

TOURISM SECURITY IN MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN 2016-2019

Key Findings and Recommendations



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Canada 

During the implementation of the project 16 destinations were visited, in 11 countries of the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico (Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Jamaica, Ecuador, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic), providing two different types of training: Basic Tourism Security Workshops and Risk Management for Tourism Destinations, and assisting with the development of Tourism Security Plans.



Mexico



Belize



Costa Rica



Guatemala



Honduras



Antigua and Barbuda



Dominican Republic



Saint Lucia



Barbados



Ecuador



Jamaica

The program provided two types of training:

Basic Tourism
Security Workshops

Risk Management for
Tourism Destinations

and assisted with the development of:

Tourism Security Plans

OVER 800 REPRESENTATIVES

from the public and the private sector participated in the trainings and working meetings, all of them with an important role in the tourism industry in their country.

As a result of these three years of intensive research, capacity building and dialogue with the participants from the beneficiary Member States, some key findings and recommendations have been identified.

These efforts could have not been possible without the active collaborations and joint work of our partners, who were a key part of carrying out the project and providing valuable knowledge and skills to the beneficiary countries:



Independent consultants and collaborators (Marko Magdic, Miguel Rico, Risto Haataja, David Vicent, Brian Powrie, Iain Macleod, Prospero Ellis, Covadonga Gómez)









KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



ENHANCE PREVENTION AND RESILIENCE

Tourist destinations may face significant difficulties recovering from acts of terrorism, organized crime, other criminal activities or natural disasters. As a result, if affected by one severe incident, these destinations may have difficulty attracting the same number of tourists they were used to receive. Therefore, it is paramount for tourist destinations to invest in resources that can provide rigorous and updated analysis of threats and risks of terrorism, organized crime and/or the potential for natural disasters. This resource allocation may also involve an increase in international and national cooperation, and the development of resilient institutions and societies equipped with emergency response teams (ERTs) ready to respond and recover. A robust planning process that includes a wide variety of public and private sector stakeholders is a critical element in developing a resilient tourism industry.



ESTABLISH A TOURISM SECURITY COORDINATION MECHANISM

Tourism security can effectively be enhanced through a robust cooperative framework among public stakeholders. It is advisable that law enforcement, civil protection/security, medical services, disaster response and other first responders, including representatives from local and the national governments, assist with the planning and coordination of the safety and security of tourist destinations. Such mechanism typically involves the establishment of a formal network of stakeholders

(public and private) and the adoption of consolidated practices for information sharing. Training, practice and conducting exercises of the security/ emergency plans with all partners involved in the response is key. It is also advisable that the planning and coordination include gender perspectives and involve representatives from the Embassies or Consulates of those countries where the majority of tourists originate.



VALUE PUBLIC-PRIVATE COOPERATION

Public-Private partnerships are key to ensuring the safety and security of tourists. Investment in the tourism industry comes primarily from the private sector; therefore, it is important to develop a formal mechanism of public-private cooperation. This cooperation will ensure improved safety and security policies and standards, and establish the right balance between the public interest and the protection of tourism as business to strengthen security of the tourism industry.



DEVELOP A TOURISM SAFETY AND SECURITY STRATEGY PLAN

Adopting and providing the necessary training to implement a National Tourism Safety and Security Strategy and/or Local Tourism Safety and Security Plan would provide the necessary framework to clarify and assign the various roles and responsibilities in the protection of tourism destinations, with the aim of leveraging the resources available. Establishing common practices, standards and priorities that are based on current capacity and needs, receiving input and taking into consideration various perspectives from all relevant public and private stakeholders is the first critical step in the development of a comprehensive and integrated safety and security plan. It is important to note that the development of a new safety and security plan may need to accommodate/complement pre-existing plan(s) already in effect, align with the overall tourism strategy, and incorporate gender perspective and balance throughout.



DO NOT PLAN FOR EVERYTHING BUT BE READY FOR ANYTHING

Failing to plan is planning to fail: while it is always recommended to develop and adopt safety and security plans, it is also necessary to maintain a certain level of flexibility, to adjust to unforeseen circumstances. Designing safety and security plans by taking into consideration unexpected events allows concerned stakeholders to be prepared by creating the appropriate contingency plan. Effective planning efforts often focus on process of management and mitigation of contingencies, rather than specific scenarios.



CENTRALIZE YOUR RESPONSES WITH A ONE-STOP SHOP

Some countries have developed and implemented a one-stop shop where tourists can find solutions to the most common challenges they could encounter during their vacation period. The services available in these offices include offering provisions for general travel information, contact information to report suspicious and/or criminal activities, support for legal and language related matters, and support in emergency or crisis situations. For these initiatives, it is important to involve all relevant stakeholders, including those from the private sector. The decision on what services to include and which stakeholders to involve should be made at the local level. Generally, this approach produces excellent results because the focus is on improving the level of customer service and instilling trust and confidence in tourists.



ONE APP, ALL IN

The concept of a mobile application (app) has been developed by numerous countries to allow tourists to access relevant travel information and communicate with specific tourism offices and services in various languages. Although there are many benefits to using a mobile app, the roaming cost, network coverage and battery consumption, may considerably limit the use of such tools and require special arrangements

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with technology and communication providers. The app and the one-stop shop may be implemented as complementary solutions.



TOURISM POLICE AND TOURISM POLICE ACADEMY

Some countries have developed police units that specialize in enforcing the safety and security of tourists. Other countries have established dedicated tourism police academies that offer comprehensive curricula for a specialized tourism security body. While it is extremely important to recognize the value of specialized police units with ad hoc skills, along with the adoption of police uniforms that can be easily identified by tourists and officers that are skilled to communicate in different languages, it is also crucial to partner such programs with fully fledged and equipped (as needed) professional police officers and commanders who report to the national security framework. It would also be beneficial for these officers to receive awareness training so that they are also able to assume the role of tourism providers.



TRAINING FOR ALL

The tourism industry is constantly evolving and requires continuous updating and specialized training for stakeholders in the industry. For example, stakeholders responsible for maintaining the safety and security services within the tourism industry would benefit from having a common background and the ability to acquire advanced knowledge on specific issues relevant to their respective mandates/roles. It is also advisable for public-private cooperation mechanisms to be put in place in order to coordinate dedicated general/specific training needs, and develop common capacity building programs with dedicated training for each of the stakeholders involved. Gender perspective is an important consideration when developing training programs for each phase of development.



TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE TO IMPROVE SAFETY AND SECURITY STANDARDS

Tourism destinations are usually more successful when projects/initiatives are developed to attract targeted audiences (customers), through dedicated marketing and awareness campaigns (i.e., students, business, wedding, nature, culture, beaches, etc.). Therefore, safety and security policies and plans need to take into consideration the targeted audience's needs and particularities and not just copy/paste successful models adopted in other tourist destinations to accommodate their own needs.



PREVENT CRIME THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

Effective safety and security policies typically include an element of environmental design, particularly in the urban context, to support both the implementation of preventive policing (Broken Window theory), to enhance the perception of security, as well as the implementation of safety and security operations during a crisis (such as evacuation protocols, emergency routes, etc.). Therefore, it is recommended that safety and security plans are developed in full coordination with the local authorities who are responsible for environmental design, urban maintenance and preservation.



INCLUDE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. ALWAYS

The involvement of the local community in the development of a tourism strategy is a key aspect to ensuring increased effectiveness of security planning and operations. When the local community becomes a direct beneficiary of the investment made in tourism, there is a greater likelihood of averting any potential disagreements with the tourist community, as well as being a direct benefit for the receiving communities. Making a concerted effort to avoid the development of gated resorts that do not encourage tourists to engage with the surrounding communities will facilitate socialization between tourists and the locals.

This is a key aspect to increasing reciprocal respect and ensuring the establishment of tourism destinations that are more resilient to crime and public disorders. In addition, combining this approach with community policing programs will likely be very effective within the tourism context.



SECURITY IS FEMALE

Gender perspective and gender balance policies must always be included in any security plan and considered throughout the strategic planning and development of safe tourism. Despite the fact that this aspect often gets overlooked or underestimated, gender balance in the workplace brings, in the long term, better work conditions for everyone by establishing a more comprehensive, inclusive and effective security plan for all. This should also be applied to all law enforcement ranks and levels, as the promotion criteria should never be established based on a gender bias.



HUMAN RIGHTS COME FIRST

Any security plan must be aligned with national and international legislation and practices. Therefore, adherence to human and civil rights must occur throughout the planning and implementation of any security operation and at every point and level in the process. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the risk of incurring severe reputational damage to the tourism industry, given how fragile the current public perception currently is. Respect for human rights denotes respect for legislation pertaining to the use of firearms and the establishment of a fair and reliable justice system, particularly in relation to vulnerable populations.



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PROMOTE SOCIAL CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

The main component of the tourism industry is business and commerce, which is produced primarily through multi-national and private sector companies. The majority of countries included in this project consider the tourism sector as one of their main sources of income. Therefore, when creating effective safety and security policies, it is critical to carefully consider the public interest when developing tourist areas. Creating robust public policies that include social corporate responsibility programs by actively engaging the concerned private sector and local communities will likely ensure the sustainability of investments in tourism for the long term, protecting the receiving community and environment at the same time.



OPTIMIZE YOUR RESOURCES, CONSOLIDATE YOUR PRACTICES

Tourism safety and security planning is an exercise that may require the adoption of creative solutions, allowing for many collaborative approaches between the private and public sector, especially during peak tourist seasons. Collaboration will help to identify solutions beforehand at national and local levels, foster consolidated policing traditions and practices, and optimize the use of available resources. Such resources can easily be multiplied and shared through partnerships with other public institutions and/or within the private sector. It is worth noting, that the adoption of external policing models has not been proven to produce effective results, at least in the short term.



ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

Respecting nature and the environment is fundamental to protecting the investment in tourism. This applies during the maintenance and construction of infrastructures when developing and modernizing tourist destinations, as well as for the educational and awareness-raising campaigns for tourists and the local community. A sustainable and clean environment will have a positive impact on the safety and security of daily operations. Furthermore, it is also important to take into account those events that may have less of an impact on the environment when planning and managing security operations (i.e., recycling programs).



EXCHANGE BEST PRACTICES, ALSO WITH YOUR COMPETITORS

Any incident or negative occurrence affecting a tourist destination may have long-lasting negative impacts, which may also affect surrounding countries. It is therefore of utmost importance to enhance any form of national and international cooperation, and consider improving safety and security standards on a routine basis to protect the people, tourist sites, assets and tourism products.



INCREASE THE PERCEPTION OF SECURITY

Security and public perception of security is the driving force behind any tourism destination. Therefore, it is important to develop a robust and reliable safety and security framework and, at the same time, market successful results by explaining selected strategic and operational security initiatives as part of the overall tourism product. There is evidence to support a tendency by some of the countries that participated in this project to exercise caution or are reluctant to publicly address tourism security because they believe it implies admitting there is a

serious tourism safety issue. Projecting the image of a peaceful and secure destination, which is able to recover quickly in the event of a security incident, both at the local (to the population) and global (in the web and social media) level, can mitigate the spread of false or exaggerated information. This portrayal, together with establishing strong international relationships, can be effective when considering the type of communiqué to include in local alerts and international travel alerts published by foreign countries and relevant international organizations.



TOURISM, NOT WAR

The perception of security may also depend on the equipment and resources used by on duty law enforcement officers. Some visitors/tourists may be reassured when heavily armed officers are visible in the streets and at public venues. On the other hand, a law enforcement presence may cause others to become overly security conscious, especially when on vacation. Therefore, it is recommended to carefully conduct rigorous and routine security assessments of potential threats, as well as the public perception of these potential threats when implementing a security strategy.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION MEANS ENHANCING SECURITY

Internal and external communications should be carefully considered with any safety and security plan, and incorporated into the daily operations of any agency dealing directly or indirectly with tourism and security. This is significant to the tourism industry, which can be easily damaged by negative communications or feedback. A communication plan must be adopted and managed professionally, taking into account relationships with local, national and international media, and with various social media platforms. It is also important to designate a spokesperson in the event of an emergency who can inform the general public with accurate updates and dispel any misinformation.



Public perception is paramount for tourism security (...)it can take only a single criminal event to damage this reputation.



DO NOT LET CRIME JEOPARDIZE YOUR TOURISM

Unfortunately, tourists are sometimes attracted by illicit services or products that may be under the control of some form of organized crime groups, such as prostitution (including child exploitation), drugs, counterfeit products, poaching and money laundering. Tolerating any illegal activities to boost the tourism industry seriously undermines social welfare and development in the local community and therefore damages the tourism industry in the longer term. As previously mentioned, public perception is paramount for tourism security. It can take months and years to establish a reputation that exemplifies a safe and secure tourism industry and take only a single criminal event to damage this reputation.



BRAND THE CIRCUIT, INCREASE THE CONFIDENCE

Developing specific programs or circuits for tourists and, establishing high quality and consistent standards to all the different tourism destinations under one umbrella/brand has the potential to increase tourist confidence and perception of the level and standard of security services provided. Greater expectations may also encourage ongoing improvement and enhancement of safety and security standards, and lead to 'multiplying effect' if relevant best practices and resources are shared destinations.



VALUE YOUR SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE, ADOPT A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

Tourism development may not always be consistent throughout the country, let alone within specific regions. While some areas may be very advanced in tourism management and related safety and security planning, other areas with significant potential may be less developed for historical, political or environmental reasons. When considering any national tourism development plan, including its security aspects, consideration should first be given to the overall design starting from the national level experience, analysing lessons learned and challenges faced, followed by implementation in less problematic areas/regions and, finally, to the most challenging areas/regions.



SECURITY IS YOUR BUSINESS: SWOT AND PESTEL IT

When considering developing a national or a local safety and security plan, consider starting with SWOT (Strengths/Weakness, Opportunities/Threats) and PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Environment, Technological, Legal), two easy but effective tools for developing a business plan. Such tools will support your analysis of what you are, what you have to understand, what you want and where you can go. Developing rigorous SWOT and PESTEL analysis can be an effective first step before starting to develop a tourism security plan.



MAKE THE TOURISTS AWARE

Visiting a foreign country may pose an important challenge because the majority of the time tourists are not fully aware of the local laws, customs or traditions of the region. Disseminating information about emergency numbers, uniformed police officers, secure taxi companies and fares, currency and credit card information, emergency plans, forbidden behaviours, safe areas etc. through official websites or the distribution of pamphlets at entry points will make tourists more aware and confident about the local environment. If such information is re-

liable and clearly communicated in your marketing strategy, it will also increase the perception of security and become a key component in attracting other tourists.



INVEST IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND MEDICAL EMERGENCY

The majority of tourists are typically concerned about the standard public services that are frequently used by the general public. For example, specific programs promoting safe and reliable public transportation, such as secure taxi/buses and safe roads, as well as effective medical emergency care, especially in connection with common diseases or accidents, will help increase the confidence of tourists and have a positive impact on the overall safety and security framework.



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