Pandemic Preparedness Planning for Travel and Tourism

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Important framework conditions
• Tourism is globally one of the most important economic activities, sometimes the absolutely dominating economic activity
• Used as a priority tool for economic development in many less and least developed countries
• Very divers sector, involving many SMEs
• Highly sensitive activity and heavily depending on perceptions

• shark = high
• Fear of every beach holiday
• 71 shark attacks in 2007
• 5-10 deaths a year

• coconut = low
• symbol of holidays
• about 150 deaths a year caused by falling coconuts
• The **subjective risk perception** is a very important element of the tourism decision process

• Especially as the tourism product is
  - predominantly immaterial, as other service products
  - produced in the future
  - distance between place of purchase and where service is provided

  and consequently a trust or belief product

• Tourists are vulnerable as they
  - are unfamiliar with the (emergency) infrastructure and systems
  - Unfamiliar with many risks of the place and society
  - Not prepared for extended stays
  - and often not familiar with the languages of the destination

• But they are looking for ‘the other thing’
• And do what they are usually are not doing
The facts

• Every day 5 – 8 million people travel internationally
• Another 50 – 80 million people travel within their own countries
• These numbers are continuously growing
• 6.5% growth for 1950-2006
• Spending 2.4 billion USD a day
Surveying the link of travel and tourism and emergency preparedness

NEP, Pandemic Plans and Tourism

- 68% of countries surveyed have a National Emergency Plan
- With two exceptions: If there is a NEP, there is a Pandemic Plan
- The exceptions are coming from the Americas
- The threat of a Pandemic made also that three countries without NEP (so far) have Pandemic Plans
- 6 countries strongly depending on tourism specifically address tourism in their Pandemic Plans
Integration of Tourism

• 52% of those with NEP have tourism covered specifically
• Improvements are so far driven by incidents
• The data indicates that especially those events with high losses in bookings and reservations caused that tourism was addressed specifically

Domestic, Inbound, Outbound

• Two major players: Civil Protection, Foreign Affairs
• Although only few countries have tourism components on both sides equally developed
• Strong tendency from data that structures are improved, especially on the side of FA
Outbound Tourism

- 144 countries are issuing information for travelers on the web
- If travel advisories issued, they cover on average between 150-200 countries and are consulted on average above 100,000 times a month
- Only 14% do not have a permanently active crisis centre in FA
- If existing, they have been regularly made use of - besides usual consular support

Inbound Tourism

- Institutional responsibility for foreigners within the own country during emergencies varies widely
- All countries offer emergency telephone numbers
- Only one (non-English speaking) country offers no foreign language service
Exercises

- Most exercises are only done among governmental institutions
- Simulations are done predominantly the likely way: strong inbound countries don’t simulate outbound and vice versa
- Countries where private sector and foreign embassies are involved have a record of previous emergencies of tourism relevance

Issues and how to overcome them

What UNWTO is currently focusing on
The silo thing
Correcting assumptions

Preparedness

- Is only effective if planning assumptions are good and up-to-date
- Drivers are CD or CP, MoH, MoI
- Many additional private sector and international influences
- Who takes care of tourists?
- Has a from a TT perspective a much wider meaning as many destinations use tourism as a tool for development
- Prevention is therefore extremely important to ensure economic and social stability
Fast and sincere reporting

Fast and Sincere Reporting

- Fundamental to ensure that outbreaks can be contained
- The sensitivity of the tourism sector can impact fast and sincere reporting
- Prisoners dilemma, high likelihood of short-term advantage over longer-term benefit
- Benefits on one side, (uncompensated) losses on the other
- Inadequate handling of situations can have huge economic, social and political impacts
Phase 3 and 4

- Major challenge as we are for too long in phase 3
- Any change will cause major signaling effect
- Those taking the decision know this
- H5N1 has much higher panic potential than SARS
- The 72hrs gap: The media will very likely cover issues before we have an official statement
Phase 3 and 4 cont.

- We need to lead with information and ensure consistency of the message
- All plans are geared towards WHO
- Industry consultation called for "Holding statements"
  - Acknowledge that there is a situation
  - That these issues were covered in the plans, now activated
  - Next briefing within 24 hrs or when relevant information would be available
beekorfo: @Samwts BNN was 1st to break the news. Listen called them. They were 1st. Twitter made the first global report #Schiphol @atodc
Targeted communications

Helping to reduce emotions and take informed decisions

Targeted communications

- Using existing networks of the tourism sector
- Applying IT and allowing fast and simple communications
- SOS.travel: georeferenced event information
- Linked with whatabout.travel: standby pages for destinations
- and TERN: The Tourism Emergency Response Network
Promoting standards
or the enforcement of those
Travel advisories

- Gained relevance with the wide use of the internet
- Health issues are a regular subject of TA
- Subject to regular disagreement between governments
- whatabout.travel designed to allow to effectively disseminate information of destinations
- Power of wording
Conclusions

• The pandemic threat caused an unprecedented effort to improve preparedness for the TT sector
• The fatigue calls for good integration of the achieved into the wider emergency structures
• Despite the long preparation, the role of several players is underestimated (FA and private sector)
• Regular exercises are very important to keep the plans and preparations trained and up-to-date

Thank you!

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