

TERRORISM VS. TOURISM: REASSESSING TOURISM SECURITY



The recent tourism near travel tragedy and terrorist attacks against hotels around the world serve to underline once again the importance of tourism security.

The unsuccessful attempt to blow up an airplane on December 25th not only garnered a great deal of publicity but also ought to serve to remind us that no matter how we may try to ignore the issue of tourism security both from within the tourism industry and from without, the issue of tourism and travel security is very much with us. In fact, historians of tourism may someday call our reaction to tourism security and our ability (or inability) to protect the traveling public tourism's defining moment.

Despite what many people think tourism security is a great deal more than merely adding extra regulations onto an already frustrated traveling public. Tourism security is a complicated subject that combines both passive elements such as CCTV (closed-circuit television) cameras, psychological and sociological knowledge, and active public policy development. Because travel and tourism cross national borders, what affects one nation may well impact the entire world.

Unfortunately due to too many knee jerk reactions many in the traveling public increasingly are beginning to wonder if these newest travel hassles accomplish much more than making travel difficult. All too often it appears that government agencies around the world tend to be reactive to the last incident rather than being proactive. The almost Christmas day bombing ought to teach us all a number of important lessons:

Terrorism is a chronic problem that will most likely be with us for a long time. Despite what the politicians say, and the public may demand, travel and tourism can never be made 100% terrorism proof. The most we can hope to do is develop smart and creative ways to frustrate terrorism. The Israelis have offered the world an important lesson that has not yet been learned: tourism security is not about focusing on bad things but rather intercepting bad people.

Terrorists are not stupid and know how to be innovative. The Christmas Day terrorist attack should be seen as another example that counter security cannot simply rely on the same security measures. Tourism security requires both creativity and innovation.

Crime and terrorism are not the same. In travel and tourism, criminals need the tourism industry with which they maintain a parasitic relationship. While crime gnaws at the heart of the tourism industry, it does not seek to destroy it. Indeed, many forms of organized crime have traditionally found tourism to be a convenient way to launder money. Terrorism, on the other hand, seeks to destroy tourism. Its goal is to separate people and inflict as much economic damage as possible in order to destroy a locale's economic viability as part of an overall war strategy against modernity.

Overreactions are the terrorists' best friends. Despite the fact that the airplane landed safely from a tourism perspective the terrorist still won. He succeeded in frightening the public and making travel less desirable and more difficult. Terrorism is different than a criminal act. The goal of

terrorism is the destruction of national economies. Because tourism is a major world industry and provides numerous job opportunities around the world travel and tourism are and will continue to be prime terrorist targets. Terrorists know that an attack against travel and tourism will not only hurt multiple economies but will also receive a great deal of publicity, thus further damaging the victim's economy.

In the wake of the current reality here are several things that tourism professionals can do at relatively low cost:

1/ Understand what tourism security is all about. There are far too many security professionals who know security but do not know how to "translate" security concepts into tourism needs. On the other side, tourism professionals are often woefully ignorant of how tourism security, surety and safety work. Because most tourism professionals have been trained in marketing, they are often confused as to what steps they should and should not take, and how they should interact with security professionals. Many tourism professionals know so little about the subject that they do not know even the correct questions to ask.

2/ Never hold a tourism security conference in which at least one or two sessions is not devoted to the inter-relationship between tourism and marketing. Simply put good tourism security is an essential part of twenty-first-century marketing. Tourism professionals need to demand that their conference organizers provide them with the basics of tourism security if they are to compete in the twenty-first century. If there is no tourism security then eventually there will be nothing left to the market.

3/ Attend one of the tourism security conferences around the world. Las Vegas will hold its yearly tourism security on May 9-11 and at the end of the month, Aruba will be holding its third bi-annual conference. These conferences permit tourism officials, police officers and other security professionals to learn about the newest trends and dynamics within the tourism industry and to exchange ideas and concepts. As often security professional budgets are tight, consider giving a scholarship a police officer or other tourism security professional's registration and/or airfare.

4/ Learn to do more and speak less. One of the problems with tourism security is that we publicize what we are and are not doing. While a certain amount of publicity is needed to reassure the traveling public, a lot more needs to be done to stop bad people rather than merely looking for bad things.

5/ Learn from others and then adapt to your local needs. There is much that we can learn from Israeli security techniques when it comes to travel. For example, airline passengers traveling to and from Israel do not have to go through many of the indignities that Western fliers must endure, and yet these same passengers are considered a lot safer, both on the ground and in the air. Part of Israel's success comes from studying what others do and then adapting these techniques to local needs. Good tourism security provides travelers with a high level of professionalism, the best of interrogation techniques coupled with the best of high tech and good training. Tourism industries around the world need to learn how to follow suit.

6/ Never forget that no cost savings is worth a life. Tourism security is not just about safe travel. It is about saving lives. When developing a tourism-marketing plan, never forget that we can pull a bad promotion campaign, change ad, or find a new slogan, but we can never replace a life. Tourism is about hospitality and good hospitality comes from taking care of our guests.

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