

# Peace Building through Tourism? Mediators Needed

What are the factors that tourism and peace have in common? Are there examples that and how tourism has facilitated peace or cooled down conflicts? Both questions are extremely interesting and need a lot more consideration than they have received so far.



Patterns of conflicts are very different from each other and each needs its own approach of peace-keeping measures and conflict disengagement. The one thing that might certainly have a common positive effect on calming down sentiments after a conflict is tourism.

Here are some reasons that will, without doubt, help stabilize a fragile post-conflict environment:

- Tourism employs people
- Tourism will create necessary funds to improve the destroyed infrastructures
- By talking to tourists, locals will be able speak about their conflict experiences
- Museums can be created and help confront both tourists and locals with the taboos of conflict and atrocities
- New beautiful environments will be created for tourists, something that locals can also benefit from
- Tourists will help give local people a better understanding of the western society
- Locals will educate tourists about the conflict and build awareness
- With tourism there is a need for education of local people and that in return will positively influence someone's chances on the labor market.
- There are always influential people among tourists and some might come back and invest or help set up other community projects (education, environment, health, etc)

Nevertheless, there is need for outside mediation. It will be very difficult to bring together abused people with their experiences, and tourists. The approach must be soft without shocking both sides. Local people might be shocked by the richness and holiday-behaviour that tourists bring along. Tourists, of course, will also be torn by the dramas they get to hear from local people.



It is very possible to unite those extremes but, mediators will have to help. Once common understanding has been achieved, the roads are clear for bigger projects. So, how could the whole process kick off?

It can only be a well-planned step-by-step implementation of tourism projects. A lot, of course, depends on the size and kind of conflict that has just finished. And the financial power of local people and governments does play an important role as well.

Post-war environments might not be seen fit and secure enough to encourage travelers to visit such a country or region, therefore: Local authorities must be encouraged to guarantee the safety and security that is needed for a touristic environment. Without the willingness and the sources to provide security, the whole project will end in disaster if only a single tourist is killed. All former conflict parties that are present in such a region will have to participate in negotiations and must be convinced that tourism will benefit both sides. Otherwise we have a potential for renewed conflict.

Peacekeeping forces or other security forces in a former conflict zone will often say that tourism hinders their operations or that an area is not fit for tourism. I, personally, have not seen a single local civilian in a former conflict zone who is not keen and happy to welcome tourists! That, of course, does not mean that certain preconditions are to be ignored...



The first businesses that will open in a post-conflict area are likely markets, restaurants, stalls at beautiful locations. Mediators could, together with tour operators, encourage this kind of soft tourism first by directing day-trips into such a region. It is important that local people get the chance to participate in the business. Otherwise the entrepreneurs will all be outsiders who have the money to create business (another potential for renewed conflict).

Next might be information centers – tourists want to know about the conflict – but without being overrun by extreme views. Sensitive, yet open, ways of information are needed. Hotels and resorts will follow last. An investment into such a project needs long-term stability and sustained peace.

Getting local governments on board of planning and realizing tourism projects in their respective conflict zone also bears some problems. Information on conflicts should not be propaganda with the potential to stir up renewed trouble. Again, international mediators might be helpful to avoid exactly that.

There are a few success stories where tourism has encouraged the peace building process: Sarajevo after the war, Cambodia (despite other problems that tourism has brought along). There is also high potential for the success of tourism and peace in many other regions of the world: Palestine, South Lebanon, Iraq, many African countries, Timor... the list is endless.

**By Armin Hermann**

internationalpeaceandconflict.org

Date: 2011-04-25

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-international-mediators-are-needed-for-tourism-bringing-peace-article1513>