



Tourism Scan

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Editorial Comment

The year 2005 began with a big blow and once again woke us to realities of the intensity of impact that natural disasters can have on our continents. The aftermath has left governments, tourism industry, scientists, academicians and civil society with several questions to reckon with for now and for the future. Here in this edition of Tourism Scan, we bring to your attention some of those concerns and hope that hard proactive measures will be taken to avoid destruction of this magnitude in future.

In the wake of the tsunami tragedy, daily readings tell us that the most affected are women and children in many of the countries. Bad enough that they have lost their homes, beloved members of family and relatives, hard earned precious belongings and everything else but what you will read will show that their lives are open to further threat. Paedophiles and child sex traffickers around the region are on the prowl to capture vulnerable children who could be sold for forced labour and sexual slavery.

We call nature “Our Mother”, but there seems to be little correlation to the saying and what is seen as far as care and protection of our sensitive ecosystems is concerned. Protection of mangroves, coral reefs and coastal vegetation are central to safeguarding the coast from natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and tsunamis. One of the scientists in Sri Lanka highlights the need for immediate implementation of the Coastal Conservation Act of Sri Lanka. Also a write-up on the Galapagos Islands, one of the treasure troves for biodiversity in the Caribbean gives an early warning to implement measures towards protection of the island and to include it in the World Heritage sites in danger before it gets too late.

*The Global Tourism Interventions Forum (GTIF)- a network of tourism partners, at the World Social Forum (26th – 31st January 2005) in Porto Alegre, Brazil posed the question **What does solidarity in tourism mean at this point in time?** In an appeal the forum stated that “Solidarity does not come in the form of ‘Aid’ alone. It called us to work “towards just and transparent conditions in international cooperation, comprehensive debt cancellation, as preconditions for sustainable development.” It also demands that we “establish comprehensive and authenticated information on the situation and the needs of people particularly in the non-tourist areas and to begin assisting them as required.” It underlined that “we ensure and encourage the central role and participation of local peoples and civil society in the rebuilding efforts.” Such processes, must “restore the natural barrier or ‘greenbelt’ around coastal areas that are now vulnerable to future storms and tsunamis” and guarantee that we “observe, in every project, strict and clear criteria of environmentally friendly, socially responsible and participatory tourism, with a view to an overall sustainable development that benefits the whole population.”. On the humanitarian side, the appeal asked that we “pay special attention to phenomena such as the trafficking of women and children that are often outcomes of such disasters”.*

As you read further, you will see another opportunity which calls to rethink and restructure current tourism in a new and more human way. Hope you will find this edition thought provoking and useful.

Shirley Susan

Editor

8th February 2005

Child traffickers on the prowl

The Tsunami impact and the resultant chaos in countries hit hardest are now being faced with several new issues. The state of 35,000 children left orphaned or separated from the families in Aceh and Sumatra face the threat of either being trafficked by child traffickers or being taken for illegal adoption by unscrupulous organizations who find the situation conducive to be taken advantage of.

UNICEF workers in Malaysia raise serious concerns claiming that they received an unsolicited text message offering Aceh children for free. UNICEF spokesman Simon Ingram said there were indications that "traffickers are active" in the tsunami-stricken regions. Considering that the recent chaos provides a "perfect opportunity" for people who prey on children, UNICEF is extremely concerned that orphaned children will be sold into forced labour or even sexual slavery.

The Indonesian government has stepped up its protection of the 13,000 children who have been orphaned by the tsunami disaster. In a move to protect the orphaned children, the government has barred people from leaving the country with children under the age of 16 from the most affected Aceh province.

The Thai government was working closely with hospitals to prevent human trafficking gangs from taking advantage of the situation.

Source: e Turbo, 04/01/2005

Australia monitors paedophile movements

The activities of 155 Australian paedophiles are being closely monitored by authorities in a bid to prevent them travelling to Asian countries where they might take advantage of thousands of children left orphaned and homeless. Australian Federal Police have been put on full alert to scrutinise the movements of the offenders and prevent them from leaving the country undetected.

This heightened alert comes after reports that children have been offered for sale via text messages. With child traffickers long known to be operating in Indonesia, the Government's move to ban any children under 16 leaving the province of Aceh without their parents is appreciated. The Federal Police Commissioner said they were working with Interpol and other agencies to watch for any signs that women and children were being trafficked for exploitation.

The national director of Child Wise, Australia's peak child protection lobby group, said the areas worst affected by the tsunami had already been plagued by rampant child sex tourism. Child Wise, with federal government funding through AusAid, is to open educational training courses in 28 villages in seven countries, five of which have been affected by the tsunamis.

Ms Mc Menamin of Child Wise said the villages were already plagued with foreigners preying on children but the problem now would be much greater. She said, "We have been concerned about this problem for years. Now it's been exacerbated by this catastrophe." "We are training tourism officials, the local police, the local welfare

officers and the local community leaders on understanding child sex tourism and ways to prevent it."

Source: 05/01/2005, Natalie O'Brien, The Australian

Tourism 'Aid' – How real is it?

Aid from various governments may seem like unparalleled generosity to recipient countries affected by the Tsunamis. But it is necessary to read between the lines to understand the underlying intent that come attached with all the packages that are being offered. Aid does not come without stringent conditions. In Aceh, well founded sources mention that the US and Australia's interest is to get their hold on to natural resources such as oil and natural gas.

At the tsunami aid conference in Geneva, Australia climbed to number one on the donors list by announcing the biggest pledge of one billion dollars, equivalent to 762 million US. But half of its pledge is in interest-free loans to Indonesia. Australia is the only major country to go on record opposing any moratorium on debt repayments by tsunami-hit countries, let alone debt forgiveness.

Germany also promised a massive package, totalling 500 million euros (668 million dollars). But in announcing the hefty sum, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder suggested it could include debt reduction and measures taken with other members of the European Union and Group of Seven major economies. One of the biggest surprises in the tsunami aid is Japan, which promised 500 million dollars. In recent years, Japan has been the only major donor to disburse a majority of its aid through loans, taking advantage of super-low domestic interest rates which let Tokyo offer huge sums with a minimum burden to itself.

The United States has pledged 350 million dollars. However aid from the United States is tied and has many political strings attached to it. Roodman said his think tank had calculated that the four countries worst hit by the tsunamis -- Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand -- paid 1.8 billion dollars in tariffs to the United States a year -- or five times what Washington has pledged in tsunami relief.

But does "aid" which will arrive in the form of loans need to be paid back? The Centre for Global Development in Washington said "I see no good reason to give loans. They're poor, we're rich, they need the money and I don't see why we need to ask for it back over the next 10 or 20 years," The call of the affected countries and civil society is not for debt relief but total debt cancellation. It is for sure that debt has already been paid back many times by all these countries that have been made as "debtors". Aid is not the only way to help.

Source: e Turbo News, 13/01/2005

Travel to make a difference

The Pacific Asia Travel Association believes that to support the speedy recovery of destinations, local employment and local self-sufficiency, consumers must be

encouraged to proceed with their travel plans to the region. PATA President and CEO, Mr. Peter de Jong, said, "The human loss of this tragedy is unprecedented. However, the negative impact will only be exacerbated if tourists cancel or postpone their visits. Now more than ever, Indian Ocean countries want you to come visit. Not only will tourism maintain jobs and boost local economies, it will also be a sign of support and solidarity, giving new hope and confidence to those who have begun to rebuild their lives and livelihoods."

Mr. de Jong added, "If you have not yet planned a visit, please consider booking a trip. If you wish to make a difference, visit the many safe and intact parts of the affected destinations. The money you spend and, importantly, the hearts you touch will make a difference."

Source: e Turbo News, 09/01/2005

Implement laws to save coastal environments.

The scientific community has voiced its verdict in the aftermath of the tsunami. The damage is greatest where beaches have been built on, dunes flattened, mangroves destroyed, where ground water is pumped out and coral reefs killed. According to the former Union Minister of Ministry of Environment and Forests in India Ms Maneka Gandhi, "It's time to undertake a reality check and build our coastal defences." She says, "Instead of spending crores on emergency compensations, there is a need to urgently start building coastal defences in the form of mangrove replantation". She quoted the example of the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, India who had asked for money to build a coastal wall while showing that building the wall in Maldives did not help. She points out that the only wall nature provides is coral reefs and mangroves. And the coral reefs don't last very long unless there are mangroves to filter the water that flows into them from human settlements.

Mangroves are plants which live between the sea and the land where they are flooded by tides. The roots collect sediment and slow the water's flow, preventing erosion from tidal currents. Over time, the roots accumulate enough debris to extend the edge of the coastline further out- a natural increase of land.

In the case of Sri Lanka, if the Coastal Conservation Act had been implemented, more than 50 percent of damage may have been avoided. Mr.Hemantha Withanage, Executive Director and Senior Environmental Scientist, Center for Environmental Justice. Sri Lanka highlighted various aspects of coastal protection under the Coastal conservation Act of Sri Lanka.

Under the Coast conservation Act of Sri Lanka, there is a set back upto 100 meters. The Coast Conservation Department has to approve any construction within this zone. As in many of the countries, the coast here is thickly populated and the Coast Conservation Department failed to control building hotels and houses within this zone. They did not maintain the much required green belt which led to the destruction of both the green belt and the corals.

According to Mr. Withanage, politicians supported this damage and many of the coastal officers were attacked in Negombo, Matara and many other coasts when they tried to enforce regulations. While legal regulatory measures have been instituted and are waiting to be enforced, lack of political will to implement laws in order to serve vested interests often takes precedence. When disaster strikes, who is to blame? Let's not blame it on nature alone.

Source: Travel Impact Newswire, 04/01/2005 and Outlook, January 24, 2005

Rebuilding efforts must involve local communities

In Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia and other areas affected by the tsunami, the rebuilding of tourist hotels and infrastructure is already beginning. If tourism is to be sustainable for local communities they must be consulted and their needs taken into account in the decision making process. For the past fifteen years, UK based organisation, Tourism Concern has been representing the interests of people in tourism destinations and working to ensure that local people benefit during travel.

Tricia Barnett, Director of Tourism Concern, believes that the crisis offers an opportunity: "The tsunami highlights the over dependency of many governments on tourism but also presents a challenge to begin to correct what has been so skewed for too long. Already people are filling the sex bars of Phuket. We must move quickly to ensure that people can earn a fair living from tourism without having to sell their bodies and their children." Tourism Concern is advocating a new process which is aimed not just at clearing up the beaches but the tourist industry.

Ms. Barnett said that they welcome the Thai government's desire to rebuild with an emphasis on environmental values but also urge attention to human rights, people's development and their opportunities to receive a fair share of the revenue. As the countries elaborate new and necessary regulations to move buildings at a safer distance from the shoreline, will local people have a say in these and other issues? she asked.

Tourism Concern will be rising to the challenge of rebuilding tourism in the devastated areas. They are to bring the voices of those living in the affected destinations into the dialogue with government, civil society and industry. As part of the newly launched Make Poverty History initiative, Tourism Concern is arguing for fair trade, not just aid.

Source: Travel Impact Newswire- Tsunami Aftermath 3, 12/01/2005

Hotel workers to end apartheid system of employment

The General Secretary of National Union of Hotels and Personal Service Workers (NUHPSW) in Nigeria, Mr. Austine .G. Mbavough, said that the union is making a continuous effort to ensure that contract and casual forms of labour are eliminated from the hotel industry. Mbavough explained that hotel managers in their pursuit to maximize profits, shy away from the expenses of paying permanent staff members their monthly salaries, so they adopt a system of employing casual workers. He noted that the hotel managers engage the casual staffs when there is business thereby saving payment that could have been paid if they were permanent. "That is why, we have been fighting seriously to do away with contract or casual staff in the hotel industry", he said.

Mbavough told THIS DAY that through the efforts of the union, so many casuals or contract staffs that were engaged in most of the prominent hotels had permanent appointment. In the same vein, Mbavough expressed that the hotel capitalist is aimed at maximising profit at the expense of the common worker. As a result, the hotel capitalist does everything possible to frustrate the efforts of the NUHPSW.

Source: Hilda Esin, This Day (Lagos), All Africa.com, 16/01/2005

Galapagos under threat

The Galapagos Islands in Ecuador are lauded as one of the world's largest natural history treasures with its unique diversity of plant and animal life. Tourism group International Galapagos Tour Operators Association (IGTOA) has issued a warning about the survival of the Galapagos Islands. As per The State of the Galapagos report, over fishing is threatening the Galapagos under the best of circumstances. "Slowly but surely, we're losing the fight to preserve the Galapagos Islands. Yes, tourism is doing fine, and travelers are arriving in record numbers. But look a little deeper; the news is not good. At the peak of their popularity, the Galapagos are in trouble," IGTOA warned, in a The State of the Galapagos report.

According to Dave Blanton, Executive Director, IGTOA, "The Galapagos Islands belong to Ecuador, which has historically been supportive of conservation, but that has changed," "Without that support, the task of conservation is insurmountable." The executive director added that narrow interests seek to exploit the islands' rich marine reserve. The tourism association said elements within the Ecuadorian government have weakened the role of the Galapagos National Park, which has had responsibility for monitoring and control of the archipelago.

In a recent letter to the director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, IGTOA requested an investigation that may ultimately place the Galapagos on the list of World Heritage Sites in danger.

Source: 25/01/2005, e Turbo News

Acknowledgements

- <http://www.travelwirenews.com>
- <http://www.allafrica.com>
- Travel Impact Newswire
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- e Turbo news

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