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The Effect of Terrorism: Evaluating Kenya's Tourism Crisis

The purpose of this paper is to provide information that can aid in the development of a crisis management plan for Kenya. Terrorism in Kenya has affected the tourism industry. Hotels were almost collapsing and thousands of Kenyans lost their jobs. This paper examines these acts of terrorism, their impact in the tourism industry, and possible ways in which Kenya could counter any terrorist related activities by tailoring a crisis management strategy. Strategies that could be employed from previous studies include having a crisis management plan in place, establishing a tourism crisis management task force, developing a crisis management guidebook, marketing and seeking help from the government.

Keywords: Terrorism; Kenya; Crisis management

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Introduction

Scholars agree that terrorists have much to gain by targeting tourists (Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, 1999; Lepp and Gibson, 2003). Terrorists have recognized the political significance of international tourism and have repeatedly and tragically communicated this; terrorism that targets tourism can be disastrous and the consequent events can result in a serious tourism crisis (Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, 1999).

Tourism has been one of the leading industries in Kenya as well as a major contributor towards the Kenyan economy (Gitu, 2003). Kenya has relied heavily on international tourists in the past. Following acts of terrorism, such as the bombing of the United States embassy in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya; the bombing of Paradise beach hotel in Mombasa, a major city; and a near fatal rocket launched grenade attack on an aircraft. Consequently, the tourism industry suffered a great blow. While the government has taken several preventive measures, it is still necessary for the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) to develop a crisis management strategy in order to reduce the aftermath of such horrendous acts in the future (Redfern, 2003). The crisis management practices in the Israeli tourism sector (Israeli and Reichel, 2003) can offer valuable information as far as crisis management is concerned.

This study will provide helpful information to the Kenyan tourism sector that will facilitate the management of any future acts of terrorism and minimize the aftermath. A crisis management plan will help counter the impact of terrorism on the tourism industry in Kenya.

Terrorism Acts in the Past

Kenya has had its fair share of terrorism attacks, some of which directly targeted tourists. In 1997, politically instigated ethnical clashes between the local communities in the

coastal area negatively affected the tourism industry. Coastal areas receive most of the international tourists that come into the country due to the tourist attraction sites and the beautiful beaches. Virtually all the foreign tourists, even those that were in distant cities that were extremely safe, were driven away, and charter firms withdrew or scaled down their operations as a result of the ethnic group violence (Kwena, 2003).

On the 7th of August 1998, the Al Qaeda network simultaneously executed twin attacks in Tanzania and Kenya, targeting the US embassy. Acts of terrorism curtail travel activity until the public's memories of the publicized events fade; terrorism that targets tourism can be viewed as a major disaster to the destination and the ensuing events can give birth to a serious tourism crisis (Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, 1999). As a result of the embassy bombing, hotels in Kenya received numerous cancellations. The US embassy in Kenya was severely damaged and the news spread throughout the world via the media. A few Americans and over two hundred Kenyans lost their lives while thousands more were injured (Kelley et al 2003).

On Thursday, November 28, 2002, terrorists believed to be linked to Al Qaeda bombed the Paradise Hotel in Kikambala on the North Coast of Kenya in a deadly attack. The Israeli-owned hotel was severely damaged by the terrorist bomb. Sixteen people died in the hotel attack, including three suicide bombers. Simultaneously, two rocket propelled grenades were fired at an Israeli airliner at the Moi International Airport, Mombasa. Both missiles narrowly missed the aircraft. These attacks triggered fears in the hospitality industry, with tourism suffering a setback due to a drop in the number of incoming tourists (Agutu, 2003). Both attacks specifically targeted Israeli tourist interests on Kenyan soil.

Following these acts of terrorism, and due to imminent terror alerts from intelligence, Western governments, led by the United States, Britain and a number of European countries,

issued travel advisories to all their citizens against traveling to Kenya in 2003. The Kenya Tourism Federation stated that the suspension of British Airways regular and charter planes flying to Nairobi, coupled with travel advisories, closed down access to 90% of Kenya's overseas markets. The country was losing an estimated amount of over 1 billion Kenya shillings (\$128 million) per week. In addition to the revenue loss, at stake were over 500,000 direct jobs and another 2.5 million indirect jobs (Gitu, 2003)

Lessons from Others

Sonmez et al (1999) suggested elements that can comprise a framework of crisis management. These included having a crisis management plan in place, establishing a tourism crisis management task force, and developing a crisis management guidebook.

The Israeli tourism industry has faced similar problems for a longer period of time and can offer valuable lessons to Kenya. Important to note at this point is that the study of the Israeli tourism industry (Israeli and Reichel, 2003) attempted to examine hospitality crisis management practices within the context of the Israeli hospitality industry. The crisis in the Israeli tourism industry originated primarily from the instability of the peace process with the Palestinians resulting in a sharp decline in the number of tourists visiting Israel. To compensate for the decrease in foreign visitors, the local hospitality industry increased reliance on the domestic market. Other practices that could be borrowed include marketing, infrastructure maintenance, human resources and government assistance (Israeli and Reichel, 2003).

Discussion

Several implications of analyzing the effects of terrorism on the hospitality industry in Kenya exist. The information gathered from this literature review can be tailored to suit Kenya in order to revitalize Kenya's ailing tourism industry. This information may also enable Kenya to have a better response rate to possible future attacks, greatly reducing the amount of damage that could otherwise be done if a crisis management strategy was not in place.

Terrorism in Kenya displays a pattern of repeated attacks. A requisite to managing terrorism and regional political problems is to accept the permanence of the former and the latter (Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, 1999). This implies that the Kenya Tourism Board should expect the worst and should develop a tailored crisis management strategy in case they are not able to counter future terrorist plans. Unless terrorism is viewed as a crisis by the tourism industry in Kenya, not enough energy and resources will be channelled to its management. The declaration of terrorism as a crisis is a vital step that the Kenyan government should take. The following are recommendations intended to guide the initial stages of crisis management, but each country has to tailor these suggestions to suit their own needs (Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, 1999).

First, Kenya needs to be prepared for crisis management with a guideline that will serve as a guide for managing the aftermath of terrorism. This guideline will save time by providing a roadmap to follow in a time of confusion resulting from a terrorism attack and will facilitate the recovery of tourism from the negative occurrences, thus rebuilding Kenya's image.

Second, a crisis management task force needs to be set up. This task force should consist of committees or departments that should be headed by dedicated locals. Whenever possible, the heads of each department should be professionals with expertise in the respective disciplines

they head. For example, the task force should have a media executive to spearhead communications and public relations; a marketing executive to oversee marketing and promotion efforts; a qualified information coordination team to coordinate damage assessment and gather disaster-related information for accurate dissemination; and a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) to head the finance and fundraising team, which will track expenditure and raise funds to aid crisis management activities.

Third, a crisis management guidebook needs to be developed, which should provide a checklist of steps to follow during pre-disaster and post-disaster. The guidebook should also outline the responsibilities of the task force teams and spell out bylaws that will ensure that the members of the taskforce will not disagree and have confusion amongst them. The guidebook should also explain how a tourism crisis differs from other crises, orient the police force to tourism specific needs, and offer sample press releases that will give a guideline on what to say and what not to say to the press.

Fourth, the KTB should continue to partner with law enforcement officers. Following the terrorism attacks, the Kenyan government tripled its efforts to provide law enforcement officers to protect the tourism industry. However, the government could probably improve security by training the law enforcement officers how to relate with tourists and to familiarize them with the uniqueness of the tourism industry.

Fifth, the KTB should continue encouraging local tourism. Since the sudden drop in international tourist from 2002, KTB has encouraged hotels to shift attention to target local tourism and give packages at discounted rates that will attract this target market. Just like the Israeli case, local tourism will have a positive impact on the bottom line of Kenyan hotels at such times.

Israeli and Reichel (2003) did not know if a cause and effect relationship existed between crisis management and short-term performance. They suggested the investigation of this relationship as a possible future research. They also lacked the long-term perspective needed to test the efficacy of crisis management. They challenge future research to establish whether crisis management practices improve the position and performance of the firm in the long run. Caution should be taken not to generalize their findings to the Kenyan settings without the awareness of the limitations of the study.

Conclusion

The research papers reviewed in this research have their limitations. (Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow, 1999) caution that crisis management is not intended to prevent actual disasters, that a crisis management plan cannot supersede local emergency plans, and that the problem at hand is exceptionally complex. Therefore, the hope for effective and applicable solutions depends on additional research coupled with cooperation from practitioners, government agencies and academicians.

Another current challenge is proving that crisis management has positive results in the short run or in both the short and long run (Israeli and Reichel, 2003). Finding a way to measure the cost-benefit analysis of having a crisis management strategy in place is a way that can assure Kenya that crisis management is imperative. Having a crisis management strategy in place and using it when a crisis arises could achieve this measurement. The aftermath of a crisis that occurs when a crisis management plan exists could then be compared with the effect a crisis had on tourism when a crisis management plan was not in place. Terrorism in Kenya may not be fully

controlled but the government may drastically reduce the impact of terrorism if and when it strikes.

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