

TOURISM & MORE'S "TOURISM TIDBITS"

May 2012

International Tourism Month and Tourism Security & Safety

The city of Las Vegas will hold its 19th conference on tourism security and safety during the month of May. The choice of this month is not an accident as May is the international month for tourism, and the first rule of good hospitality is taking care of our guests. All too often tourism professionals see themselves as marketers rather than hosts. Realty is different however. Visitors eventually will not come to places where people are afraid for their lives, where crime is rampant, where they need to fear pandemics and tourism officials show more concern for spin than solving the problem. This last sentence should not be read as an accusation, but rather a challenge. In an ever-changing world where life seems to become both increasingly more challenging and dangerous, it is the responsibility of the tourism industry to protect its guests and to find ways for them to enjoy themselves without fear of disease, food poisoning, any form of physical assault, or an act of terrorism. Today's travelers and tourists, for the most part, seek out places/experiences where there is a sense of security and safety. Although there is a small minority of travelers who seek out the dangerous, most visitors want to know what the industry is doing to protect them, and how well prepared a local industry is in case a security or safety issue should occur.

Traditionally, many tourism professionals have avoided addressing issues of tourism security and tourism safety all together. There was a common feeling among these professionals that visitors will 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 September 11, 2001, the industry often took the position that the less said about tourism security and safety the better. To help make your community or attraction safer and at the same time to improve your marketing efforts, Tourism & More suggests that you consider some of the following ideas.

-Attend a conference on tourism security. This year there will be major conferences in Las Vegas in May, in Aruba in June, and later this year in Bogota, Colombia for Spanish speakers, and for Portuguese speakers in Rio de Janeiro.

-Embrace the fundamental paradigm shift toward travel safety and security. From a business perspective those venues that provide give good security mixed with good

customer service will flourish. Those parts of the travel and tourism industry that refuse to embrace security for travelers will see major losses.

-Work with your police department to establish a TOPPs (Tourism Oriented Policing/Protection Services) Unit. Tourism policing is a very different from other forms of policing and takes into account the interrelationship between the visitor and the locale's economy. Simply changing uniforms or calling someone a tourism police officer without proper training may actually be counter productive. Police departments are an essential part of a tourism community's safety and protection plan. The local police department should not have to learn where things are in a resort after an incident has taken place. Regular visits and meetings can save both time and lives and reduce what might have been a major incident into a minor one. If police are used correctly they can become an economic development tool for your tourism community. Police officers who work in tourism areas should be highly trained professionals who are paid the same wages of any other well trained professional.

-Never forget that tourism security begins with a sense of hospitality and caring. Those tourism centers with high levels of good customer service tend to be the safest tourism centers. Tourism centers that provide poor customer service send out a message that they do not care about the well being of their guests. On the other hand, tourism centers in which employees tend to care about their guests tend to be safer. Creating an environment of caring is the first step toward good guest safety and security procedures.

-Never forget that a tourism community is an ecological system in and of itself. What happens outside of your community impacts what occurs within it. For example, tourism managers and government officials need to be keenly aware of the crime issues that are found in tourism communities. If the location is suffering from a high level of crime, it is unrealistic to believe that this crime wave will not impact its tourism areas.

-Develop a plan to be able to evacuate visitors in case of an emergency and know how you will provide for your guests' communication and evacuation needs. Make sure that your guests are provided emergency contact lists with the telephone numbers of medical personnel, police, resort security and even translation services. Guests should also be told what to do in case something is lost and where the lost and found is located and what its operation hours are.

-Remember that both safety issues such as food hygiene and security issues such as assaults can impact the reputation of your tourism community and your bottom line. From the visitors' perspective, a ruined vacation is a ruined vacation. If a restaurant is serving food that makes tourists sick and this information enters into the media, the

location's reputation may be ruined. Tourism security and safety are as much about perceptions and what is reported as they are about the facts that the media report. Food safety means making sure that food preparation areas are secure, and that there is a close working relationship between your security department and your food preparation services. Food safety in today's world also means that background checks need to be performed on all employees who handle food and to train these employees in pertinent aspects of resort security.

-Review your tourism areas to decide where security cameras and additional lighting are necessary. This review of equipment should take place on a yearly level to decide what changes may be necessary. In an age of terrorism and high crime, tourism centers need to protect not only the areas that are seen by the public but also such areas as where trash is disposed and deliveries are made.

A good overall security program is much more than simply hiring a few extra guards. Tourism security is a highly professionalized plan that permits the protection of everything from the site to the visitor, to the community's very reputation. While good security programs do not promise total safety and security, they do lessen the risk of negative events, prepare a location to minimize negative effects should an incident occur, and produce the political will to permit the community to recover.