

TEN YEARS ON: BALI BOMBINGS HIT THE TOURISM INDUSTRY



It was in October 12, 2002 when Bali, specifically the famous Kuta Beach, was attacked by terrorists. The bombing surprised the whole nation. Even up to this point, Bali bombing is considered as one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in history.

One of the nations that grieved over what happened was Australia. The land down under was filled with tears for the 88 Australians who died in the attack. There were 114 other tourists from 23 countries who were killed as well.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the Bali tragedy. To commemorate the lives of the victims, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, the leader of the opposition Tony Abbot, and former Prime Minister John Howard set aside politics for the meantime as they join hand in hand with the survivors, the victims' families and those who has taken part in rescuing and rehabilitating the victims.

Other than losing precious lives for Indonesia, the attack meant a downside in their tourism industry as well. Before the tragedy, the tourism industry employed around 40% of the labor sector. After the attack, tourists made second thoughts about coming to Indonesia. Bali became one of the least favorite tourist destinations.

Tourists are scared that lax security, unreliable medical infrastructure and poor emergency management may cost them their lives. This resulted in the heightening of the travel advisories across Southeast Asia. With this, the tourism industries in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore were greatly affected. This prompted the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) to convene the heads of state November 4, 2002 in Cambodia. The leaders in that ASEAN meeting reviewed the travel advisories issued to the region. They came up with a resolution which promotes cooperation in marketing the tourism of the entire region.

PATA assisted the Indonesian government and Balinese tourism authorities in developing a recovery program aimed at making the tourism industry of Bali get back at its feet. More than a year after the implementation of the program, Bali manifests signs that it will regain its spot as one of the safest and friendliest tourist destinations.

Another outcome of the Bali attack was the proliferation of travel advisories of different governments via the online community. The Internet has fast become a favorite venue in distributing and publicizing travel advisories since the government will not spend much in doing so. Countries like Australia, Canada, the USA, South Korea, Japan and European Union countries are some of the key players when it comes to generating tourism. They are very much aware of the power and influence of the Internet which they used in giving warnings to their citizens about the hazards and dangers of visiting any Southeast Asian nation.

Other than using the Internet, the Australian government also assisted its travel industry in disseminating travel advisories. In June 2003, Australia became the first country to make an agreement between the leaders of the major travel industry sectors in Australia and the Foreign Affairs and Trade department. They agreed to consult and cooperate with each other on how they

can effectively disseminate travel advisories. For almost 10 years, DFAT and the travel sector of Australia reaped benefits from the agreement. However, the 2 groups disagreed on one issue - the travel warning to Indonesia. The political trauma that the Bali tragedy brought to the Australian government was obvious. That was why the downgrading of the travel warning to Indonesia took a long time.

At this point, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada are the only 3 countries where the foreign ministry and tourism authorities consult each other when it comes to travel advisories.

The Bali bombing indeed is a traumatic chapter in history. However, if one will look at it on a positive note, the attack opened our eyes to the need and importance of strong and well-planned crisis and risk management. Right now, the travel sector is more prepared for crisis. Credits must be given to ASEAN, APEC, UNWTO, WTTC and PATA. Everyone now realizes how crucial it is to never let their guards down.

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