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Tourism Borders and Tourism Security

A number of tourism and travel professionals in Canada, Mexico and the US were taken by surprise when the US State Department announced the need for passports (full implementation by 2008) for all people crossing the US-Mexican and US-Canadian border. For example writing in the Canadian press COLIN PERKE of the Toronto Star noted: "that critics fear (this policy) could choke off tourist traffic from both sides of the border." Congressman John Lafalce representing a district that is close to Niagara Falls noted "This (policy) will significantly reduce the amount of traffic going over our bridges and through our tunnels. This is something that was not very well thought out at all."

The new policy seems to underline how many tourism officials are still using older paradigms, one in which they believe that good marketing can solve almost any problem. The classical twentieth century paradigm held that tourism professionals should avoid addressing issues of tourism security and tourism safety all together. It is for this reason that tourism officials down play security often do not attend tourism security conferences and know relatively little about the subject. It is also for this reason that tourism officials have traditionally favoured electronic devices over human beings, good training, and physical presence. Often tourism professionals wonder if too much security indicates that they should be afraid and that even speaking about these subjects will frighten customers. Thus, especially in the years prior to 2001, the industry often took the position that the less said about tourism security and safety the better. In the twenty-first century however this paradigm is no longer a reality.

Tourism professionals are slowly coming to discover that not only do their travellers now seek out locales that offer good security and safety, but that speaking about these measures can be one of their best marketing tools. A good example of this ability to speak about tourism safety and use it as a marketing tool can be seen in Israeli tourism. After the initial shock of the Intifada, Israeli officials pursued an honest policy of confronting their terrorism problem and explaining to the public what they were doing about it. The result has been tremendous leaps in Israeli tourism (so far up by almost 50% this year). Furthermore, the tourism industry may no longer be able to expect special government attentions. Prior to September 11, government officials tended to be extremely sensitive to the tourism and travel industries' needs. Since September 11, 2001 government officials have begun to question how seriously tourism officials take security and if the industry is stuck in a twentieth century paradigm. The result has been less sympathy for tourism's needs and the decision that long-term security concerns will override immediate economic concerns. European tourism officials will also need to tighten up their security (which is even more lax than that in North America). Should they fail to do so, then it should not come

as a surprise that at some point they too may have to lose their open borders and that tourism will once again have to be promoted on a nation by nation basis.

One of the ways that the travel and tourism industries can convince government officials and the traveling public is through greater training. The assumption that the public does not see the gaping holes in hotel security, airline security, police training, border crossings, and event security is incorrect. The public is well aware of the fact that few components in the tourism industry have taken the 9-11 challenge seriously. Instead the predominant position has been that we are now past September 11th and it is time to get back to business as usual. For example how many tourism communities, convention communities or communities that host major events have established a TOPs unit in their police departments? The acronym TOPs stands for *tourism oriented policing/protection services*.

A good TOPs program is much more than simply hiring a few extra guards or placing lights and cameras around a city square. A TOPs trained police department understands which are tourism crimes, how not only to react to these crimes, but also how to protect visitors in a way that makes visitors enamored of the locale and creates a positive marketing image. Often TOPs programs deal with such issues as:

_The realization that often tourists react to a place not so much by the risk as by their perception of the risk.

_ Making sure that locals understand that often visitors are ignorant of the crime statistics, and often both Issue of liability by travel intermediaries (planners) if fail to inform clients of potential risks.

_The understanding that a crisis often develops when safety concerns are more prevalent among the tourists than the professionals

Here are a few, and sometimes conflicting, sociological trends are essential in developing a TOPS unit

The broad dimensional role of tourism policing includes expectations of order maintenance, law enforcement, and public service within a bureaucratic culture of rules, regulations, and traditional values. Since the second half of the twentieth century, law enforcement agencies have had to adapt to a society in constant flux. Thus, while each TOPs unit is constructed slightly differently, TOPs units generally have all or at least some of the aspects listed below. These include:

... Officer selection based on personality profiles. Extroverted officers tend to be better at TOPs duties than introverted ones.

... Officers who have college education and are bi-lingual.

... Training is specific tourism crimes, such as room invasions, crimes of distraction, and CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design). Additionally TOPs officers are expected to know something about the workings of the local tourism industry, the sociological and psychological profiles of the local visitors, and community relations.

... TOPs officers should be considered an elite group and when possible receive extra pay.

... Officers should be able to handle customer relation problems and understand and be empowered to "own the problem."

... TOPs programs often have auxiliary personnel to supplement police units.

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