
Peter Tarlow

Tourism & More Consulting Services
College Station, Texas

The Role of Tourism Security in Tourism Education

There should be little doubt that the tourism industry ought to have awakened to the importance of tourism security. From missing people to hotel bombings, from pirate ships to hurricanes, 2005 was not an easy year for the tourism industry. As a major generator of income on both national and local levels, tourism is open to attack from various sources. For example, terrorists may see a tourism site as an ideal opportunity to create economic havoc. Criminals do not wish to destroy a tourism locale, but rather view that locale as an ideal "fishing" ground from which to harvest an abundance of riches.

How travelers are handled after an incident can have a major social and economic impact. Tourists and visitors do not distinguish between the treatment they are afforded by the local travel and tourism industry and by people living and working in the community. As such, law enforcement agents and tourism security professionals have a special role in protecting the economic viability of a locale. How security professionals act and the methods that they use can reinforce the marketing department's message or undercut it.

Many tourism professionals are still afraid to speak about terms such as tourism security and tourism safety. Even in this world of continual terrorism there is a common feeling among many tourism and travel professionals that these terms will frighten customers and that the less said the better. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

Travelers and tourists, for the most part, seek out places where there is a sense of security and safety. Although there is a small minority of travelers who seek out the most dangerous places, most visitors want to know what the industry is doing to protect them. Tourism professionals need to work with security professionals to protect the visitor from locals who might seek to do the visitor harm, from other visitors who may be in transit for the purpose of committing crime, and less than honest staff members. Finally, the industry must seek to protect the visitor from its own tourism professionals who may be willing to commit fraud or sell a product that is defective.

We only need to read/view the media to know that crimes and acts of terrorism against tourism entities receive a great deal of media attention and can have a major impact. The classical method of simply denying that there is a problem is no longer valid and is counter-productive to a tourism locale's best promotional efforts. When there is a lapse in tourism security, the effect is long term. Some of the consequences to a local's reputation include the locale's moving from upper to lower class clientele, the need to drop prices, the general deterioration of the site, and the need for a major marketing effort to counteract the negative reputation.

Despite these many problems many tourism officials and academic institutions seem to flee issues of risk management and tourism security rather than embrace them. Few universities offer courses in tourism security as part of their curriculum, few scholars study the issues and often the articles and course given are of a substandard level. Old cliches are repeated as if repetition equals truth. To make the situation even more difficult, many supposed experts confuse issues of crime with those of terrorism, thus producing misdiagnoses.

Despite the problems 2005 did see some bright spots. For example, two major new books were published on tourism security during 2005. Both *"Tourism in Turbulent Times"*, edited by Jeff Wilks, Donna Pedergast and Peter Leggart and *"Tourism Security & Safety"* edited by Yoel Mansfeld and Abraham Pizam add new insights to the field.

Additionally tourism specialists have begun to ask challenging questions. For example, a risk management team needs to start off by asking simple questions such as:

- Is there a level of acceptable risk?
- Can our tourism entity afford insurance to cover the costs of these risks?
- Have we prioritized our risks?
- What are the consequences of a risk management failure?

There are a number of ways for tourism specialists to subdivide risks toward their industry. For example, is the risk one of crime or terrorism? These are two very different forms of risk and have very different consequences. Terrorists often seek publicity and look for masses of people to hurt or murder. Criminals rarely seek publicity. Criminals seek to harm the individual visitor or guest but rarely seek to harm the actual tourism industry. Criminals' actions, however, will result in a weakened tourism industry.

Another important advance in the field is the fact that tourism professionals and academics are coming to realize that no tourism entity lives in a vacuum. The care of a locale's streets, lawns, and internal environment has a major impact on tourism surety. Ecology, however, should not only be restricted to the physical; it also involves the cultural ecology. Just as the industry must protect its visitors it also has to protect the environment in which the industry lives. The few tourism courses that do exist rarely emphasize the connection between site and ecological security. This form of risk management and security means that ecology must not only be environmental but also cultural. It behooves specialists in tourism surety to protect the cultural ecology of an area. Strong cultures tend to produce safe places. On the other hand, when cultures tend to die, crime levels may tend to rise. Protecting the cultural ecology along with the physical ecology of a locale is a major preventative step that tourism surety professionals can do to lower crime rates and to assure a safer and more secure environment.

There is a major need then to unite quantitative and qualitative research. The tendency to submerge human feelings and needs into pure mathematical formulas may lead to skewed results and misdiagnoses. Because tourism incidents are often not reported all data and police records may be inaccurate. In reality, there is no such thing as travel (tourism) security or safety.

Academic institutions need to stress that no one can guarantee one hundred percent security. Instead a better term is travel (tourism) surety. Surety (a term borrowed from the insurance industry) refers to a lowering of the probability that a negative event will occur. Surety does not promise perfection, but rather improvement and takes into account that to live is to risk. Thus, tourism surety refers to the point where security, safety, and risk management converge. The convergence of these fields is an fertile ground for academic and applied studies.