimulate greater inbound travel. Furthermore, by knowing how aspects such as government trust, crisis management, healthcare, and COVID-19 mitigation are viewed among potential travellers, Fiji tourism planners and policymakers will be better equipped to make decisions that will encourage Australians to return to Fiji.

Literature review and hypotheses development

The concept of the destination image is subjective (Woosnam et al., 2020) and includes an individual's feelings, impressions, ideas, and beliefs (Crompton, 1979; Pike, 2017). The

concept of destination image was introduced by Gartner (1994), Scott (1965), and Solo (1956) as three interrelated yet distinct components of conative, affective and cognitive image. This provided the methodological and conceptual means of examining destination image (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Sharma et al., 2022b). Affective image refers to an individual's feels and emotions towards a destination (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Hallmann et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2019). Cognitive image refers to an individual's evaluation of a destination's perceived attributes before visitation (Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2022a). This can be related to tourist destinations' resources (Ashworth, 2013). The conative image component of the destination represents a behaviour or action element.

A destination's overall image is formed by associated impressions (Ragab et al., 2019). Guzman-Parra et al. (2021) suggest that tourism organisations can use impressions as unique assets to enhance a destination. Agapito et al. (2017) found that sensory impressions were associated with a positive attitude towards destinations in southwest Portugal. Similarly, the sensory experience influences tourists' emotional attachment and relational value at destinations (Agapito et al., 2017; Fakfare et al., 2021). Tseng et al. (2015) highlighted that westerners negatively influenced China's destination image by highlighting issues of loudness and unsanitary behaviours. Retrieving information relating to a destination from media sources can influence tourists' impressions before travelling (Jiang et al., 2022; Mercille, 2005). Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) found that tourists' impressions of the travel experience before travel were critical in determining behavioural intention. Studies relating to destinations' impressions amid COVID-19 remain limited. Agag et al. (2022) found that travellers' perceptions of a destination during the pandemic were based on the cognitive knowledge that affected booking behaviour. Impression management has been identified as a crucial driver of tourist behaviour amidst the pandemic (Zhang et al., 2022). Based on the above discussion, we purport that potential Australian tourists' impressions of Fiji will influence their cognitive and affective destination image formation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{1a}: Potential tourists' impressions of Fiji will be positively related to their cognitive destination image.

H_{1b}: Potential tourists' impressions of Fiji will be positively related to their affective destination image.

When selecting a travel destination, reliability, minimal risk, limited hassle, and brand trust have been key factors influencing choice (Chen & Phou, 2013). In fact, Han and Hyun (2015) found that perceptions of risks and uncertainty for travellers are minimised due to trust. The positive association between trust and behavioural intention in tourism has been confirmed (Abubakar et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Though studies have explored the influence of destination image on trust (Chen & Phou, 2013; Setiawan et al., 2021; Su et al., 2017), the reverse relationship remains unexplored. Individuals trust in a government's COVID-19 management actions was revealed to play a key role in implementing and accepting the implemented measure (Fancourt et al., 2020). Abubakar et al. (2017) revealed that tourists' trust in the quality and reliability of a destination influenced a positive health image of a destination which then translated into travel behaviour. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) confirmed that trust in a tourist destination's government amidst the pandemic influenced travellers' future travel intentions. Similar findings were confirmed by (Hassan & Soliman, 2021). As such, we expect that trust in the ability of the destination's government to manage the COVID-19 crisis is positively associated with the destination image. Therefore, we advance the following hypotheses:

H_{2a}: Potential tourists' trust in the Fijian government will be positively related to their cognitive destination image.

H_{2b}: Potential tourists' trust in the Fijian government will be positively related to their affective destination image.

The crisis brought on by COVID-19 has profoundly influenced the tourism industry (Broshi-Chen & Mansfeld, 2021; Farmaki, 2021; Zhong et al., 2021). Destinations are affected by crises regarding tourist spending reductions and arrivals (Hall et al., 2004). Examples include the outbreak of SARS in China (Wen et al., 2005), the Ebola outbreak in Africa (Wen et al., 2005), and the global COVID-19 pandemic (Zheng et al., 2021). Following a crisis, travel undoubtedly declines (Zheng et al., 2021). Such crises have negatively impacted the destination image (Avraham, 2015). This is due to tourists' travel-related fear and risk (Kozak et al., 2007). The information communicated during crises via traditional media and social media outlets (Zheng et al., 2021), highlighting captured images and misleading material, can influence one's perceived image of a destination (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Zenker et al., 2019). As such, destinations put forth effort amidst and following crises to recover their destination image (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Based on the above discussion, this study assumes that positive perceptions of crisis management amidst the COVID-19 pandemic would influence potential Australian tourists' cognitive and affective destination image of Fiji. As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{3a}: Potential tourists' positive perceptions of Fiji's crisis management due to the pandemic will be positively related to their cognitive destination image.

H_{3b}: Potential tourists' positive perceptions of Fiji's crisis management due to the pandemic will be positively related to their affective destination image.

Moreno-González et al. (2020) demonstrated just how important tourists deem proximal healthcare systems in selecting a travel destination. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of a country's healthcare system (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Tourists have shown particular concern about healthcare systems in the middle- to low-income countries due to limited healthcare resources (Arora et al., 2020). Countries like Italy, Iran, and China experienced high COVID-19 transmission rates, while effective and efficient healthcare systems in countries like New Zealand and Australia show reduced impact and enhanced destination image (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Becken et al. (2017) revealed the importance of proper healthcare systems in enhancing destination image. Similarly, Moreno-González et al. (2020) found that destination image was affected by countries' healthcare-related destination image. This study purports that potential Australian tourists' positive perceptions of the healthcare system in Fiji are positively associated with their cognitive and affective destination image. Therefore, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H_{4a}: Potential tourists' positive perceptions of the healthcare system in Fiji will be positively related to their affective destination image.

H_{4b}: Potential tourists' positive perceptions of the healthcare system in Fiji will be positively related to their cognitive destination image.

According to Hammarström (2005), emotional solidarity refers to the bond that individuals experience between one another. Woosnam et al. (2020) pointed out that this sense of togetherness can explain tourists' destination image. During times of crisis, common social identities are developed for parties that go through the same experiences (Federico et al., 2021). Emotional solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic was found to be critical in supporting social interventions and healthcare provisioning (Arab-Zozani & Hassanipour, 2020; Federico et al., 2021), such as supporting frontline employees, sharing resources, assisting individuals at risk or need (Federico et al., 2021). Gebrekidan (2020) reported that the lack of emotional solidarity led to the abuse of healthcare workers, panic buying, and protests against COVID-19 restrictions. Governments' actions, population size, social inequalities, resource availability, and healthcare system quality can each impact individuals' perceptions of solidarity (Arab-Zozani & Hassanipour, 2020). Tourists' perception of emotional solidarity can influence their perceptions of safety for tourists (Woosnam et al., 2015), which has been noted by Reisinger and Mavondo (2006), to explain individuals' intentions to visit a destination. Based on this review, it can be inferred that potential visitors' perceptions of emotional solidarity demonstrated in Fiji can influence formulated cognitive and affective destination images. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{5a}: Potential tourists' perceptions of emotional solidarity in Fiji will be positively related to their cognitive destination image.

H_{5b}: Potential tourists' perceptions of emotional solidarity in Fiji will be positively related to their affective destination image.

The interruption of tourism growth due to the pandemic crisis makes mitigation and management practices crucial (Broshi-Chen & Mansfeld, 2021). As crises have a high degree of uncertainty and are complex, and each is distinct from the others, much consideration must be given to the mitigation and management process (Broshi-Chen & Mansfeld, 2021). This creates a need for tourism destination image management following a crisis (Olmedo & Mateos, 2015). Formulating and implementing appropriate interventions to respond to crises is key to reducing tourists' perceived risk (Kim et al., 2022; Matiza, 2020). Following various acts of terrorism, crisis management in the forms of support for hotels, tax incentives, increased security and image management strategies has assisted numerous destinations in recovering lost tourism (Barbe et al., 2018; Bassil et al., 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing was one mitigation practice implemented to reduce the spread of the virus (Im et al., 2021). Such mitigation practices helped bolster demand for some destinations (Wu & Shimizu, 2020; Zhong et al., 2021). Based on this review, we purport that potential tourists' perceptions of COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji will enhance cognitive and affective destination image. As such, the following hypotheses are developed:

H_{6a}: Potential tourists' perceptions of COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji will be positively related to their cognitive destination image.

H_{6b}: Potential tourists' perceptions of COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji will be positively related to their affective destination image.

The hierarchical relationship between cognitive, affective, and conative images was first proposed by Gartner (1994). Prior studies have confirmed a positive association between the cognitive and affective image as well as the reverse relationship (Woosnam et al., 2020). The initial response of a tourist toward a destination is referred to as affective image, which

causes them to take action towards a destination (Walmsley & Young, 1998). Researchers have found an association between tourists' affection for a destination and the cognitive evaluation of the attributes of a destination (Billig, 2006; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010). Additionally, tourists' cognitive assessment of a destination in the initial stages can contribute to their developing affection for the location (Li et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2007). A recent study by Sharma et al. (2022) confirmed the association between cognitive and affective images on conative images. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₇: Potential tourists' cognitive destination image will be positively related to their affective destination image.

H₈: Potential tourists' cognitive image will be positively related to their conative destination image.

Despite prior studies demonstrating the difference between conative destination image and behavioural intention (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2004; White & White, 2007), the terms have been used interchangeably in previous studies (King et al., 2015; Prayag, 2009). The work by Loureiro and Jesus (2019) found that affective image was positively associated with revisit intentions to Rio de Janeiro. Taghipourian et al. (2019) confirmed the positive association between affective image and revisit intentions to Mazandaran. A recent study conducted by Sharma et al. (2022b) on destination images in online games found that affective image was positively associated with conative image of a destination. Based on the evidence discussed in prior research, the current study also assumes that affective image would be positively associated with conative image. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₉: Potential tourists' affective image will be positively related to their conative destination image.

Xenophobia refers to the discomfort and anxiety that tourists perceive towards residents or hosts they do not know personally while travelling to and from a destination (Shahabi Sorman Abadi et al., 2021). Xenophobic tourists have been noted to feel suspicion, vulnerability, malice, and discomfort towards a destination (Kock et al., 2019). According to Zenker and Kock (2020), some destinations have indicated a great interest in understanding xenophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior studies have highlighted that the threat of a pathogen would contribute to individuals avoiding uncertain situations (i.e., xenophobia) (Faulkner et al., 2004). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased xenophobia between hosts and guests (Shahabi Sorman Abadi et al., 2021). Schaller and Park (2011) stated that tourists could engage in xenophobia to protect themselves from a pandemic crisis, leading them to consider their responses to such crises. As Kock et al. (2019) noted, tourists exhibit various behaviours amidst pandemics; in fact, xenophobic thoughts can contribute to a reduced positive image of a destination. As such, this study assumes that xenophobia will dampen the positive association between cognitive and conative images and between affective and conative images. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{10a}: Potential tourists' xenophobia will moderate the positive relationship between their cognitive and conative destination image.

H_{10b}: Potential tourists' xenophobia will moderate the positive relationship between their affective and conative destination image.

Based on the above-proposed hypotheses, the conceptual framework of this study is developed. This is presented in Figure 1 below.

Perceptions of destination
in midst of pandemic

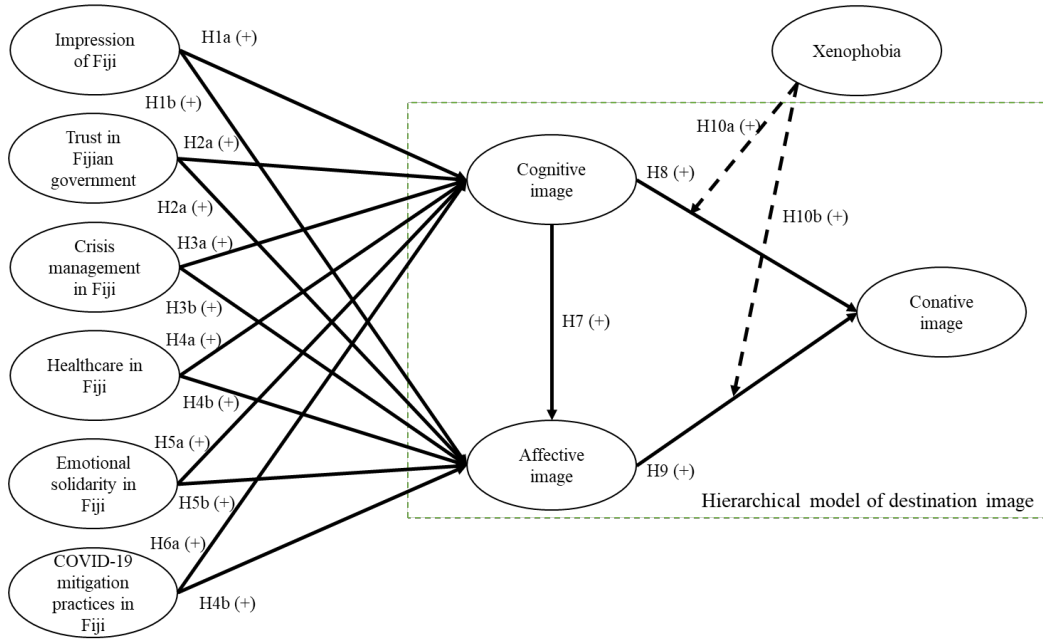


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methods

Measurement scale, sampling, and data collection

This study's population comprised Australian citizens at least 18 years of age. The reason for selecting this population was that Australians account for the highest share of visitor arrivals in Fiji (Sharma et al., 2020). As such, Australian respondents were deemed an ideal population to participate in this study concerning their perceptions of Fiji as a potential destination to visit. Data were collected between January and March 2022. Fiji opened its borders to travellers, which included Australians, on December 1, 2021. Therefore, the timing of data collection was appropriate given Australians could potentially travel to Fiji. An online questionnaire was developed using SurveyMonkey, with links circulated using a sponsored advertisement on Facebook. Recent research has employed this method of data collection due to health protocols and social distancing measures (Sharma et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021a; Singh et al., 2021b). Social desirability bias was reduced by ensuring that survey participants were assured their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would be anonymous. Only individuals who were interested in travelling to Fiji were asked to participate in the study. From the 423 responses collected, seven were removed from the dataset as they were incomplete. This resulted in 416 useable questionnaires for analysis. The detailed demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1 below. The majority

of respondents were females ($n = 241$; 57.93%) between the ages of 18 and 25 ($n = 148$; 35.57%), earning more than AUD90,000 ($n = 179$; 43.03%).

Table 1: Participants' demographic profile

Gender	N	%
Male	173	41.59
Female	241	57.90
Do not wish to share	2	0.48
Age		
18 - 25 years	148	35.57
26 - 30 years	114	27.40
31 - 40 years	89	21.39
41 - 50 years	61	14.66
51 years and above	2	0.48
Do not wish to share	2	0.48
Income		
No income earned	7	1.68
Less than AUD15,000	12	2.88
AUD15,000 - 29,999	9	2.16
AUD30,000 - 44,999	17	4.09
AUD45,000 - 59,999	36	9.65
AUD60,000 - 74,999	52	12.5
AUD75,000 - 89,999	104	25.0
AUD90,000 +	179	43.03

Appendix A presents the operationalisation of each item that was adopted from extant studies, presented using a 7-point Likert scale of agreement (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The survey instrument was pilot tested with 20 participants representing the study's population. Respondents were encouraged to provide open suggestions concerning the length of the instrument, wording of items, etc. Small language changes were made based on feedback provided by the participants.

Content and face validity were confirmed as crucial steps in the instrument development process (Connell et al., 2018; Patrick et al., 2011). Face validity was applied to ascertain whether items were sensible and appropriate, while content validity was used to determine the extent to which items measured the different variables in the study (Fitzpatrick et al., 1998). This procedure was consistent with prior studies (Slack et al., 2020). That is, expert opinion was used to achieve content validity, while face validity was attained through the pilot test ($n=20$) conducted prior to full data collection. These steps enhanced the quality of the survey instrument.

Data analysis

To assess the multiple relationships between constructs in the proposed conceptual model, structural equation modelling (SEM) was utilised. The two primary SEM approaches include variance-based SEM (VBSEM) and covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM). The latter was deemed more appropriate for this study based on sample size requirements and the multivariate nature of the design (Hair et al., 2006; Henseler et al., 2009). This method has been popularly used in prior studies (Singh et al., 2021c; Slack et al., 2020). According to Hair (2009), a two-step process must be followed for CB-SEM. The first step involves performing the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by the second step, where SEM is performed using SPSS and AMOS Graphics 25. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was not performed as the scales employed in this study were well-tested in prior studies, and no additions were made to the scale (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2017; Öğretmenoğlu et al., 2021; Sim et al., 2021). Additionally, Hair, et al. (2020) claimed that EFA is required when constructs have no prior patterns or hypotheses. The moderation analysis was performed using the Hayes PROCESS macro. The measurement model was used to confirm the reliability and validity of constructs and the factor structure. The model fit will be evaluated for the structural model together with the reliability and validity based on the recommendation of Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Results

Common method bias

As this study relies on self-reported data, common method bias (CMB) tests were performed to ensure the robustness of the results. Harman's one-factor test was used to assess the potential for bias. Results confirmed that the variance explained was less than the recommended 50% (i.e., 39.49%), confirming the absence of CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Reliability and validity

A good model fit was confirmed for the measurement model using CFA. $CMIN/df = 3.51$, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.89, goodness of-fit index (GFI) = 0.89, adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.84, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94 and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.04 (Hair, 2009). The most common measure for goodness-of-fit is chi-square, however it is very sensitive to sample size. Therefore, scholars have proposed relative chi-square ($CMIN/df$) to overcome this issue (Ozdemir et al., 2022). According to West et al. (1995) the $CMIN/df$ is generally accepted to be less than 5. This requirement has been fulfilled, which indicates an acceptable model fit. As this study's sample size is above 200, it is advised to employ alternative measures of GFI, NPC, RMR, and RMSEA (Ozdemir et al., 2022). RMSEA values are recommended to range between 0.05 and 0.08 (Hair, 2009). A good fit is indicated when the RMR and NCP are close to 0. GFI values are recommended to be close to 1 (Hair, 2009). The measurement model met each of these requirements. Additionally, Table 2 provides the item loadings for the measurement model. Results confirm that all loadings were over 0.70, thus establishing the appropriateness of the items (Murtagh & Heck, 2012).

Table 2: Constructs and loadings

Construct	Item	Item loading	Mean ¹	Construct	Item	Item loading	Mean ¹
	IMP1	0.81	3.34		CG1	0.86	4.97

Impression of Fiji	IMP2	0.79	3.74	Cognitive image of Fiji	CG2	0.82	3.93
	IMP3	0.71	3.88		CG3	0.72	4.59
	IMP4	0.72	3.77		CG4	0.75	4.93
	IMP5	0.80	4.06		CG5	0.71	4.58
	IMP6	0.73	3.74		CG6	0.81	4.86
Trust in the Fijian government	TFG1	0.77	3.90		CG7	0.87	4.54
	TFG2	0.82	3.66		CG8	0.76	4.73
	TFG3	0.84	3.56		CG9	0.74	4.61
	TFG4	0.88	4.39		CG10	0.77	4.74
Crisis management in Fiji	CMG1	0.73	4.52		CG11	0.72	3.76
	CMG2	0.82	4.91		AF1	0.79	3.77
	CMG3	0.85	3.75		AF2	0.77	3.64
Healthcare system in Fiji	HCS1	0.74	2.67		AF3	0.82	4.83
	HCS2	0.83	2.65	Conative image of Fiji	AF4	0.74	4.74
	HCS3	0.78	2.82		CN1	0.71	3.76
Emotional solidarity in Fiji	SLD1	0.72	3.66		CN2	0.80	3.96
	SLD2	0.75	4.52		CN3	0.77	3.69
	SLD3	0.74	4.75		CN4	0.79	4.53
	SLD4	0.84	3.79	Xenophobia	XNP1	0.77	3.53
	SLD5	0.85	3.94		XNP2	0.74	4.39
COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji	CMP1	0.74	4.57		XNP3	0.76	3.63
	CMP2	0.77	4.74		XNP4	0.87	3.66
	CMP3	0.89	4.55		XNP5	0.81	3.81
	CMP4	0.78	3.84		XNP6	0.71	3.84
	CMP5	0.87	4.88				
	CMP6	0.74	3.52				
	CMP7	0.75	4.67				
	CMP8	0.77	3.59				

¹Items were asked on 7-point Likert scale of agreement (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)

Table 3 presents the variables' composite reliability values, which were greater than the recommended 0.70 cut-offs suggested by Hair (2009). This also confirms the variables' internal reliability. Additionally, Table 3 reports the average variance extracted values for each factor, which exceeded the critical value of 0.50 (Hair, 2009). These results confirm convergent validity. Based on the recommendation by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), discriminant validity was supported, given all square roots of the AVEs were greater than correlations between each factor. Also, the discriminant validity was supported as factor AVE values were greater than their average shared squared variance (ASV) and maximum shared squared variance (MSV) values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results are presented in Table 3. As Kline (2015) suggested, the pair-wise correlations between the factors were less than 0.80. Additionally, this study conducted the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) analysis to confirm discriminant validity further. Results in Table 4 reveal that the factors' square root of the AVE exceeds the correlations between factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: Discriminant validity

	SD	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	IMP	TFG	CMG	HCS	SLD	CMP	CGI	AFI	CNI	XNP
IMP	1.19	0.89	0.58	0.21	0.14	0.81									
TFG	0.29	0.90	0.69	0.29	0.15	0.35	0.87								
CMG	0.98	0.84	0.64	0.38	0.17	0.33	0.27	0.74							
HCS	0.95	0.83	0.62	0.21	0.22	0.36	0.16	0.36	0.78						
SLD	1.12	0.89	0.61	0.22	0.15	0.24	0.42	0.12	0.18	0.81					
CMP	0.96	0.93	0.63	0.36	0.17	0.48	0.49	0.33	0.48	0.23	0.78				
CGI	1.04	0.94	0.61	0.39	0.15	0.33	0.34	0.39	0.36	0.37	0.42	0.82			
AFI	0.91	0.86	0.61	0.33	0.23	0.29	0.21	0.12	0.44	0.17	0.17	0.35	0.75		
CNI	0.97	0.85	0.59	0.26	0.15	0.19	0.18	0.32	0.13	0.44	0.24	0.23	0.18	0.83	
XNP	0.92	0.90	0.61	0.33	0.22	0.22	0.38	0.37	0.45	0.36	0.38	0.45	0.44	0.43	0.77

Table 4: HTMT

	IMP	TFG	CMG	HCS	SLD	CMP	CGI	AFI	CNI	XNP
IMP										
TFG	0.26									
CMG	0.41	0.53								
HCS	0.36	0.38	0.52							
SLD	0.58	0.49	0.59	0.28						
CMP	0.32	0.43	0.21	0.14	0.39					
CGI	0.25	0.49	0.35	0.22	0.23	0.62				
AFI	0.41	0.21	0.31	0.53	0.45	0.32	0.61			
CNI	0.36	0.34	0.23	0.47	0.48	0.65	0.36	0.32		
XNP	0.25	0.61	0.49	0.42	0.27	0.47	0.23	0.27	0.21	

Structural model

By employing covariance-based SEM, path analysis was performed to determine the fit of the structural model. Based on the criteria proposed by Hair (2009), the results revealed a good model fit : $CMIN/df = 2.26$, $NFI = 0.88$, $GFI = 0.87$, $AGFI = 0.84$, $RMR = 0.15$, $CFI = 0.95$, $TLI = 0.93$ and $RMSEA = 0.04$. The probability values and regression weights were used to test the proposed hypotheses. The results reveal that most of the hypotheses were supported. H_{1a} : ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$), H_{1b} : ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.001$), H_{2a} : ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$), H_{2b} : ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$), H_{3a} : ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$), H_{3b} : ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$), H_{5a} : ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$), H_{5b} : ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$), H_{6a} : ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.001$), H_{6b} : ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$), H_8 : ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$), H_9 : ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.001$). Only H_{4a} : ($\beta = -0.01, p > 0.05$), H_{4b} : ($\beta = 0.02, p > 0.05$), and H_7 : ($\beta = 0.01, p > 0.05$) were not supported. Variance explained in the three outcome constructs was fairly robust (e.g., cognitive image—51.1%; affective image—47.2%; and conative image—56.9%). The R^2 confirmed the findings' robustness as all values were in excess of 20%, which is generally considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2011). The results are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Direct relationship hypothesis result

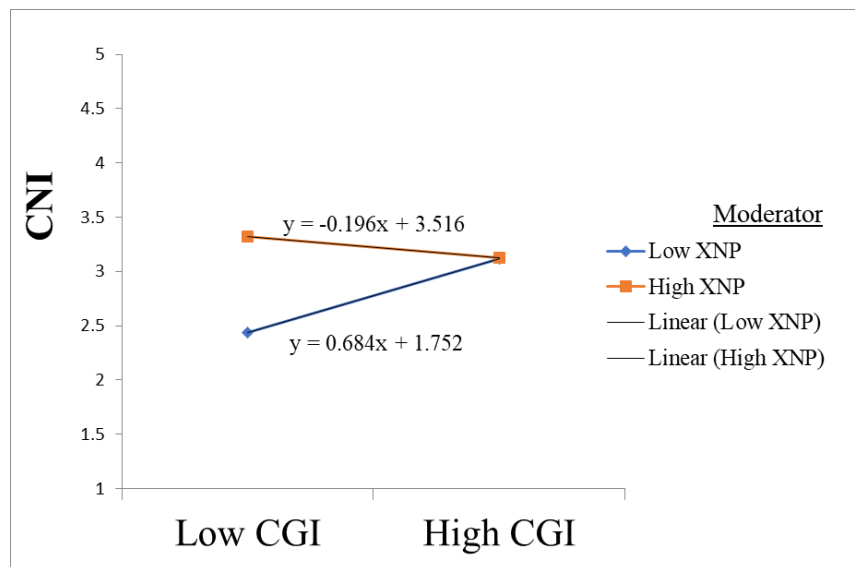
Hypothesis	Path	β	Significance	Support
H_{1a}	IMP $\rightarrow$ CGI	0.36	< 0.001	Yes
H_{1b}	IMP $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.21	< 0.001	Yes
H_{2a}	TFG $\rightarrow$ CGI	0.22	< 0.001	Yes
H_{2b}	TFG $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.19	< 0.001	Yes
H_{3a}	CMG $\rightarrow$ CGI	0.29	< 0.001	Yes
H_{3b}	CMG $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.23	< 0.001	Yes
H_{4a}	HCS $\rightarrow$ CGI	-0.01	> 0.05	No
H_{4b}	HCS $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.02	> 0.05	No
H_{5a}	SLD $\rightarrow$ CGI	0.25	< 0.001	Yes
H_{5b}	SLD $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.20	< 0.001	Yes
H_{6a}	CMP $\rightarrow$ CGI	0.18	< 0.001	Yes
H_{6b}	CMP $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.22	< 0.001	Yes
H_7	CGI $\rightarrow$ AFI	0.01	> 0.05	No
H_8	CGI $\rightarrow$ CNI	0.34	< 0.001	Yes
H_9	AFI $\rightarrow$ CNI	0.30	< 0.001	Yes

Moderation analysis

Model 1 of the PROCESS macro was employed to investigate the moderating influence of xenophobia. The results confirm that xenophobia was found to dampen the positive association between cognitive image and conative image (H_{10a}). This result is illustrated in Figure 2. However, H_{10b} was not supported. Table 6 presents the moderation results.

Table 6: Moderation Result

Xenophobia						
Path	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	Moderation?
CGI → CNI	-0.22	2.97	0.01	0.0421	0.2714	Yes
AFI → CNI	0.13	-1.16	0.27	-0.1319	0.0182	No

**Figure 2: Moderation result**

Control variables

Income, gender, and age were controlled for in model testing. The findings revealed that none of these control variables had any confounding effect on the dependent variables. The results were as follows: income ($\beta = -0.01, p > 0.05$), gender ($\beta = 0.03, p > 0.05$), and age ($\beta = 0.07, p > 0.05$).

Discussion

H_{1a} and H_{1b}, which proposed the positive relationship between potential Australian tourists' impressions of Fiji and their cognitive and affective images, were confirmed in this study. This implies that Fiji's cognitive and affective destination image is influenced by the number of reported COVID-19 cases, deaths, recovery rate, vaccine mandates, and policies relating to physical distancing and mask-wearing. Prior studies have also confirmed similar results as Chen et al. (2017), who found that tourists' overall impression of Cuba was important in determining their intention to visit. Guzman-Parra et al. (2021) also revealed that impressions could be unique assets to enhance a destination image. H_{2a} and H_{2b}, which proposed that potential tourists' trust in the Fijian government would be positively related to their cognitive and affective images, were also supported. This indicates that tourists' trust in Fiji

information and communication, transparency and openness, and honesty about COVID-19 responses are critical to the development of the cognitive and affective destination image among those considering a visit. These findings are consistent with Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) and Hassan and Soliman (2021), who also revealed the importance of tourists' trust in the government in destination visit intention. H_{3a} and H_{3b} proposed that potential visitors' perceptions of crisis management in Fiji would be positively related to their cognitive and affective destination images. This demonstrates that crisis management strategies in the forms of early and timely diagnoses of COVID-19, responses to COVID-19 infections, and supply chain risks related to adequate medicine and food have a strong bearing on potential visitors' cognitive and affective destination image. Prior studies revealed similar results. For instance, Avraham (2015) found that crises negatively impact destination image. Zheng et al. (2021) also found that the crisis decreased tourists' demand for destinations.

Despite support shown for the first sets of hypotheses, H_{4a} and H_{4b}, which hypothesised that potential visitors' perceptions of Fijian healthcare would be positively related to the cognitive and affective destination image, were not. This finding is contrary to prior studies, such as Moreno-González et al. (2020) that confirmed the importance of healthcare perceptions on destination image. A tenable explanation is that because Fiji is a developing country, tourists do not expect much in terms of healthcare services in the country. That is, it could be that tourists do not consider Fiji's healthcare robust, reliable, fast and timely in tackling COVID-19 or providing reliable COVID-19 testing. These issues in Fiji's healthcare have been highlighted by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a World Bank Group member. It stated that the country's healthcare faces challenges in its entire value chain, from the availability of medications and supplies to early screening and diagnosis of diseases (Chand, 2022). H_{5a} and H_{5b}, which proposed that potential visitors' perceptions of emotional solidarity in Fiji would be positively related to their cognitive and affective destination images, were supported. This highlights that individuals perceive that the Fijian government is caring towards its people and that the government is doing its best to reduce the mental and emotional impacts brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. To help individuals cope with the mental and psychological impacts of COVID-19, organisations such as Empower Pacific teamed up with hospitals in the country to provide psychological first aid in quarantine facilities, individuals and families in home isolation, patients in hospitals and frontline workers (Williams, 2021). H_{6a} and H_{6b}, which stated that potential tourists' perceptions of COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji would be positively related to their cognitive and affective destination images, were also supported. This shows the impact that perceptions of Fijian authorities placing social distancing signs, encouraging mask-wearing, ensuring cleanliness, providing proper advice, installing hand sanitisers, and encouraging wearing a protective face covering and gloves, are critical to enhancing their image of the country. Olmedo and Mateos (2015) found something similar by confirming the importance of tourism destination image management following a crisis in another island destination, Majorca (Spain).

H₇ that hypothesised potential visitors' cognitive image would be positively related to their affective destination image was not confirmed in this study. This contradicts what Li et al. (2010) and Lin et al. (2007) found in their research. This could be because of the reverse relationship that was not explored in this study (affective image → cognitive image). Studies in environmental psychology, for instance, have empirically validated that greater levels of affection lead to more positive cognitive evaluations of a place's attributes (Billig, 2006; Rollero & Piccoli, 2010). However, this study confirmed H₈, which proposed cognitive image would be positively related to conative destination image. This implies that Fiji, as a tourist destination, providing good value for money, having a clean environment, convenient transportation, interesting festivals, nightlife, appealing cuisine, quality hotels, pleasant

weather, and scenic beauty would lead tourists to want to visit the destination and recommend it to others. Similar results were found by Sharma et al. (2022b) and Agapito et al. (2013). Finally, H₉, which proposed that affective image would be positively related to conative destinations image, was supported. This demonstrates that tourists perceiving Fiji to be relaxing, lively, exciting, and pleasant have stronger intentions to visit the country and recommend it to others. Similar results were found by Loureiro and Jesus (2019) concerning Rio de Janeiro. H_{10a}, which proposed xenophobia would moderate the positive relationship between cognitive and conative destination image, was supported in this study. In essence, for tourists with a high degree of COVID-19 induced xenophobia, there is a decreased likelihood to visit and recommend the destination regardless of what the destination has to offer its terms of value for money, convenient transportation, interesting festivals, nightlife, appealing cuisine, quality hotels, pleasant weather, and scenic beauty. This finding was in line with prior study results such as Zenker and Kock (2020), which highlighted that tourists' xenophobia during a pandemic crisis lead to destination concerns. However, H_{10b} which hypothesised xenophobia would moderate the positive association between affective and conative destination image, was not supported. Such a finding contradicts the work by Schaller and Park (2011) that found tourists used xenophobia to protect themselves from a pandemic crisis. A possible explanation for the lack of moderation effect here may be due to the relative stability in affective associations to destinations, who once formed, are less prone to change (due to externalities like xenophobia) (Korpela et al., 2009)

Theoretical implications

The theoretical contribution of this study is fourfold: first, the study proposed and validated a novel framework that considers the various antecedents of destination image that come into play in shaping its formation, especially in an era of uncertainty, like the ongoing pandemic crisis. Although past research has underlined the importance of image for destination competitiveness and recovery from various crises, current research on its antecedents and implications for the intention to visit a destination is lacking in general. This study revealed that impressions of the destination, trust in central government, perceptions of crisis management, emotional solidarity with locals, and perceptions of COVID-19 mitigation practices all positively determine potential travellers' cognitive and affective image of the destination.

Additionally, although the individual effect of such factors on destination image has been previously tested, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has concurrently tested their impact on destination image formation. This study's findings provide novel ways to understand image formation during turbulent events and periods. Third, this research contributes to the ongoing discussions regarding the sequential relationship between cognitive and affective image, which was not established in this study. A tenable explanation is that such a relationship is questioned when a destination is suffering from a severe crisis like the pandemic. Another contribution of this study is the application of xenophobia as a moderating variable in the relationship between cognitive and conative, and between affective and conative; scarcely any research has explored some type of moderator among the components of the image. As the findings indicate, potential tourists with high levels of xenophobia caused by COVID-19 are less likely to visit and/or recommend a destination to others, regardless of their image of that place.

Practical implications

A host of practical implications can be drawn from the results of this research. This is especially true of the first six hypothesis pairs. To aid in the economic recovery process,

destination marketers and government officials within Fiji and abroad should honestly and assertively work with other countries, in this case, Australia, to convey their efforts to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and ensure the safety of potential visitors. Testimonials posted on traditional and social media outlets of those who have recently visited Fiji would also go far to convey not only confidence in Fiji's ability to provide adequate healthcare but also to mitigate the crisis, welcome visitors (i.e., demonstrating emotional solidarity with potential tourists), possess a trustworthy government, and enact strategies to allay the potential spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, DMOs within Fiji, whether they be at the national, regional, or local level, should maintain regular up-to-date postings on their websites and social media platforms of reported COVID-19 cases, deaths, recovery, and vaccination statistics, in addition to mitigation practices (e.g., physical distancing regulations, mask-wearing policies, proper cleanliness/sanitisation protocols and businesses' compliance of such preventive regulations), and closest healthcare and hospital facilities.

Confirmation of the xenophobia influence on destination image constructs highlights the need to create tourism marketing offerings to account for this phenomenon. Destination marketers need to make tourists less anxious about COVID-19 risks by communicating effective policies and procedures to protect them. Government departments and policy markets also need to ensure appropriate insurance is available for travellers to cover their travel and medical costs. Flights, hotels, tour companies, and resorts should offer to book cancellations and refunds should the tourists be affected due to the COVID-19 virus.

As mentioned in the introduction, this work aimed to address two United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: #3—*good health and well-being* and #8—*decent work and economic growth*. First and foremost, ensuring Fijian residents' safety and public health is a priority (addressed primarily through many of the crisis mitigation measures mentioned above). If residents are not well and continue to suffer from COVID-19 physically, then obviously, trying to attract visitors is unwise for communities and villages throughout Fiji and tourists who may be carriers of COVID-19 or become infected while in-country. As proper healthcare strategies become well established, addressing economic growth especially focusing on resource-dependent communities within Fiji, should be the focus. The emphasis here would be on reinvigorating demand for the locally held resorts and ecotourism businesses. This research (and numerous other studies) shows that cognitive and affective destination images translate well into conative images. The 'proof will be in the pudding' as to whether such conative destination image translates into actual visitation among Australians.

Limitations and future research directions

Despite this work's practical and theoretical contributions, some limitations must be considered. First, data were collected using Facebook. While prior studies have popularly used this method, it is not reasonable to expect all tourists to have accounts on the social media platform. Additionally, this study's respondents comprised a high percentage of young adults. This could be attributed to the popularity of social media among younger cohorts. Therefore, future studies should explore other methods of data collection. Additionally, this research was conducted using a cross-sectional design. Therefore, this research only provides a snapshot in time of tourists' perceptions and intentions. Future studies could benefit from potentially more robust insights by employing experimental or longitudinal designs. Finally, the conative image in this study measures tourists' visit intention rather than actual behaviour. Prior studies have highlighted the importance of considering the intention-behaviour gap.

Therefore, future studies should seek ways to collect behavioural data most effectively from tourists that may prove to be more objective than self-reported intentions.

Appendix A

Construct	Item
Impression of Fiji (adapted from Li, Nguyen, & Coca-Stefaniak, 2021) – 6 items	My impression of Fiji is affected by the number of COVID-19 cases reported. My impression of Fiji is affected by the number of COVID-19 deaths reported. My impression of Fiji is affected by the COVID-19 recovery rate. My impression of Fiji is affected by the policy enacted concerning vaccine mandates. My impression of Fiji is affected by the policy enacted concerning physical distancing. My impression of Fiji is affected by the policy enacted concerning face coverings.
Trust in the Fijian government (adopted from Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Rastegar, & Hall, 2021) – 4 items	I trust the information and communication provided by the Fijian government concerning COVID-19 infection rates. I have admired the openness and transparency of the Fijian government since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I would characterise the Fijian government as honest in their response to COVID-19. My level of trust in the information and communication provided by the Fijian government has increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Crisis management in Fiji (adopted from Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Rastegar, & Hall, 2021) – 3 items	I admire the timely and early diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 by the authorities in Fiji. I admire the forceful and rapid response to COVID-19 in Fiji. I admire the effective management of the supply chain risk and disruption (shortage of food and medicine) in Fiji.
Healthcare system in Fiji (adopted from Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Rastegar, & Hall, 2021) – 3 items	I believe the healthcare system of Fiji is reliable and robust. I admire the timely and fast tracking of those exposed to COVID-19 in Fiji. I admire the high-capacity for COVID-19 testing in Fiji.
Emotional solidarity in Fiji (adopted from Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Rastegar, & Hall, 2021) – 5 items	I believe the Fijian government cares about its people in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fijian government has done the best to relieve and decrease the emotional and mental impacts of COVID-19 on affected people. I believe Fijian people help and care for one another in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fijian government and its people demonstrate a sense of togetherness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fijian people help each other in different ways (financially and non-financially) to relieve and decrease the emotional and mental impacts on affected people during the COVID-19 pandemic.
COVID-19 mitigation practices in Fiji (adapted	Fijian authorities have done well to place signage encouraging people to stay six feet apart from one another in crowded areas. Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to require physical distancing.

from Humagain
& Singleton,
2021) – 8
items

**Cognitive
image of Fiji**
(adopted from
Woosnam,
Stylidis &
Ivkov, 2020)

**Affective
image of Fiji**
(adopted from
Woosnam,
Stylidis &
Ivkov, 2020)

**Conative
image of Fiji**
(adapted from
Woosnam,
Stylidis &
Ivkov, 2020)

Tourist xenophobia (adopted
from Kock, Josiassen & Assaf,
2019)

Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to require face coverings.

Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to require businesses to regularly wipe down surfaces.

Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to advise visitors with flu-like symptoms to stay home.

Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to provide touchless hand sanitiser stations.

Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to require business employees to wear protective equipment (gloves and face coverings).

Fijian authorities have done well in their efforts to ensure public indoor spaces are well ventilated.

Fiji has scenic beauty.

Fiji has pleasant weather.

Fiji has quality hotels.

Fiji has appealing cuisine/food.

Fiji has an excellent quality of service.

Fiji has good nightlife.

Fiji has interesting festivals.

Fiji is easily accessible.

Fiji has convenient transportation.

Fiji is known for its clean environment.

Fiji is known for providing good value for money.

Fiji is unpleasant—pleasant.

Fiji is boring—exciting.

Fiji is sleepy—lively.

Fiji is distressing—relaxing.

I plan to visit Fiji in the next three years.

I plan to visit Fiji sometime in the near future.

I plan to recommend Fiji to my acquaintances and co-workers.

I plan to recommend Fiji to my close friends and family members.

I doubt that Fijians would be welcoming to tourists like me.

I would not feel comfortable in the Fijian culture.

I would probably feel uneasy engaging with Fijians.

There would be many misunderstandings between me and Fijians.

I would be suspicious of Fijians I encountered.

I would be worried that Fijians would meet me with reservations.

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