



Tourism Scan

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“The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism is a Chiang Mai; Thailand based coalition of Regional Ecumenical Organisations and over seventy secular and faith-based groups. It seeks to unite people around collective efforts that negate the undesirable effects of modern tourism and, in its place, institute socially responsible and ethically oriented tourism. It believes that tourism must be based on justice and sustainability for host communities and that, therefore, tourism planning and practice must be democratised. ECOT advocates respect for the protection and dignity of the human rights of women, children, indigenous peoples and workers in the tourist trade. It opposes tourism projects that create environmental devastation.”

Editorial Comment

The eternal question: Who benefits from tourism, is best answered in this true-to-life cartoon from a newspaper in Goa, India. It is tragic-comic in scope. Tourism entrepreneurs care two hoots whether local communities benefit. It is at the bottom of their list of concerns. Whether you are in Africa, Asia, The Caribbean, Pacific Islands, in Latin America, or just about anywhere where tourists descend, there is an obvious and dangerous trend- the 'commons' are being stolen from the people and privatised in the name of global capitalism. With little or no pretence, arrogant business people bring in capital to buy of important human resources, such as land, water and so on. Beaches are now private property! (Who would have dreamed the world would come to this?) Can nature's gifts to humanity be actually made private? It begs the question: Can unbridled capitalism be controlled, tamed, or given a human face? The protagonists of globalization argue this is possible- that globalization (capitalism that disregards borders but enforces restrictions on travel from some countries to others and imposes cruel restrictions on people trying to migrate to earn a decent livelihood). Yet, the facts-on-the-ground point to one clear fact at least in the arena of mass/commercial tourism. Tourism is an industry that has thrived on capital without conscience. It is brutal in that to the tourism investor, it matters very little, perhaps nothing at all, that women and children must pay for the fancies of women and men who have no qualms when they abuse them, or when their holidays (escapades) from reality end up spreading HIV and AIDS; or when trees and forests, islands and oceans are polluted; when workers are underpaid, abused, and overworked; or when cultures are turned into commodities for the pleasure of the tourist who needs her/his entertainment on terms that are easy.



The GTIF-ECOT team in the Polycentric World Social Forum in Karachi have spoken eloquently to this issue. Aditi Chanchani, Alberta Almeida and Peter Prezel in their statement make no bones about just what it is that tourism does to people, communities, and environments. Read their statement at the top of this edition of Tourism Scan. Each of their papers is also available from our offices and interested persons may write in for a copy.

Elsewhere, we highlight how governments are acting to put an end to violence against tourists. Noble as this is, we are compelled to ask the question: Why the big fuss when a single tourist is brutalised, and the invariable silence when it is an ordinary worker in the tourism industry who is violated, or the woman who has no choice but to cater to the sexual fantasies, whims, and fancies of the perverted western tourist travelling to the Third World only to take advantage of vulnerable children and women.

And the news from East Africa to promote borderless tourism- who will benefit? The African? How? Or is it just another ploy to open borders so that the rich entrepreneur in these countries connive with the overseas investor and MNC to make things still easier for the European, North American, Japanese, and the handful of tourists from other countries?

News from Thailand tells us how the travel and tourism sector has lost business and what is being done to bring the tourist back. Little thought from the tourism sector about what ails Thailand, and how the industry can contribute to its social responsibility through support to processes of democracy and civil society building. And, that goes for Nepal too. The big hotels have weathered the crisis of politics in Nepal but not without cost. Unscrupulous and dodgy overseas tour operators – many from India- and the usual tourist-sending countries have used the political uncertainty to squeeze out deals that are embarrassingly cheap

There are other stories in these pages and we urge readers to read them with a critical eye. Much that the tourism industry presents seem like bonanzas to the developing country. Reading between the lines, there is another story that lies hidden. These are the stories of lies, deceit, pretence, and duplicity from an industry where profits matter.

ECOT plans to engage in a study of how the tourism industry has the tendency to just violate social and environmental standards, take an opportunistic view of things, and end up doing well for itself. This is what makes the talk and claims about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) sound like a shaggy dog story and a yarn.

You simply cannot construct social responsibility on the foundations of an industry that builds its profits on the blood, sweat, and tears of the many just to hand over leisure and recreation to a handful.

Ranjan Solomon

Development of alternative tourism models stressed at World Forum (DPA)

KARACHI - Members of the Global Tourism Interventions Forum (GTIF) called on Monday for developing alternate models of tourism in the developing world to counter the “highly inequitable process of globalization.”

The call by GTIF activists came as the delegates at the ongoing World Social Forum (WSF) in the Pakistani port city of Karachi debated issues facing the developing world, especially in South Asia.

Being held for the first time in Pakistan since its inception five years ago, the six-day forum began on Friday with the slogan “Another World Is Possible” and a call by delegates to “rethink and re-create globalization” to benefit the less fortunate, particularly those in South Asia.

“Globalization has a very adverse impact on the tourism industry in the developing world, particularly countries of South Asia, such as Sri Lanka and India,” a senior GTIF official, Albertina Almeida, told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

GTIF has a network of activists throughout developing countries who are committed to “changing the character of global tourism towards a tourism that is just and equitable,” Albertina said.

Albertina, who works for GTIF in India, said developing countries, in a desperate search for foreign currency and under pressure from powerful governments and international financial institutions, often sell seashores and other natural wonders for the tourism industry.

“These countries, in the long run, subjugate their economies, devastate environments, subject their women and children to abuses, and let their cultures be inundated by the present-day tourism industry,” she charged.

Peter Rezel, a GTIF activist from Sri Lanka, said that after the December 2004 tsunami, a new process of reconstruction of the tourism industry commenced in his own country, especially along the beaches, but without the participation of the local population.

“New hotels and beach resorts are being constructed while local populations, including fishermen, have been forced to vacate those places where they have been living,” Rezel said.

He charged that this type of development is a result of globalization that “commodifyies” peoples, natural resources, land, water and other common property resources, heritages and culture.

“Under the ongoing process of globalization, we see tourism as a model of creating enclaves which fence out the local communities from access to the beaches, the forests, the waters while depriving them of their livelihoods, lifestyles and their basic freedom,” Albertina said.

More than 20,000 delegates from 58 countries are attending the Karachi world forum. The forum was founded in 2001 by community organizers, trade unionists, young people and academics as an alternative to the establishment World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. It has convened every year at Porto Alegre, Brazil except in 2004, when the forum was held in the Indian port city of Mumbai.

This year, for the first time, three World Social Forums were held. Caracas, Venezuela, and Bamako, Mali, hosted two of them in January, and Karachi followed this month after the deadly October earthquake in Pakistan caused a postponement.

Source: Khaleej Times, Karachi



Nepal returns to normal

By Pankaj Pradhananga

Katmandu Nepal (eTN)

Life in Kathmandu and other major cities returned to normal. There is a renewed energy and hope for peaceful and progressive days ahead, be it in the tourism sector, manufacturing industry or any other business. However, some highways are barricaded but are expected to be cleared shortly.

Tourism, the backbone of Nepalese economy, was the hardest hit by the recent political uncertainties. Now with the restoration of democracy, tourism entrepreneurs are optimistic about the revival of the industry.

“Mt. Everest and the beautiful trekking routes in the country will always attract trekkers to Nepal as we have lots of repeat clients who simply fell in love with the country after their first visit. Now they would love to come back as we had advised them not to travel earlier this month due to uncertain political situation. Now we are confident to take care of our clients ensuring a memorable experience in the Himalayan kingdom,” opines Mr. Binod Rai, director of Nepal Insight trekking.

“We are very positive to bring our clients back to Nepal as the political uncertainty has just ended. Nepal is always loved by the tourists and we had a few cases where our groups even cancelled their India trip as they could not come to Nepal. We mostly sell Nepal as an extension trip of India as such it is very important for us to have permanent peace in Nepal,” says Mr. Laxman Karki, manager of Le Passage to India, a leading tour operator based in Delhi.

“Though the occupancy of our hotel was good in the past few weeks despite of the political movement in the country, we are now looking forward to mark 100 percent occupancy with the new political development. As you know Nepal is a quick recovery destination,” said Rajesh Subba, sales director of Radisson Hotel in Kathmandu.

The safety and security of tourists were well taken care of during the recent political movement. Nepal tourism board, with the help of tourism associations, worked hard to ensure all international and domestic flights passengers were transferred to/from the airport, even during curfew. Coach Service with special curfew pass was plying on the streets leaving no tourist stranded.

There is great expectation that with the lasting democracy and process for peace restoration in the country, Nepal is bound to bounce back as a leading tourism destination.



Indian man gets jail time for raping German tourist

By Anil Mathur

The Indian man who raped a German tourist in Alwar, Rajasthan on March 20, 2006 has been sentenced to spend the next seven years behind bar.

Indian officials, travel agents and tourists alike have expressed satisfaction at the speedy trial and the verdict for BK Mohanty. The fasttrack court took only nine days before rendering a verdict.

Judge Maheshwari earlier rejected the defense’s argument claiming that the victim and the accused had an “intimate friendship” and hence it was not a case of rape.

Observers welcome the court’s treatment of the Mohanty case, and that it should be set as a precedent both for speed and content.

The case is also significant because of the severity of the punishment. Mohanty’s seven year jail term is being seen as a landmark verdict.

India has in recent years had to work hard in dispelling bad publicity brought about by a string of crimes against tourists. Many hope the Mohanty verdict will help deter criminals from committing such a vicious crime.



East African states to become a non-border region

By Apolinary Tairo / eTN Africa

Heads of State for the neighboring East African states of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda pledged to eliminate cross-border travel barriers as a way forward to speed up regional integration.

In their Seventh Summit of the East African Community (EAC) held in Tanzania’s northern tourist city of Arusha Wednesday, the East African heads of state said travel barriers, which existed within their states since 1977, should be eliminated.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said travel barriers should be eliminated to allow free movements of people between the three countries which make the East African region.

President Museveni said cross border barriers between each state were deterrent to regional development in areas of travel and business.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki said the present territorial borders were useless to the people of East Africa since they share similar cultural, economic and geographical values.

He said East African region should be integrated into a single customs union bloc and stand open to free movements of people from each member state, while his Tanzanian counterpart, President Jakaya Kikwete, stood for total elimination of cross-border barriers.

President Kikwete said Rwanda and Burundi will soon be granted full membership to the East African Community before this regional bloc changes into a regional political federation in 2010.

During their meeting, the heads of state appointed and sworn-in Tanzania's ambassador to France, Juma Mwapachu, the Secretary General of the community. He replaced the Ugandan outgoing Secretary General Amanyu Mushega.

Since the signing up of the customs union agreement early this year, there has been uproar and silent protests on cross-border tourism on the Tanzanian side, a time bomb likely to explode soon when the implementation of the agreement takes place in a near future.

Tanzanian safari operators plan to pressure their government to submit to the EAC some amendments in tourism cooperation protocols that would require Kenyan ground tour operators to exchange tourists with their Tanzanian counterparts at the border points.

Cross border tourism in East Africa ceased in 1977 shortly after the breaking up of the former East African Community, prompting each country to establish its own tourism network.



Chinese tourists shun Zimbabwe

Harare - Chinese tourist arrivals to Zimbabwe have declined by 70 per cent, dashing hopes of a tourism revival in Harare, the state-controlled Sunday Mail reported.

The authorities in Zimbabwe had pinned their hopes on improved tourist arrivals from China because visitors from traditional Western markets have shunned the southern African country for the past six years. The 70 percent fall represented "the highest decline recorded from any source market," said the Sunday Mail. Despite China's granting Zimbabwe Approved Destination Status to Chinese tourism to the country, Chinese prefer to go to South Africa and Zambia, the report said. The head of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Karikoga Kaseke blamed the decline on poor marketing. Critics say President Robert Mugabe's programme of white-land seizures launched in 2000 has scared away many would-be visitors. Political tensions and shortages of essentials like fuel may also have deterred others. - Sapa-dpa 'Highest decline recorded from any source market'



Misinformation to cost Asia tourism billions

By Y. Sulaiman / eTN Asia

Boracay Beach, Philippines

Tourism in Asia may lose billions this year due to misconceptions on travelers' safety, a report released by Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and VISA International has revealed.

The PATA report is claiming that despite visitors willing to visit Asia, Asia stands to lose billions in tourism revenue because of wrong information on travelers' safety.

The report, Asia Travel Intentions Survey 2006, is based on a survey on the attitudes of potential travelers to Asia from 10 key markets - Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Sweden, the UK and the US.

Travelers voiced their concern over safety, with one in five misinformed about locations where terrorist attacks have occurred. Two-thirds of respondents say they are less likely to visit Asia if their government issues travel warnings.

Almost 60 percent say terrorism fears and negative media reports would discourage them from traveling to Asia.

Eighty percent of those considering Asia as a destination say there is a 50 percent chance of them returning.

Forty-three percent of individual travelers interviewed are considering Asia as a holiday destination.

Potential travelers need urgent and accurate access to information, the AC Nielsen-conducted study concluded.



Danger in paradise

The murder of a young holiday-maker on an idyllic Thai island in January was horrifying, but a seemingly rare occurrence. Not so. Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark uncover the seething resentments on Koh Samui that have sparked a violent crime wave that locals and westerners do their best to conceal. Read more by clicking on the link below.

<http://browse.guardian.co.uk/search?search=koh+samui>

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