

Waves of Tourists Affect Tsunami Recovery



2 years after the Boxing Day tsunami devastated many parts of south Asia, the amount of tourists in many countries has dipped significantly. For example, there have been 40% less visitors to Thailand and 46% less in the Maldives.

This factor has naturally had a very negative effect on the economies of the relevant countries as the tourism industry is vital to their survival. However, as the countries of south Asia recover from the 2004 disaster, tourism has been nothing but a hindrance to local people.

Funds raised by charities have generally been devoted to rebuilding luxury hotels and other tourist facilities rather than to rebuilding the homes of the local people. The typical coastline scene of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives is a mixture of tennis courts, hotels and demolished houses. To make the situation worse, much of the L3.7 billion pledged by UN agencies to help the tsunami survivors has not yet been spent. Big business and holiday making has been prioritised.

Fishing communities have been affected by tourism as they have been forced to move inland away from their coastal livelihoods as governments strive towards making beaches look tidier for the pleasure of tourists. For example in the Sri Lankan town Tamil Nadu, 300 families have been forced to live within 6 acres of land as opposed to the 16 acres they used to live in. This is due to the fact that the original 16 acres have been earmarked for tourist development.

Similarly, the tourist industry has had an emotional negative effect on some locals. The 2004 tsunami disaster, of course, had a devastating effect on the lives of thousands of people and many wish to forget it. However, in Thailand there is now a museum devoted to the huge wave and its influence on the local community. The Thais were not even consulted before the museum was built.

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