Tourism and Crisis Management

Tourism, a global phenomenon involving the movement of hundreds of millions of individuals to virtually all countries on the surface of the globe, is by no means immune to external shocks.

Tourism infrastructure is often located in areas exposed to sudden-onset natural disasters, in particular beach and coastal areas, river valleys and mountain regions. The sector is further confronted with man-made crises, from political instability to terrorism and global health pandemics. Often **the perception alone of risk and disruption will affect tourist decisions and movements.**

The consequences of reduced tourist numbers for the millions of people whose livelihoods depend on the sector

can be serious. **Without adequate crisis management, a short-term crisis can quickly become a long-term tourism crisis and socio-economic disaster**.

The work of UNWTO

Aware that being prepared makes the vital difference to casualty figures and economic losses in the wake of a crisis, UNWTO assists its Member States to assess natural and man-made risks in tourism destinations and implement systems to reduce the impact of, and assist in the recovery from, crises.

UNWTO works closely with governmental institutions involved in emergency planning, coordination and management to **develop crisis management systems** and **integrate tourism into national emergency procedures.** Many national emergency plans deal with non-essential activities (such as tourism) as a low priority, an issue UNWTO is working to change.

UNWTO has set out a number of measures to ensure the safe and efficient movement of travelers. These include guidelines on **travel advisories**, calling for accurate, relevant, regularly updated and appropriate advisories based on a wide variety of relevant sources, and procedures on exchanging information to facilitate international travel.

In a globalized world, diseases can spread far and wide. UNWTO works closely with the World Health Organization (WHO)

Did you know?

• During the Pandemic (H1N1) in 2009 no measures to restrict travel were recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). As scientific evidence shows, limiting travel would have been highly disruptive to the global community and would have had very little effect on stopping the spread of the virus.

• UNWTO is part of the Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN), which links up leading tourism associations in times of crises.

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on the **International Health Regulations (IHR)**, a legally binding international agreement to prevent the international spread of disease while limiting unnecessary restrictions on international travel and trade. UNWTO is also linked to the UN system involved in pandemic response via the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC).

Health risks have in fact been of particular concern for the tourism sector over the last few years with the SARS outbreak in 2003 demonstrating the impact on tourism even from a rapidly controlled outbreak. Avian influenza in 2005 and the Pandemic (H1N1) of 2009 further highlighted the challenges these outbreaks bring to the tourism sector.

In times of risk, **crisis communications** is key. A coordinated message with accurate and reliable information makes all the difference when it comes to assisting travelers and the tourism sector in general. The **UNWTO Toolbox for Crisis Communications in Tourism** serves as a practical guide for travel and tourism stakeholders to effectively address the

communications challenges posed by crises. The Toolbox, which includes templates for press releases and other crisis communications formats, covers issues from interviews and press conferences to the use of social media. UNWTO also holds regular workshops on crisis communications, covering topics such as how to talk to the media or the use of social media during a crisis.

In response to this need for consistent communications UNWTO has established a "network of networks" where leading tourism associations can rapidly share information, establish common messages and monitor crisis situations as they evolve: the **Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN)**. TERN was activated during the Pandemic (H1N1) in 2009 and the volcanic eruption in Iceland in April 2010 that shut down European airspace for nearly a week.

UNWTO also carries out **regular simulation exercises,** focusing on specific tourism threats, to train those responsible and identify areas for improvement.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES:

UNWTO Risk and Crisis Management Programme - rcm.unwto.org

Tourism Emergency Response Network - rcm.unwto.org/en/content/about-tourism-emergency-response-network-tern-0

Toolbox for Crisis Communications: Checklist and Best Practices - publications.unwto.org

Travel and Tourism under Pandemic Conditions: Review and Preparation Exercise - rcm.unwto.org/en/publication/travel-and-tourism-under-pandemic-conditions-review-and-preparation-exercise-unwto-headq

Travel and Tourism under Pandemic Conditions: Second Review and Preparation Exercise - rcm.unwto.org/en/event/travel-and-tourism-under-pandemic-conditions-second-review-and-preparation-exercise