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Rebuilding Tourism Resilience in the Post-Pandemic Era: Hotel Success Narratives in Tanzania

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Abstract

COVID-19 struck tourism more deeply than ever before and it is still less clear how tourist hotels in the remote setting of the global south navigated the crisis. Limited explored empirically and what remain less known is how the standard operating procedures were designed, perceived and effectively applied to inform resilience in specific tourist hotel setting. In this article we explore the role of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) played in rebuilding tourist hotels resilience. Karatu district Tanzania touristic space situates study context. Methodological approach adopted is qualitative research design with integration of interview, observation and pertinent hotel statistics in comparing pre and post pandemic realities within a span of ten years. With focus on luxurious hotels in the study area and drawing from crisis management and resilience theory we triangulated interviews, hotel bookings data and bed occupancy rate to generate novel outcomes. Findings disclose that tourist hotels adopted safety protocols proactively to manage crisis and rebuild resilience. Innovated protocols in tourist hotel setting provided peculiar geopolitical space to counter the global pandemic fear and deconstructed lockdown and mobility restriction discourses and ultimately reclaiming booking and increasing bed occupancy rates with time. Beyond SOP, counter-narratives also pointed to the role of vaccination, that came relatively latter. In future similar global disasters, tourist hotels crisis management protocols should embrace continuity in service delivery taking proactive precaution while evading disastrous mobility restrictions policies. Our contribution is specific within the tourist hotels setting during the formation of COVID-19 protocols along with their adoption and after.

Key words: Post-pandemic tourism, COVID-19 SOP, resilience, hotel, success narratives

Introduction

COVID-19 fear created global crisis with reactive mobility restrictions resulting in unprecedented tourism disruptions (Lew et al., 2020). As tourist hotels disproportionally experienced extremely low occupancy rate, cancellation of bookings and total closures (Liberato et al., 2022) due to lockdown, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) came to subside the virus and restart tourism (WHO 2020; Aldao et al., 2022). Countries customised SOP with guidance from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2020) and Tanzania, radically reopened borders from 18th May (URT, 2020a&b). While compliance to sanitary protocols (Dabi and Ankrah, 2021) might have broader implication on tourism resilience, the formation, adoption and outcome of SOP is less known and scholarly publication is limited. Equally, Ekemena & Ama (2024) noted positive and significant relationship between the extent of compliance with the protocols and guests' perception on re-booking. However,

perception, extent of adoption and outcome of SOP in tourist hotels and the role it played to manage the crisis and rebuild resilience is less explored empirically. This study targeted international tourist hotels in the global south remote local setting to advance understanding of the role SOP played in rebuilding resilience from crisis management lenses.

Crisis Management and Resilience

Crisis management and resilience are interrelated concepts. Crisis has to be managed while in order to enhance system resilience to unforeseen catastrophic events or uncertainties it is necessary to develop a lasting strategy (Hendhana et al., 2024). Resilience reflects the degree of disturbance a system can withstand while still maintaining variables determining its behaviour (Holling, 1973;1996; Adger 2000; Farrell and Twining-Ward 2004; Bonanno, 2005). It constitutes resistance and adaptation of structure and function of particular system (Biggs et al., 2012) and applies to complex and vulnerable systems with nonlinear and interdisciplinary approaches (Orchiston et al., 2016) in changing and unfavourable environments.

Continuous ability to adapt and maintain positive performance or the ability to bounce back from a particular crisis (Saad et al., 2021), ability to recover and adapt to disasters or new paths (Bhamra et al., 2011) and to maintain continuity (Hedner et al., 2011) indicate resilience. Shaw and Maythorne (2013) noted 'recovery' and 'transformation' as key division in the resilience definition. In recovery it is possible to return to the old system; in transformation, the current structure cannot withstand the disruption and as such must be changed. Literature also distinguishes two paths in building organisational resilience: adoption and absorptive path (Zighan et al., 2022; Conz and Magnani, 2020). Resilience in tourism analysis explains a complex adaptive system as the industry firms in the sector are susceptible to the foreseen and unforeseen disruptions (Pedauga et al., 2022; Schwaiger et al., 2022).

Tourism scholarship has applied resilience (Hall et al 2023; Pham et al., 2021) in the contexts of disasters (Brown et al., 2018), pandemics (Jiang and Wen, 2020; Marco-Lijara et al., 2022), socio-economic instability (Melian-Alzola et al., 2020), or building sustainability (Lee, 2008; Sobain et al., 2021). Equally, hotel resilience studies focus on the role of capital (economic, social, human, physical, natural, cultural) (Brown et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2021) and on systemic, organisational, economic and community approach (Melian-Alzola et al., 2020). Size influences resilience of hotel business as for example, international hotel chains displayed a higher level of preparedness and planning compared to local hotels during pandemics (Filimonau et al., 2020; Bhaskara and Filimonau, 2021). Hotel industry recovery strategic measures to adapt to 'new normal' situations include technology, collaboration, organisation, human resources, marketing, service provision, health care, cancellation management and flexibility (Suder et al., 2025).

Resilience is analysed at individual, team, organisation and in tourism at destination level (Hall et al., 2017; Hillmann and Guenther, 2021). Prayag et al. (2024) distinguished resilience as a process (how organisation should perform to be resilient) and as a result (what status organisations aim to achieve) in the context of four-star, five star and great luxury hotels in the Canary Islands. Dynamic capabilities, financial slack, readiness, response, recovery, proactive, reactive, precursor, improvisation, resistance, agility and entrepreneurial orientation feature in resilience scholarship with emphasis on preparedness, responsiveness, adaptability and

learning. In hotel industry under highly changing and adverse markets conditions flexibility, diversification, cooperation and digitization (Suder et al., 2025) along with collaborative and adaptive capability are treated as dimensions of resilience. Resilience building relied on high level of entrepreneurship, fear of crisis and willingness to strengthen flexibility during the last wave of COVID-19 (Suder et al., 2025). Jesus et al. (2025) pointed reductions in human capital, bigger size, and higher past profitability diminish resilience, while higher leverage and capital intensity strengthen it. Booking and bed occupancy rates metrics explain hotel performance (Wang et al., 2025). The question not answered in the literature is how tourism resilience develops during the crisis and disruptions facing the industry (Hendana et al., 2024). More specifically, how formation and adoption of COVID-19 protocols in tourist hotels contribute to resilience theory broadly is also less known. The gap invite sharing of available empirical research findings to broaden the existing knowledge on the contribution of SOP to tourist hotels resilience post-pandemic.

Methodology

Figure 1 illustrates study setting context. Karatu District was selected purposely. In the most famous northern tourism circuit, the district remote area for the past few years has grown into an eminent international tourist destination for high end luxurious hotels investment away from Arusha City, Tanzania. Karatu District is located in Arusha region on the North East. It is bordered by Manyara region on the South and Singida region on the West. Country side tourist hotels in Karatu take advantages as they are situated in the main gateways to Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Serengeti National Parks. All these are World Heritage Sites listed under the United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Also, Lake Manyara National Parks and Lake Eyasi are touristic attractive water bodies adjacent to Karatu District. Karatu has 24 hotels targeting high end tourists.

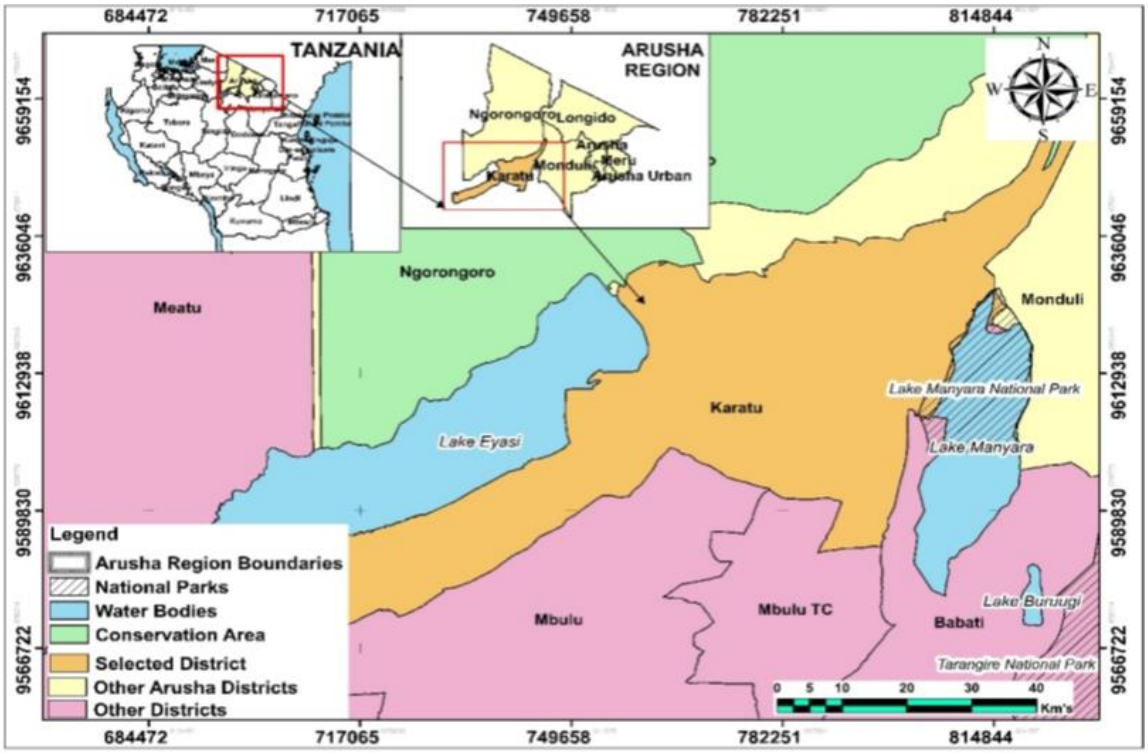


Figure 1: Karatu District Map and the Bordering Districts

Compared to other remote areas in Tanzania mainland, Karatu has many luxurious tourist hotels. Visitors hailing worldwide via Kilimanjaro International Airport or elsewhere can choose Karatu as their dream destination in the remote location of Eastern Africa Terrestrial Landscape Accommodation.

Methodological approach adopted is qualitative research design integrating interview, observation and pertinent hotel statistics in comparing pre and post pandemic realities within a span of ten years. Hotel was treated as a unit of analysis. We studied conveniently a total of 13 luxurious tourist hotels cases out of 24. Initially, all the 24 hotels were visited and the selected 13 hotels were convenient and the managers willingly provided response. Interview questions probed in chronological order the awareness, purpose and effectiveness of implementing standard operating procedures at the entrance, reception, and restaurant as well as hotel performance. Additionally, direct observation method applied in ascertaining compliance to protocols including hosts-guests interaction dynamics. Furthermore, hotel booking data generated enabled four years comparison capturing pre-pandemic, during and two years post-pandemic cases as Sigala (2020) suggested pandemic research to focus impact, response and outcomes concurrently. Ultimately, accessible nationwide ten years hotel bed occupancy rates sourced from Tanzania Bureau of Statistics website were analysed to gage pre- and post-pandemic trajectory. Triangulation adopted allows to draw from flexible, multiple methods and depth qualitative data (Cruzes et al., 2015; van Hulst et al., 2024). Data generated are subjected to context, narratives and trend analysis in a way replication and relevance is ensured.

Context, Narratives and Trends Analysis

Narrative analysis focuses on interpreting a study group's personal stories (van Hulst et al., 2024) in their natural setting. First-person narrative in quotations display how the interviewee expressed themselves in constructing SOP formation realities, purpose, adoption and outcomes (Box 1-4) and analysis extended graphically in tables (1-4) and figures (2-5). Integration of context, narratives and trend analysis enabled to present key informant novel stories in the first place, analyse and interpret data and ultimately discussing the key findings more accurately. In ensuring anonymity and confidentiality hotel name are hidden using codes.

Awareness on Formation of COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures in Tourist Hotel

Hotel operator perceptions on the formation of SOP influences how specific establishment applied the protocols in their premises and ultimate adoption outcomes. One of the hotel operator narratives recited the World Health Organisations (WHO) directives and ministry of health during the formation of the COVID-19 SOP in tourist hotels. "*The WHO in collaboration with ministry of health introduced the standard operating procedures to reduce infection after the COVID-19 outbreak. Our hotel has guidelines to serve customers and tourists by adhering to health requirements so as to make a person comfortable and free from various diseases. It emphasises hand washing with running water, sanitizing, distancing, and quarantine for staff and visitors who have some symptoms"* (Interview, Hotel A, 31/05/2022).

Hotel customised SOP in order to enhance resilience and promote its own competitive advantages. How hotel operator perceived the purpose of standard operating procedures is key in the narratives.

Narratives on the purpose of standard operating procedures are detailed in Box 1 and the analysis is in Table 1. Accordingly, SOP provide principles and guidelines for hotel service providers in ensuring that visitors are served and protected in accordance with the available health directives. They discipline hoteliers in ensuring visitors' health is protected. No one should be infected in the hotel visited. With regards to hotel business resilience, SOP aimed at reducing rates of infections to enable tourist service providers continue serving visitors coming to their hotels. It guided hotelier and visitor safety. It enables fighting against common diseases like malaria, skin diseases & cholera as well as emergent eruption of diseases like COVID-19. Protecting hoteliers from infections and ensuring visitors are safe from infections. Defending hoteliers to continue providing best services by concurrently protecting themselves and their visitors against new infections. Helping hoteliers in ensuring visitors are saved from new infections and those who are already infected are separated from those who are not infected and ultimately reducing infection speed as anyone passing in hotel environments adhering to.

Box 1: Awareness on Purpose of SOP

"Tourist hotel SOP provides principles and guidelines for service providers to ensure that visitors are served and protected in accordance with the available health directives. It guides and discipline hotelier to ensure that visitor's health is protected. No one should be infected at our hotel. SOP aimed at reducing the rates of infections so that we can proceed serving visitors coming to our hotel" (Interview, Service Provider Hotel C, 04/06/2022).

"Myself if not all employees at our hotel am aware with the hotel Covid-19 SOP since they were provided early during the eruption of the disease to be followed by various organizations while the hotels as among the targeted areas since we are receiving various visitors. Commonly as the hotel sector there are SOP which are used to guide us on how we suppose to deal with visitors, they are updated time to time and they are used to fight against common diseases like malaria, skin diseases and cholera. But when it comes to emergent eruption of disease like Covid-19, we listen intentionally the new SOP specific to that disease" (Interview, Service Provider Hotel B, 06/06/2022).

"I am aware with the hotel Covid-19 SOP as they were introduced during the period of Covid-19 eruption to be followed by the hotel sector when serving our customers. They were developed so as to protect us from infections and to ensure that visitors are safe from those infections. We conduct Covid-19 test as service providers and to the visitors so as those who are infected, they are quarantined for a certain period. Therefore, we are the main beneficiary of various SOP which are provided by various authorities as they defend us to remain providing best services while protecting ourself and our visitors against new infections" (Interview, Service Provider Hotel D, 08/06/2022).

"Myself am aware with the hotel Covid-19 SOP as they were introduced to help us ensure that visitors are saved from new infections and those who are already infected are separated from those who are not infected. They were to be followed by anyone who passes in our environments so as to reduce infection rates". (Interview, Service Provider Hotel E, 02/06/2022)

Table 1: Analysis of Hotel Service Providers' Perceived Purpose of SOP

S/N	Themes/contents	SOP purpose
1.	Hotel service providers' principles & guidelines ensuring visitors are served & protected in accordance with health directives	Integrate global health directives & enhance hotel business services quality standards
2.	Discipline hotelier, ensuring visitor's health is protected	
3.	One should not be infected at the hotel visited	
4.	Reducing infections rates & continue serving visitors coming to the hotel	
5.	Guiding hoteliers how to deal with visitors	Host-guest new normal, diseases control & crisis management
6.	Fighting against common diseases like malaria, skin diseases & cholera as well as emergent eruption of COVID-19	
7.	Protecting hoteliers from infections & ensuring visitors are safe from those infections	Safety standards new normal, rebuilding confidence to reclaim hotel services provision [supply] & inviting visitors [tourists/demand]
8.	Defending hoteliers to continue providing best services while protecting themselves and their visitors against new infections	
9.	Helping hoteliers in ensuring visitors are served from new infections and those who are already infected are separated from those who are not infected	Quarantine protocols enhance a sense of responsibility & accountability to contain & manage the pandemic proactively & rebuild resilience
10.	Reducing infection speed as anyone passing in hotel environments adhering to	

SOP directed testing temperature of guests and staff at the point of entry to ensure safety. Spraying hotel environments to kill viruses as well as ensuring every hotel entry has sanitizers was emphasised. Distancing of ten meters between visitors and staff was allowable with frequently cleaning and disinfecting surfaces in workplace, workstations, light switches and doorknobs. Avoiding buffet style meal services, instead opting for English service or plate service and sanitising also apply. Box 2 presents themes in the designated SOP and analysed further on table 2.

Box 2: Themes in the SOP

"SOP constitute various themes ... regular hand washing with running water, sanitizing, distancing of staff and visitors, and quarantine for those individuals or visitors who found to have some symptoms" (In-depth Interview, Hotel A, 31/05/2022)

… testing guests and staff temperature done at the entry to ensure we are safe. This was to ensure all guests are safe and they are not source of new infections. … spraying all the hotels environment to ensure that all the viruses are treated. We were directed to ensure that every hotel entry has sanitizers" (Interview, Service Provider Hotel G, 11/06/2022)

"… major theme was to keep distance from one person to another at reception and dining area, for seating the allowed distance was ten meters. … all accommodation facilities should frequently clean and disinfect surfaces in workplace … workstations, light switches and doorknobs (Interview, Service Provider Hotel J, 13/06/2022)

"… avoid all buffet style meal services … opt for English service or plate service. … visitors and staff adhere to seat between 10 meters. This goes together with sanitizing … to reduce spread of the disease" (Interview, Service Provider Hotel G, 11/06/2022)

Table 2: SOP Themes and Context Analysis

S/N	Themes	Context/Place
1.	Regular hand washing with running water, distancing, and quarantine for staff and visitors who to have some symptoms	Hotel entrance & surrounding enviros
2.	Testing temperature of guests and staff	
3.	Spraying hotel environments to kill viruses	
4.	Ensuring every hotel entry has sanitizers	
5.	Distancing of ten meters between visitors and staff	Reception, dining, room setting
6.	Frequently cleaning and disinfecting surfaces in workplace, workstations, light switches and doorknobs	
7.	Avoiding buffet style meal services, opting for English service or plate service	Dining & restaurant
8.	Sanitising	

Collectively SOP targeted hosts-guests hygiene, along with health and safety precautions with the purpose of restoring confidence to stay in hotels and customer service provision.

Effectiveness of SOP Adoption in Tourist Hotels

Effectiveness of SOP adoption is probed at the tourist hotel entrance, reception, and restaurant (Table 3). In enabling adoption of SOP tourist hotel provided contingency plans and staff training as the starting point. Healthcare and hygiene, changes in handling guests' arrivals in hotels, room setting and cleaning, food and beverage services, business strategy transition and customer retention were paramount. Contingency plans and staff training targeted protocols for isolation areas and coordinating with local health authorities in case of emergencies. Staff were trained to manage potential outbreaks as a way of minimising disruptions to guest services. Hotels applied SOP from the stage of booking, reception area and other areas within their premises. Comprehensive staff training program focused on educating employees about

proper hygiene practices, distancing guidelines, and the importance of all safety protocols. Depth analysis reveals a relatively more effective SOP adoption at the hotel entrance unlike reception and restaurant.

Table 3: SOPs Implemented at Entrance, Reception and Restaurant

Entrance	**N**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std.**
Temperature checks	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Guest luggage cleaned and disinfected	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Encourage guest to wear masks	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Hand sanitizer is provided to guests and staff	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Reception					
Floor markings for distancing	13	4	5	4.92	.277
Online check-in to reduce time at the front desk	13	4	5	4.92	.277
Guests arriving from restricted countries are provided information at the time of making reservations	13	4	5	4.92	.277
Sanitizers available at the desk for guests to use	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Hygiene instructions are provided to guests	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Restaurant					
Number of tables reduced/ distancing new normal	13	3	3	3.00	.000
Sanitizers available for guests to use	13	5	5	5.00	.000
Seating tables reduced to half capacity	13	3	5	3.15	.555
Disposable coffee cups are used for breakfast	13	3	5	3.15	.555
Disposable cleaning equipment is used	13	3	3	3.00	.000
All staff at buffets are using face shields	13	1	3	2.77	.599
All staff are wearing masks and gloves during providing service to guests	13	1	3	2.77	.599
Sneeze guards are installed on all buffets	13	3	5	4.85	.555
Self-service coffee machines are unavailable and coffee is served	13	1	3	2.77	.599
Disposable serviettes, which are pre-packed or individually packed, are being used	13	1	3	2.69	.751

Entrance	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Buffets are covered in glass and served by staff from behind the Buffet	13	1	5	2.77	1.013

Staff and guest temperature checks were executed at the hotel entrance. Guest luggage was cleaned and disinfected. Guests were provided with masks and encouraged to use them. Hand sanitizers were provided to guests and staff. At the reception sanitizers were readily available at the desk for guests to use. Hygiene instructions were provided to guests. Less applied SOP at the reception included floor marking to enable distancing and online check-in to reduce time at the front desk. Guests arriving from restricted countries were less informed at the time of making reservations. At the restaurant successful implemented SOP were few. These included reduced number of tables to allow distancing, sanitizers were available for guests to use while disposable cleaning equipment were used.

Tourists Hotels Performance Outcomes after Adoption of SOP

Improved performance in hotel including increased bed occupancy rate, booking and catering services is associated with SOP adoption (Box 3). It minimised spread of infections and prevented death that could be linked to COVID-19. This restored confidence of staff to interact with guests. Similarly, tourists confident to resume travel regained with time. SOP further created comfortable environment for tourists to arrive in hotel during the pandemic.

Box 3 Success Stories

Our hotel has recovered after implementation of SOP. We have assured guest having safe health environment for them. We have increased number of tourist visits who need hotel services including accommodation (Interview, Service Provider Hotel B, 07/06/2022)

We have implemented SOP and increased bed occupancy rate and higher number of bed available occupancy (Interview, Service Provider Hotel J, 15/06/2022)

Recovery in our hotel have been achieved in catering services after implementation of COVID-19 SOP. We have increase orders and delivery in most places and recreation centres (Interview, Service Provider Hotel C, 04/06/2022)

Implementation of SOP have minimized spread of infections and prevents death due to COVID-19. This has created conducive and comfort environment for tourists to arrive in our hotel accommodations (Interview, Service Provider Hotel K, 22/06/2022)

Coming of tourists have an association with having SOP in place and implementing them. We have recovered since we included availability and implementation of SOPs in out offers and advertisements (Interview, Service Provider Hotel E, 02/06/2022)

Bouncing back, safety, health, markets resuming, financial, economic profit making, business continuity, smooth operations, risk reduction, human capital, lifesaving, sustainability and tourism regrow feature in the key informant success narratives (Table 4).

Table 4: Analysis of Hotel Performance Success Narratives

Key findings in the narratives	Resilience indicators
Hotel recovered after implementing SOP. Assured guest safe & health environment. Increased number of tourists visits	bouncing back, safety, health, markets resuming
Implemented SOPs and increased bed occupancy rate	financial, economic, profit making
Recovery in hotel after implementation of COVID-19 SOP increase orders, delivery & catering services	business continuity, operations
SOP implementation minimized spread of infections & prevents death. Created conducive environment and comfort for tourists in hotel	risk reduction, human capital, life, sustainability
Implemented COVID-19 SOP increased tourists' arrivals	regrow

Adoption of SOP does not necessarily mean there is recovery instead it is a pathway towards recovery (Box 4). Costs of implementing the protocols is high and likely vaccinations accelerated tourism recovery beyond what SOP did.

Box 4 Counter narratives

Recovery during COVID-19 is not a result of SOP implementation, rather other business strategies being implemented to thrive in harsh business environment (Interview, Service Provider Hotel I, 07/06/2022)

We spend a lot of money in implementing provided SOPS, therefore it's difficult to recover through them (Interview, Service Provider Hotel F, 01/06/2022)

Tourist recovery is not only accelerated by SOP implementation, despite it is seasonal situation of tourist (Interview, Service Provider Hotel L, 28/06/2022)

Recovery have not been only accelerated by SOP implementation instead COVID-19 vaccinations which created safe environment and prevented spread of pandemic (Interview, Service Provider Hotel G, 27/06/2022)

While SOP adoption rebuilds resilience, tourism recovery requires many other strategies. Increasing tourists' arrival in the country does not necessarily mean that hotels has recovered. Fall and rise of hotel bookings is navigated next to ascertain hotel performance trajectory.

Navigating the Fall and Rise of Hotel Bookings

Hotel bookings in Karatu (Fig. 2) show an upward trend above pre pandemic level indicating resilient recovery pathway after adoption of SOP.

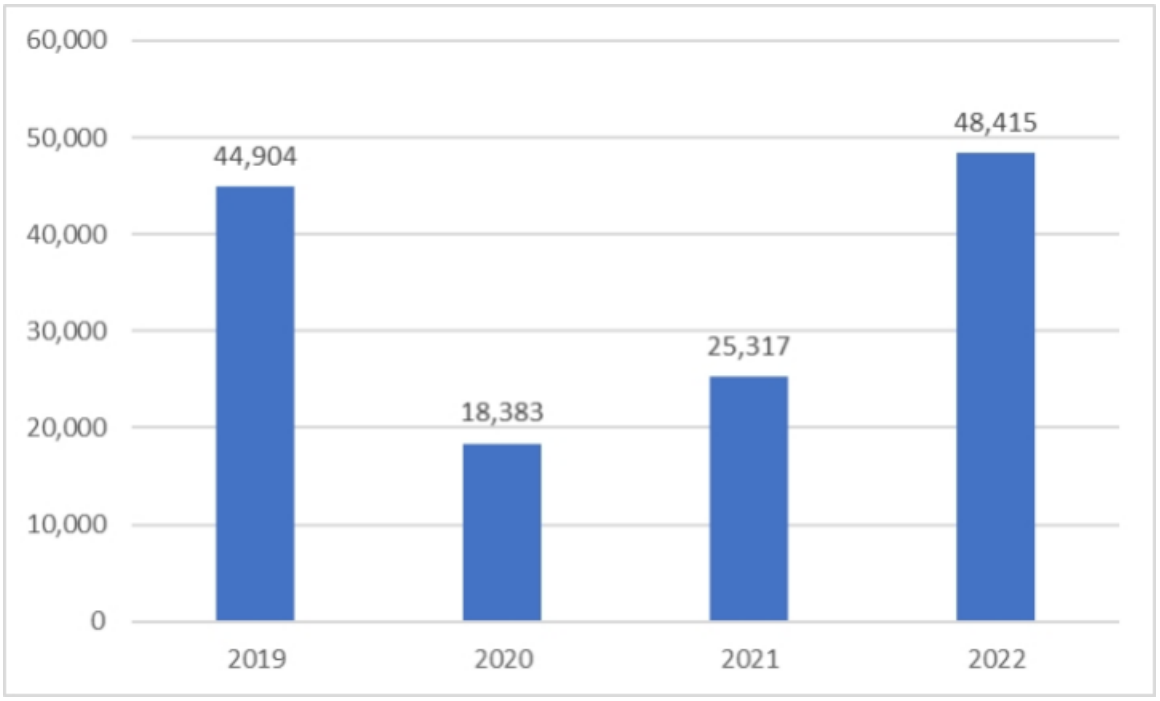


Figure 2: Hotel Bookings Totals in Karatu, 2019-2022

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Hotel booking in Karatu decreased from 32.8% in 2019 to 13.4% in 2020 aptly due to COVID-19 fear. After adoption of SOP to recover tourism from pandemic negative impact, hotel booking increased to 18.5% in 2021 and increased sharply up to 35.5% in 2022 (Fig. 3). Relative to the previous year, hotel bookings nearly doubled in 2022.

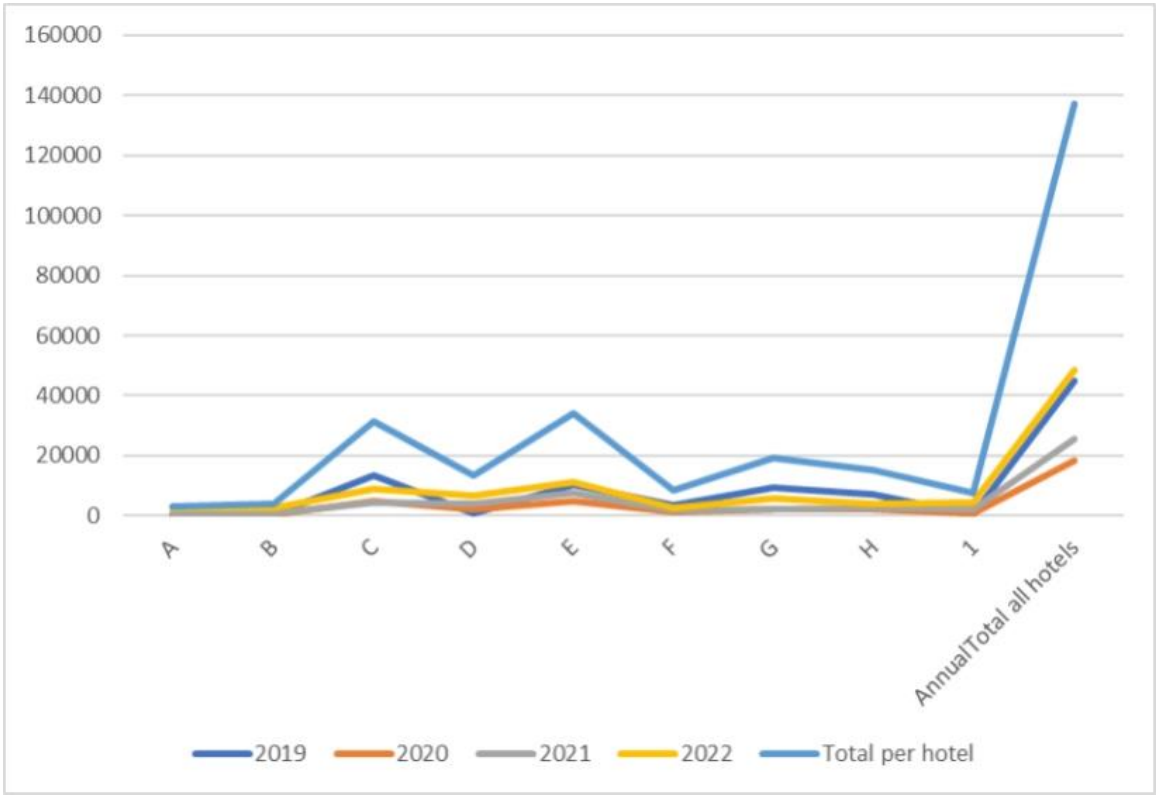


Figure 3: Karatu Tourist Hotels Booking before and after Adoption of SOP**, (**Field Data, 2022)

Beyond hotel booking performance hotel bed occupancy rate is compared to ascertain how resilient tourist hotels has become after adoption of SOP overtime relative to pre pandemic era.

Comparison of Hotel Bed Occupancy Rate Performance

The day average bed occupancy rate revealed is 11.2% (Fig. 4). The highest occupancy rate revealed in the day of interview in the tourist hotel was 25% whilst the lowest occupancy rate recorded is 2%.

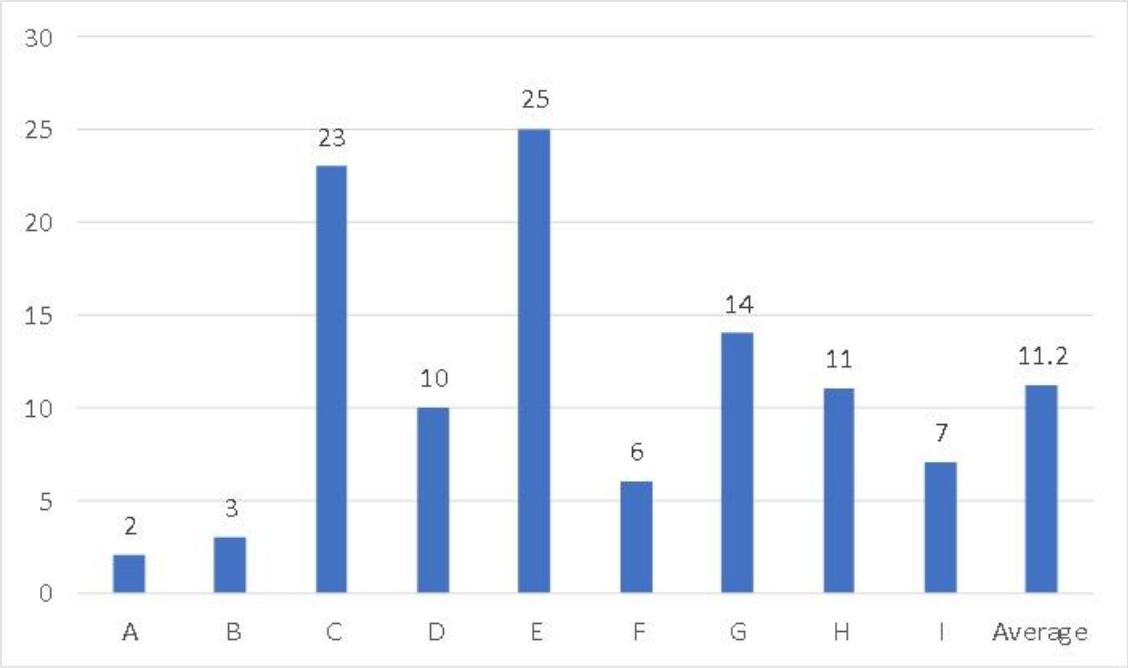


Figure 4: Day Bed Occupancy Rate Revealed During Interview**, (**Fieldwork Data, 2022)

Notably, few hotels declined to reveal their bed occupancy rate as it is seemingly perceived in business performance wise as confidential. This partly is as an indication of the fact hotels are still performing poorly post pandemic. Substantial variation in bed occupancy rate performance among hotels studied in Karatu suggest need for triangulation to broaden analysis in a way pre- and post-pandemic comparison can be captured at the national level. Accordingly, the day average bed occupancy rate is slightly above the lowest monthly amid pandemic bed occupancy rate (9.3%) recorded in April 2020 (Fig. 5).

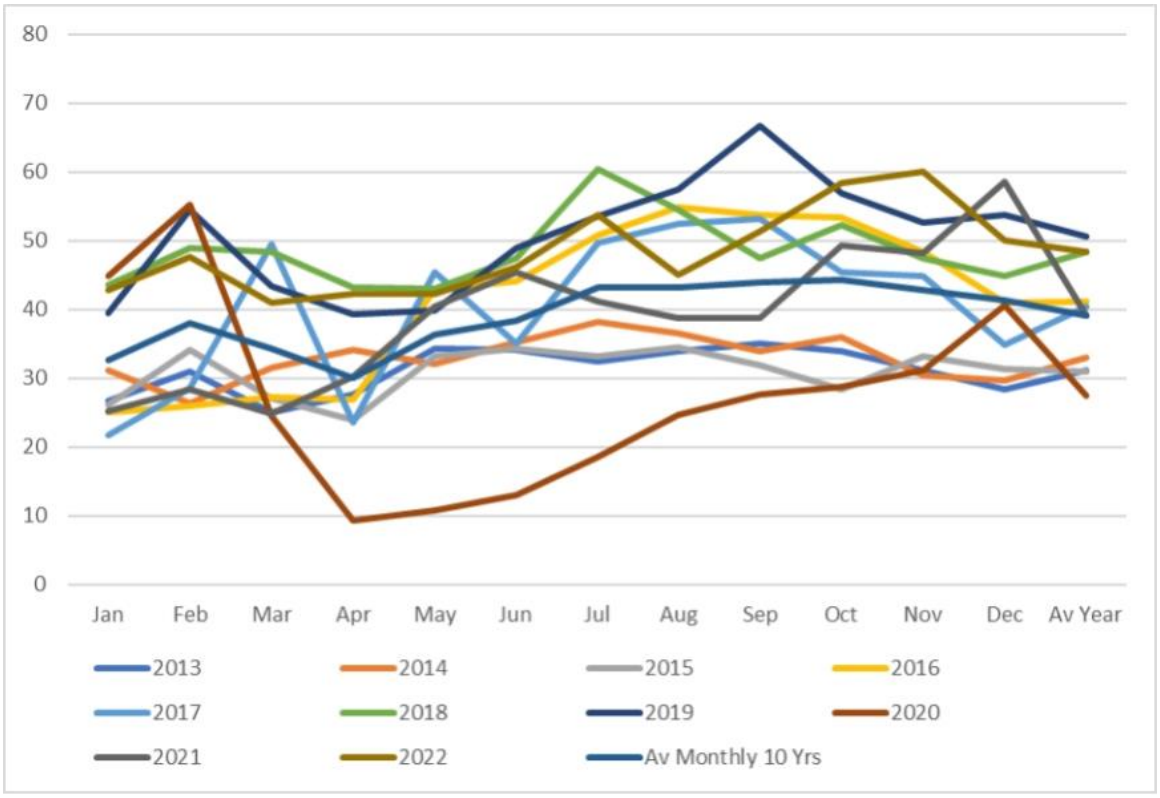


Figure 5: Hotel Bed Occupancy Rate Trends 2013-2022

Source: Analysis of NBS Data https://www.nbs.go.tz/statistics/topic/hotel-statistics-2013?page=2

Nationwide analysis of hotels bed occupancy rate reveals a promising recovery and resilient tourism in the country for the span of ten years consecutively. The highest annual average occupancy rate pre pandemic (51%) was achieved in 2019. During the pandemic in 2020 hotel bed occupancy rate declined considerably (27%). This is the lowest bed occupancy rate ever recorded for over the ten years period. As adoption of standard operating procedures, alongside other measures including vaccination rebuilt tourist hotels resilience and reclaimed confidence to travel again occupancy rate show an upward recovery trend up to 39.1% in 2021 and 48.4% in 2022, although slightly below the pre-pandemic highest level.

Discussion

As revealed in the results SOP formation narratives appreciatively draw from global discourse crisis management strategy to rebuild resilience amid the pandemic and prevent spread of coronavirus infection with the purpose of restarting tourism. The finding is supported in Chan et al. (2022); however, distancing protocols was interpreted differently. Some actors denounced social distancing new normal as it misleads host-guest interaction in tourist hotel context (Hu et al., 2021; Nilashi et al., 2022). Instead, hotel narrative replaced the term 'social' with 'physical' distancing. Floor markings designated to enable distancing of visitors at the reception and dining, is the case in point. Health, hygiene and safety were paramount in the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak while also these protocols were confusing and not homogenous, since each country set their own safety measures and how to apply them (Aldao et al., 2022).

Regarding effective adoption of SOP, studies elsewhere (Wirya, 2023; Ekemena & Ama, 2024) show more less similar findings as SOP were socialised, shared, owned and enforced in the hotel space from the front office to housekeeping and restaurant. Less applied SOP have shortcomings and were tactically avoided to propel continuity of tourism in crisis management context (Hendhana et al., 2024). Unique contribution in this article is partly that distancing, online check-in and provision of information for visitors in the restricted countries during reservation was counterproductive as could further infringe travel confidence and the continuity of friendly hosts-guests interaction. Similarly, many protocols proposed in the restaurant were generally impractical and as such avoided. However, performance keeps improving gradually provided SOP adopted at the entrance and reception could have ascertained guests-hosts health and safety earlier on. Effective screening of the hosts and guests at the entrance and reception with their health and safety status ascertained and consequently possible infection symptoms handled appropriately to avoid undesirable outbreak or crisis associated with unforeseen emergencies. This finding contributes to the understanding of resilience building particularly through proactive crisis management and flexibility.

Comparison of tourist hotels performance pre, during and post-pandemic reveals the bouncing back (see also Hall et al., 2023) pathway. SOP has contributed safety, healthcare improvement, markets or tourism demand recovery, financial and economic profit making, business delivery continuity, stable operations, risk reduction in terms of diseases control, infection avoidance, quality of human capital, life, sustainability and finally tourism regrow. Studies elsewhere (Ekemena & Alma, 2024) show improved sanitary conditions after SOP adoption during the pandemic. Hotel bookings in 2022 surpass the average bookings recorded in the pre pandemic era confirming the fact tourism is bouncing back which Hall et al. (2020) predicted. While many other factors could have contributed to the rise in hotel bookings, the role SOP played is peculiar. International gateways reopening in Tanzania played broader role to restart tourism (Lema, 2021) as well as the coming latter royal tour campaign (URT, 2024) alongside the later controversial vaccines. Comparatively, COVID-19 vaccination that surfaced in the counternarrative applied almost one year after pandemic outbreak. As such, the role SOP played is specific and unique at hotel level individually and collectively. In the study area the safety protocols provided proactive justification for restarting tourism earliest possible, in the first place while evading fear and lockdown discourse. This enabled continuity of tourist hotels business.

SOP success narratives explain the process rebuilding and sustaining tourist hotels that dared to remain open while serving few visitors at time of COVID-19 crisis. Hotels that survived show resilience and unlike other places, Karatu provide best example where almost all tourists hotels continued their new normal business operations immediately after SOP innovation. This restarted tourism and propelled enhanced business delivery continuity in the midst of the crisis. In Karatu, the hotels are located in the village setting and are spaciously distributed to allow isolation. This isolates hotels that died elsewhere and particularly in Arusha City as were unable to apply SOP timely to navigate bankruptcy in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic peak. During travelling in fieldwork, we spotted a quite number of hotels that could not bounce back post pandemic and many of these were those that were closed permanently during the lockdown peculiarly in Arusha City. Some of the hotels failed to reopen immediately as their sole proprietor investor died allegedly due to pandemic. Our findings demonstrate success narratives after COVID-19 crisis as all tourist hotels studied navigated bankruptcy and

recovery pathway is promising, critiquing Hotel Resilient (2020) discourse, that more than 40% of businesses do not open after major disasters. Our case explains narratives of hotels that survived during crisis and after. As also noted elsewhere (Lema, 2021) through field observation in Karatu district it is revealed that almost all tourist hotels resumed operation aptly from late June 2020 onwards after reopen of the international gateways.

Bed occupancy rate in tourist hotels determine business performance (Moreno-Izquiedo et al., 2023). For the consecutive ten years period, regardless the pandemic hardest hit (Sigala, 2020; Hall et al., 2023) average bed occupancy rate stands at 39% in Tanzania. The highest monthly average bed occupancy rate for over the ten years period is 44.3% recorded in October, with the lowest (30%) recorded in April. Comparatively the situation in Tanzania is promising unlike what is reported elsewhere (Liberato et al., 2022:277) where in the first three months of 2021, in the lodging sector, occupancy rates were around 5% and 8%, not exceeding 10%. Of the most affected areas in tourism, the hotel industry had very significant drops, in some cases around 90%. Tourist hotels that dared to adopt SOP and continue running during the peak of the pandemic provided a sole testing ground to subside conventional fear of COVID-19 pragmatically. Resilience rebuilding trajectory is reflected in bookings and bed occupancy rates.

Implications of the Success Narratives in Rebuilding Hotels Resilience

Conceived as a combined crisis management and resilience rebuilding strategy, SOP were innovatively designated to confront tourist hotels crises and disruptions of COVID-19 outbreak. This was important as Liberato et al. (2022: 279) noted *"Classic hotels suffered the most. People were afraid of anything that shared space, and therefore didn't want to go to hotels or lodging that had common spaces, which hotels can't escape"*. In tourist hotels, crises, and disasters events pose threat to routine operations with potential to negatively affect the overall reputation of a tourist destination by influencing the perceptions of tourists (Mair et al., 2014) worldwide. Importantly, SOP designated efforts of all operators to interface with guests to protect themselves using sanitizers, gloves and face masks or any other item(s) required for personal safety. Operators were to maintain safe physical distance with guests whom they interact with. The 'new normal' challenged conventional hospitality businesses enormously calling for hosts and guests and communities to respond, adapt and survive exogenous and endogenous change (Mavono, 2022).

As tourist hotel constitutes a nested geopolitical space connecting source region, transit route and destination business psychology their success narrative in the event of crisis builds on the ability to appeal and adapt to internal and external dynamics in an open system to risks and uncertainties overtime and space. Resilient tourist hotel endures in the face of disruption while maintaining its identity inside out much as a hotel entrepreneur has to know their business inside out. SOP designated during the pandemic served as change agent to the mindset and practice of hosts and guests as strategy of dynamically developing hotel industry resilience as a key link in the tourism value chain (Wszendybył-Skulska et al., 2024). Tourist hotels are typically characterised by the highest capital intensity and long-term investment process (Spencer & van Xyl, 2015) as the product [hotel] is stationary while the market [tourist] is mobile thus fundamentally differentiating hotel from the conventional industries. This inherently makes hotel more vulnerable to both internal and external shocks, as such, in order to ensure success, each hotel is responsible and accountable in guaranteeing visitors appeal,

inviting repeat visit and resuming or reclaiming back travel confidence in the event of crisis and emerging uncertainties across time and space (Alvarez-Ferrer & Gonzales-Bustos, 2018).

Wszendybył-Skulska et al. (2024) noted that pandemic was not an isolated or unique event but rather a catalyst that brought long-standing issues for hotel and tourism calling for an effective supply chain management and a robust framework for labour security (Chen Eyoun, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Karatepe et al., 2022). SOP were to rebuild resilience and recover the hotel industry with continuity of business operations as paramount during the pandemic as conventional hosts-guests interaction was abruptly interrupted with fear of the infection. Crisis management informed SOP design in such a way addressing interdependent variables ranging from adapting, coping, continuing, surviving and recovering. Tourist hotel ability to recover after the pandemic entail resilience. Hotel Resilient (2020) outlined three pillars of resilience [1] disaster risk reduction global standard innovation, [2] software or technology to implement the standards, identify potential sources of risks, manage action to protect life, reduce down time, and minimize business losses [3] resilient training for building capacity to prepare, respond and recover from crisis events. More resilient tourist hotels survived the pandemic hit while those that failed to survive are not resilient as continuity during the pandemic entailed incurring more costs without expecting returns in the near future. It included maintaining the standard quality in hotel space and remaining open and ready to receive tourists any time as they may wish to visit the hotel. Employee retention and adoption of COVID-19 protocols articulated in this paper were as such part of additional costs hotel investors incurred to continue operations during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Tourist hotel COVID-19 standard operating procedures success narratives articulated in this article inform crisis management and resilience rebuilding. In the light of crisis management (Aldao *et al.*, 2022), SOP encouraged and provided space for hosts and visitors to test temperature at the entrance, clean and disinfect luggage, handwash regularly, sanitize, wear masks, and maintain a safe distance from others. Effective screening at the entrance, unlike at the reception and at the restaurant minimised fearful spread of infections and seemingly prevented deaths that could be associated to COVID-19. The created tourist safety and comfort to arrive and stay in hotels allow recovery of the business operations with increment in hotel bookings and bed occupancy rates demonstrating resilience. More broadly, adopted SOP in specific hotel setting served as geopolitical space to counter the global pandemic lockdown and similar mobility restriction discourses. In the theory SOP has played absorptive and transformative roles concurrently to rebuild hotel resilience during pandemic. Health and safety protocols enhancing continuity of hotel operation despite unfolding similar pandemic crisis should be encouraged in future while avoiding as much as possible all detrimental global mobility restriction policies not limited to lockdown. This research has contributed to the understanding of resilience theory in tourist hotel during crisis exposing the role SOP played. Broadly, the findings have implications on strategic destination management (Liberato et al., 2022). Our contribution is specific within the tourist hotels setting during the formation of COVID-19 protocols along with their adoption and after as proactive crisis management and resilience rebuilding strategy. Investigation of other hotel resilient drivers along with pandemic induced failure narratives and vaccine passport is beyond this article scope and, as such, remain open for future research.

Disclosure statement

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