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Ideas on how tourism can confront the terrorism menace

Over the last few years, Tourism Tidbits has offered its readers a potpourri of ideas and thoughts regarding tourism and violence, be that violent criminal acts or terrorism acts. In reality, crime and terrorism while both destructive to tourism attack the industry from different perspectives. Criminals tend to shy away from publicity. The criminal act is one in which the perpetrator works for his/her benefit be that benefit one of personal power, money, or sex. Tourism criminals rarely want to destroy the local tourism industry. Much to the contrary, as the industry prospers, the number of potential victims grows.

Terrorists, on the other hand, rarely seek personal gain. Theirs is more of a Robyn Hood action; a form of quixotic idealism gone sour. Terrorists are often so sure of themselves that they are willing to destroy property and lives for what they falsely believe is the righteousness of their cause. Terrorism attacks on tourism destinations in the US, Bali, Kenya and South Africa have finally made the tourism industry wake up to the fact that tourism venues are especially vulnerable to the possibility of attacks. Terrorists seek publicity. When terrorists strike a tourism center, they receive the large amounts of publicity they seek causing not only damage to life and property, but creating a long-term negative economic impact on not only the local tourism industry but on that of neighboring nations. The old form of regional marketing then, may no longer be valid in an age of terrorism. Furthermore, the unique sociological make-up of tourists (i.e., they tend to be mentally on vacation, they tend to assume they are safe, they tend to be easily identifiable, and they often function in anomic states of mind) makes tourist venues and the tourism industry's customers prime terrorist targets. While the probability of a terrorism attack in any one specific location may be low, the media's hunger for news, and its tendency toward sensationalism means that were a terrorist attack or a bombing occur at any tourism venue, the consequences for the entire industry can be long lasting and highly destructive. To complicate matters, tourist centers are vulnerable to other forms of violence that at first may appear to be acts of terrorism but occur for other reasons. For example, bombings may take place as a form of revenge, extortion, or for reasons of sheer madness. In all cases, however, the negative consequences of such an act extend far beyond the "theatre of action."

Because mass tourism is a twentieth century industry, and symbolizes the "engagement of the other" and a way to cross cultural boundaries, terrorism often seeks to eliminate it. Found below are some of the ideas that Tourism Tidbits has shared with its readers during the last fifteen years.

- Develop plans of action with local law enforcement agencies now. Do not wait until a problem occurs. Get to know your local law enforcement agencies. Make sure these agencies understand the special needs and problems of the tourist industry and then work out joint plans.

- Develop an understanding with the local media. While you cannot tell the media what to state during a time of an emergency, you can try to make the media aware of their responsibilities and the consequences of inaccurate reporting.
- Do not fall into the trap that "it cannot happen here." Terrorism, cult violence, and sensational types of crime can happen even in the smallest of communities. These communities are often the least prepared and have the smallest law enforcement forces.
- Every community should have a security brochure. Include in this brochure basic safety features and emergency phone numbers. If you have not yet developed such a brochure for your community, here are some tips on how to design it and some points you may want to include in a tourism safety packet for your community.
- When designing your security brochures use bright and cheerful colors. While you want your tourists to be safe, you also do not want to alarm them. Use clear and easy to read fonts placed on a background of colors that are upbeat and encouraging. Design these guides so as the reader receives the subtext that although caution is critical, your community is a safe and fun place to visit.
- Encourage visitors/guests to be observant. Most tourists simply leave their hotel/motel room without ever noticing who may be in the area. Tourists should remember that it is always a wise idea to take note of anyone who may be suspicious.
- Encourage guests to avoid discussing their travel plans in public places. Surveillants consider staff-personnel (and children) to be a prime source of information. The more the criminal knows about a particular tourist the easier it is to make that tourist a victim.
- When new hotels are being constructed, emphasize CPTED/TPTED. "Crime/Terrorism Prevention through Environmental Design" is a very successful crime/terrorism fighting method. For example, for new buildings ask if your locale's hotels have physical boundaries, what type of lighting do they use, how safe are their parking areas? When building a new hotel, install clearly visible security cameras, electronic locks. In older buildings, work with a security professional to create the safest and most secure environment possible.
- Although people are afraid of being hurt, ironically they enjoy visiting places where others were hurt. War tourism and even places where violence has occurred often become major tourism attractions. As we have learned from the millions of people who have visited New York City's ground zero, there is a dark side to the tourism industry.
- Better signage lessens security problems. The less confused a tourist is, the less likely he/she is to demonstrate signs of anomie (disorientation). When tourists appear confident of where they are going, they lessen the likelihood of becoming crime victims.
- Know your limitations. Bombs can look like almost anything. Develop a relationship with a trained bomb detective. Make sure that this person has the opportunity to familiarize him/herself with your facility prior to an incident. Never assume that you will know how to recognize a bomb.

Never forget that every security decision is both a moral and business decision. It is a lot cheaper to stop an attack than it is to recover economically after the attack. Being prepared to deflect a crime or act of terrorism can save lives and businesses.