



Seminar: Increasing Resilience to Natural Hazards in the Tourism Sector in the Americas

Hotel Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, November 17 – 09:00 – 17:00 hrs

Tourism is one of the main economic drivers for many countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region, accounting for 8.8 percent of overall GDP in the region in 2008 (Source: World Tourism Organization). For many of these countries tourism is the principal source of income, with tourist expenditures representing about 33 percent of GDP in Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Lucia, and 22 percent of GDP in Belize. The tourism sector is among the main drivers of economic growth, both directly and through the tourism-related construction activity. Moreover, economic cycles are also highly correlated with the performance of the tourism sector, more so for those economies that are more reliant on tourism. Tourism arrivals, while significantly affected by economic developments in the source countries, are also affected by external shocks such as hurricanes (IMF 2008). To maintain its long-term viability, the tourism sector must therefore be prepared to absorb and recover from a wide range of internal and external shocks especially from geophysical events such as extreme weather events and earthquakes (as witnessed in Haiti and Chile), which have caused injuries and loss of life, significant physical and structural damage, and have reduced the attractiveness of a destination to potential visitors.

Natural Disasters and their impact on development plans in the Americas

Latin America has been one of the regions most affected by disasters according to estimates of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). On average, the annual cost of impacts in the region is over \$6.0 billion US dollars. Central America, in the last decade in particular, has had to confront a series of catastrophic events. The loss of human life and material damage from these disasters have meant significant setbacks in regional social and economic development and increased their vulnerability to natural hazards.

The passage of hurricanes George and Mitch in the Caribbean and Central America, for example, claimed the lives of more than 13 000 people. The economic losses left by Mitch amounted to more than \$8.0 billion US dollars, equivalent to more than 8% of the gross domestic product (GDP) throughout Central America, and exceeding the combined all of annual GDP of Honduras and Nicaragua, the two countries most affected. The estimated losses from hurricane Ivan in Grenada in 2004 were estimated at 200 percent of the country's GDP, while the Government of Haiti estimates that reconstruction costs following the January 2010 earthquake at approximately \$11.5 billion.

In Cusco, Peru, the recent adverse weather during the first quarter of 2010 has resulted in significant losses. According to the Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism "losses are important and relevant and we are concerned because people in Peru depend on tourism for their day to day existence". To counteract the effects caused by the rains, the National Chamber of tourism, CANATUR, urgently announced the launch of the Learn Peru Campaign, an initiative which asked tour operators to offer special rates during February and March with reductions in the price of tickets and travel packages to any destination in the country. While this initiative may have lessened the impact on the tourism sector associated with the floods, the detrimental impact on the tourism sector can still easily be discerned.



Damaged buildings, including hotels, are flooded by the Vilcanota river in Cusco, Peru, on January 28, 2010. Hundreds of tourists waited to be airlifted out after flooding and mudslides stranded them near the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu.
Mariana Bazo/Associated Press

In 2010, OAS member States recognize through AG/RES. 2591 (XL-O/10):

"The Importance of Tourism Cooperation in the Americas" that *natural and man-made disasters have the potential to adversely impact the tourism sector, particularly, the competitiveness of the micro, small, and medium tourism enterprises; and the importance of urgently reducing the vulnerability of the tourism sector in the member States to natural hazards through the development of national natural disaster risk reduction strategies, mutual assistance, technical cooperation, land-use planning, and improvement of building codes oriented to the tourism sector.*

Who organizes and convenes this Seminar?

The Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), through the the Office of Tourism of the Department of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism (DEDTT/OT) and the section on Risk Management and Adaptation to Climate Change of the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD/RISK-MACC), within the framework of the activities of the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM).

What do we expect from this Seminar?

The ultimate objective of the seminar is to:

1. Contribute to mainstreaming of Natural Hazard Risk Management (NHRM) into planning in the tourism sector;
2. Support activities in the Wider Caribbean and Latin America region that contribute to increased resilience of the tourism sector to natural hazards; and
3. Establish a regional monitoring and exchange of information and good practices mechanism.

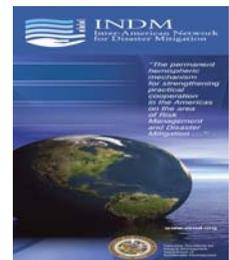
Some specific expected outcomes and outputs are:

1. The articulation of current needs and the identification of the main lines of action for increasing resilience to Natural Hazards in the Tourism Sector;
2. The mapping of stakeholders, including tourism officials, NGOs, aid workers, Governments and other stakeholders regarding mitigation of multi-hazard risks in the tourism sector;
3. The establishment of a consensus on the structure, roles and functions of a Tourism segment within the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM) for the exchange of information and good practices in promoting South-South cooperation in Risk Management in the Tourism Sector in Central America and the Wider Caribbean region; and
4. The identification of mutual cooperation projects and programs that can be coordinated by SEDI DTTC/DSD.

The results will contribute to the preparatory process of the XIX Inter-American Travel Congress, which will convene Ministers of Tourism, National and Regional Tourism Authorities and other industry stakeholders over 2 days, on September 29-30, 2011 in San Salvador, El Salvador. The Congress is the principal forum for formulating hemispheric tourism policy, and the DEDTT/OT at the OAS, serves as the technical secretariat for the Congress.

This initiative builds on previous work of and other initiatives by DSD/RISK-MACC. In the case of the Office of Tourism following the severe damage of the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, the then Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) and the OAS Division of Trade Tourism and Competitiveness (DTTC), with funding from the US State Department, led the development of a plan to assist OAS Caribbean Member States in strengthening the tourism sector's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a critical event impacting the sector. The project produced a new version of the Hurricane Procedures Manual as part of a Model Multi-Hazard Contingency Planning Manual for the Tourism Sector. The hurricane manual was revised using interviews with hoteliers, hotel associations and government officials from Ministries of Tourism. Of particular interest were interviews with hoteliers on the island of Grenada that focused on their experiences in designing plans that were tested during the impact of Hurricanes Ivan (2004) and Emily (2005).

In the case of DSD/RISK-MACC, this initiative will complement work and build on lessons learned during the implementation of the INDM. With financial support of the Canadian International Cooperation Agency (CIDA) and in response to a series of mandates and resolutions emanating from Summits of the Americas and meetings of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) –namely the Declaration of Santa Cruz +10 and the Inter-American Program for Sustainable Development (PIDS 2006-2009) adopted at that Ministerial meeting, on December 5, 2006, by the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI), the Department of Sustainable Development (OAS/DSD) established the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM), in December 3 of 2006. In 2007, OAS member States gathered at the XXXVII Regular Meeting of the General Assembly, in Panama, recognized the INDM “as the permanent hemispheric mechanism for strengthening practical cooperation among intergovernmental agencies in the area of disaster reduction, especially by sharing technical information and best practices.”



Who will be there?

Ministers of Tourism, heads of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Agencies, Ministers and High-level authorities on Sustainable Development, hotel associations and wholesalers and tourism operators, universities, cooperation agencies, organized groups of the civil society, and meteorologists, hydrologists, seismologists and other experts on observation, monitoring and modeling natural phenomena.