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Tourism & More Consulting Services

Issues in Health, Safety and Security

The tourism industry is the world's largest peacetime industry. In many places such as the Caribbean it is the region's largest industry and number one export item. Tourism safety and security issues need to be a concern for anyone interested in the economic and social wellbeing of this region. Tourism sites have also often been successful targets for terrorists. It is interesting to note that there does not seem to be a relationship between the population sizes and acts of terrorism. Locales that have been the victim of terrorism often have nothing more in common than a successful tourism industry. Below are some of the reasons for this interaction. Tourism is interconnected with transportation centers

- Tourism is big business and terrorism seeks to destroy economies
- Tourism is interrelated with multiple other industries; thus an attack out the tourism industry may also wipe out a number of secondary industries.
- Tourism is highly media oriented and terrorism seeks publicity
- Tourism must deal with people who have no history, thus there is often no data base and it is easy for terrorists simply to blend into the crowd
- Tourism must deal with a constant flow of new people, thus terrorists are rarely suspected.
- Tourism is a nation's parlor that it is the keeper of a nation's self image, icons and history. Tourism centers are the living museum of a nation's cultural riches.

Although many disciplines make a clear distinction between security and safety, tourism scientists and professionals do not. Security is often seen as protection against a person or thing that seeks to do another harm. Safety is often defined as protecting people against unintended consequences of an involuntary nature. In the case of the travel and tourism industry, both a safety and a security mishap can destroy not only a vacation but also the industry. It is for this reason that the two are combined into the term "tourism surety." Tourism surety is the point where safety, security, reputation, and economic viability meet. Another example of this interfacing between safety and security is in the issue of health related matters. Visitors are capable of carrying diseases from one part of the world to another. Visitors are also subjects of poor health standards in food preparation and the transferal of health problems from local tourism employees to visitors. Terrorists are also very much aware of this fact.

The current discussion on avian flu raises the possibility of the need to quarantine whole nations and could have disaster- impacts much greater than that of the SARS panic this took place just a few years ago. Perhaps the first question that may need to be asked is: are international media,

public health officials, and science writers causing undue panic over the bird flu question, just as they did with the West Nile fever, Swine flu, Ebola, SARS, dengue and any rabies outbreak. The media may create such a scare about avian flu that it may become a self-fulfilling prophecy due to the lowering of natural immunity systems by stress. Still another aspect to be considered is that of natural disasters. For example, The New Orleans experience ought to serve to remind people in the first world just how dependent they are on services such as power plants, electricity and air conditioning. Katrina should teach us that as an industry, we will need to review how hotels and attractions are built so there is a new balance developed between economic scales of efficiency and responsible tourism security.

-Remember that All crises have a human element. The locations that suffered from the hurricane Katrina need to review what they should have done differently. While the Mississippi and Alabama Coasts are mainly sun 'n surf destinations, New Orleans is a major city, which functions not only around tourism but also around businesses, commerce and transportation. This crisis ought to teach us all how interrelated tourism is with these other industries.

-Tourism security is as much about developing plans to deal with both natural disasters as it is about developing plans to stop human-made disasters.

-The tourism industry needs to recognize that tourism surety is about both security and safety. Hurricane Katrina once again ought to have taught us that acceptable risk when it comes to human life is nothing more than gambling with people's lives and the very life of the tourism industry. Any tourism community that does not have a well-trained tourism security unit ought not to be shocked when it loses its industry.

-There is a high priority for risk management techniques to be looked at from every angle. All too often, tourism surety is seen as adding nothing to the bottom line and plays second fiddle to marketing. This is a major mistake. Without tourism surety there is no bottom line!

-The tourism world must recognize that much of the world's tourism industry is located in close proximity to the world's oceans, and another large portion of the world's tourism industry is located in seismic areas or areas that are prone to other natural disasters. That means that tourism leaders ought to be discussing preventative measures before a crisis occurs rather than after the crisis has taken place.

-The tourism community needs to develop a cadre of experts who can help communities help themselves. For example, New Orleans and the US Gulf Coast cannot recover without outside assistance. Once the initial shock wave has worn off, as an international caring industry, tourism specialists should be working with the people of this region to help them not only rebuild, but to rebuild in a responsible and sustainable fashion.

To help, here is a checklist of things we all need to review:

-Make sure the media tell the truth and provides accurate information

- Avoid media speculation
- Do not simply rebuild, but rebuild in a responsible and sustainable manner.
- Understand that we are working for "recovering " (a dynamic state) rather than "recovery" (a static state)
- Pay attention to the total recovery on both the micro level (individuals) and on the macro level (communities, countries). Work toward their physical, mental, psychological and economic recovering
- Be kind; remember that the people in these regions are scared and on some level will be for life