HOSPITALITY & TOURISM
ISSUES IN MALAYSIA

Compiled by
VIKNESWARAN-NAIR, Ph.D

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ERITA & ERITA-Asia
Equipe de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur le Tourisme et l'Alimentation
(Centre for Inter-disciplinary Research in Hospitality, Tourism & Food)
UNIVERSITÉ DE TOULOUSE LE MIRAIL &
TAYLOR'S COLLEGE, SCHOOL OF HOSPITALITY & TOURISM
THE IMPACT OF A TSUNAMI ON TOURISM IN MALAYSIA: ADOPTING A CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Abstract:
On 26 December 2004, an undersea earthquake measuring nine on the Richter scale occurred in the Indian Ocean off the northwest coast of Sumatra, the earthquake generated tsunamis that devastated the shores of Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and other countries with waves up to 40 feet high. More than 150,000 people perished and 20,000 people are still reported missing as a result of the tsunami. Although the final toll may never be known, it is likely to be higher than the current estimate. At 1.40pm Malaysian local time, the shadow wave of the tsunami resulting from the undersea earthquake hit the holiday islands of Penang and Langkawi, as well as some coastal areas in the states of Perlis and Kedah. Peninsular Malaysia was spared the full impact of the tsunami as it is sheltered by the island of Sumatra and not directly exposed to the Indian Ocean. Nonetheless, today nine months after the catastrophe, how have the people affected by this tsunami moved on with their daily chores. Even resorts that were not hit by the wave have seen this season’s tourism collapse as tourists stayed away from the region. How can the tourism industry in this region be ready for the next crisis? The aim of this paper is to analyse the impact of a tsunami on the tourism industry in Malaysia and the region, how the stakeholders in the industry have reacted to get the industry moving, and how to be ready for future calamities.

Keywords:
Tsunami, tourism impact, natural disaster, aftermath, action-plan

INTRODUCTION
For several years now, world tourism has been living in a climate of uncertainty and insecurity. Having experienced a series of crises, world tourism once again had a tragic end in 2004, which otherwise was an exceptional year of expansion. On 26 December 2004, an undersea earthquake measuring nine on the Richter scale occurred in the Indian Ocean off the northwest coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. It was the worst disaster in the history of world tourism causing the biggest loss of lives in terms of the number of tourists as well as those working in the tourism industry. Although the tragedy was unprecedented in its severe impact on human lives and physical infrastructure, the damage to the tourism sector was relatively small and its impact on the tourism infrastructure was limited to three countries, i.e., Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives (Frangioi, 2005). In the case of tourism in Indonesia, only a small island – Nias near Sumatra was affected. The east coast of India is not usually visited by tourists in a dense manner, while Malaysia and Seychelles were only marginally hit by the tsunami.
As an after comment, geology seems to be a science that is still in its infancy. There appears to be no adequate estimate of the potential for a tsunami to strike again. As reported in Thailand's The Nation (2005), there are two views - the first one (which we find more likely) is that lightning does not strike twice, and that the next tsunami is probably only due in the next century or so. The other view might be that the area around the Indonesian islands has become 'unstable' and that further calamities are waiting to happen in the near future. It is not easy to understand why scientists have no assessments about whether a repeat is likely or not. Your guess is probably as good as mine, or as any of the people knowledgeable in the field.

The first tsunami hit the region and was gone in an hour. But the second “tsunami” in terms of human misery and economic disaster far exceeded the tsunami itself. Tourism remains vulnerable. As concluded by the Special Report of the Economic Intelligence Unit (EUI) (2005), the tsunami was a one-off event, and a repeat is extremely unlikely. But some tourists may not trust such an analysis and prefer to stay away. Tourists may not want to holiday in places where many have perished. So, even if facilities can be quickly rebuilt, the tourism industry in some countries may lose its lustre if effective action plans, which include pre, during and post crisis management, are not in place to tackle any calamity that may envelop the region in the years to come.
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PREFACE

Jean-Pierre Poulain  
Director of ERITA

Vikneswaran Nair  
Co-Director of ERITA-Asia

Indeed it is with great pleasure that we are launching the inaugural issue of the English edition of the Tourism Review or Revue Tourisme. The 20 years relationship between Taylor’s College, School of Tourism (TCHT) in Malaysia and the Université de Toulouse le Mirail (UOT) in France has directly and indirectly brought about positive exchange of ideas, knowledge, innovations and quality programmes.

We would like to thank to all our contributing authors who have submitted high quality scholarly work. For this inaugural edition, a total of ten articles have been selected after going through three rounds of review process. Eight papers are authored by researchers from the institution of higher education in Malaysia and the balance two from France.

With this publication, we do hope our counter part from both the country will be able to understand some of the latest innovations and issues that are besetting the industry in the region. Only through publication like this, we are able to bridge the gap between developing nations and developed nations.

We wish to take this opportunity to invite other readers to join us in the manuscript-review process and also submit your paper for publication consideration in the forth coming issues of the review.

Merci beaucoup and thank you.

Tourisme April 2006
b. Flexibility in promotion
   • Create new niche market products
   • Target experienced and special interest travellers
   • Create own special offers
   • Quickly shift promotions to most promising markets
   • Set up promotions to domestic market
   • Increase familiarisation trips for tour operators and special events organizers
   • Take travel advisories seriously
   • Intensify cooperation

c. Security for the future
   • Evaluate security procedures
   • Push to improve the quality of services and facilities

d. Use research effectively
   • Survey generating markets on perceptions of your destination

On the whole, the role of the media is critical in modern crisis management especially in the tourism industry. All the key aspects described above and resources must be in place before the next crisis occurs. Working hand in hand with AICST, who is prepared to contribute to the work of the task force through the development of enhanced risk management procedures for crisis management for regional tourist destinations (APEC, 2005), is one way of not reinventing the wheel.

CONCLUSION

Tourism in the Southeast Asian region has suffered repeated setbacks in the past few years. Malaysia remains a safe destination for tourists, safe from the direct effects of the tsunami after-effects since it is sheltered by the island of Sumatra and not directly exposed to the Indian Ocean. In the aftermath of the tsunami, it is obvious that damage is very high in regions where there are no greenbelts. The tsunami killed many people but we also saw the power of the people and the civil society who helped each other without ethnic, religious or national bias. Humans still have this element despite the many civil conflicts.

Every destination in the Asia Pacific region, including those affected by the tsunami, is expected to post positive arrivals growth between this year and 2007 according to the Pacific Asia Travel Association. The PATA Strategic Intelligence Centre (SIC) forecasts indicate the growth is expected to range from 4 per cent in Pakistan to almost 21 per cent in Malaysia (Travelbiz, 2005). As for a possible repeat of the tragedy, work on installing regional alarm systems for the Indian Ocean is already underway. This should alleviate the fears of potential visitors.