

RECREATING DESTINATIONS: Rebuilding the Tourism Industry after Disaster

IEDC Research Report // August 2013



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Executive Summary

The tourism industry accounts for 14.6 million jobs (7.7 direct, 6.9 indirect) in the United States. In return, federal, state and local governments receive \$129 billion in taxes directly. With small businesses comprising 84 percent of the industry, tourism clearly is an economic driver for many communitiesⁱ. The increase in the occurrence and devastation of natural and man-made disasters is impacting the tourism industry in many communities, especially those that depend on seasonal tourism.

This white paper is intended to guide economic developers in the recovery of the local tourism industry after a disaster. Because each disaster and its impact are unique, the paper is organized into sections that allow readers to find guidance based on their particular communities' needs. Throughout the paper are sample announcements and examples of tourism industry recovery strategies that various communities have implemented.

This paper is divided into three sections: introduction, short-term strategies and long-term strategies. The introduction outlines key partners in the preparedness and post-disaster economic recovery stages specifically for the tourism industry. The second section provides an overview of strategies to implement during the immediate and short-term recovery stages, including marketing to both internal and external customers and helping local businesses. The final section highlights long-term strategies to aid in rebuilding a stronger, more vibrant tourism industry while encouraging visitors to return.

Introduction

Tourism is a significant economic driver across the world. In the United States, tourism accounts for 7.7 million jobs and \$1.5 trillion in spending.ⁱⁱ When disaster strikes, whether natural or manmade, the tourism industry is often drastically affected.

Each community affected by a disaster has a unique path to recovery. However, there are many best practices and lessons learned regarding disaster preparation and recovery that communities can draw on. This guide offers many of those lessons and practices that can empower communities to strengthen their tourism sectors before a disaster and restore them afterward.

According to the National Governor's Association, the disaster lifecycle has four phases: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. For a description of each of these four phases, including the difference between short- and long-term recovery, visit <http://restoreyoureconomy.org/disaster-overview/phases-of-disaster/>.

The Key Partners in Tourism Recovery Efforts

Organizations that support tourism locally may include a convention and visitors' bureau; a chamber of commerce; an economic development organization; municipal or county government; non-profits focused exclusively on tourism or tourism assets; business improvement districts and main street organizations and trade associations.

On the next page are descriptions of the roles that these organizations may play in preparing for or recovering from a disaster.

If there is a local **destination marketing organization (DMO)**, it will most likely take the lead in disaster recovery efforts for the tourism industry. With its marketing expertise and connections, the DMO has the ability to share messaging with external and internal customers and work with industry stakeholders. In many communities, the DMO is the convention and visitors bureau.

Absent a DMO, the **economic development organizations (EDO)**, if tourism is included under its purview, may take the lead in rebuilding the tourism industry. Otherwise, then EDO is likely to play a support role that may include helping tourism businesses secure financial support, training workers and providing other business retention and attraction activities.

Higher Education Institutions as Partners for Rebuilding

The hospitality department or extension service office at your local college or university may be able to assist in recovery efforts. Possible tasks include conducting a tourism industry inventory, examining trends to identify new niche attractions, and formulating a post-disaster marketing plan.

Don't overlook local community colleges, especially those that have a tourism or hospitality department. The local knowledge they hold can be a real asset in recovery.

The chamber of commerce is likely to work with businesses in general recovery efforts, such as including obtaining financing and connecting potential suppliers with customers. Using its membership base, the chamber of commerce is a good organization to gather all businesses to answer questions and provide general assistance. Where the chamber of commerce is the lead tourism industry organization, it would take the lead in helping the industry rebuild.

Local elected officials will set the tone for recovery. They are responsible for identifying recovery coordinators, certifying that impacted areas are safe, ensuring that basic human needs are met, seeing that infrastructure is repaired and aiding other recovery efforts. Local elected officials may be able to waive certain regulations or requirements to speed recovery efforts.

The roles of additional people and organizations that may be involved in disaster recovery are described below.

A disaster recovery coordinator may be appointed to coordinate recovery efforts among various nonprofit and government agencies. This person typically is responsible for facilitating planning sessions and meetings; identifying and leveraging resources for community recovery efforts; coordinating activities among different agencies and organizations; and ensuring clear communication among key stakeholders.

Police officers, firefighters and other emergency responders will be on the ground assisting in recovery efforts at tourism attractions and assets if needed. Depending on the type of disaster, they may be the spokesperson for the community.

Hospitals, clinics and government health departments may have a role, depending on the extent of injuries or outbreaks of communicable disease. Virus epidemics, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) can have major impacts on the tourism industry. The department of health will be central in evaluating when it is safe for tourists to return to the community.

The airport authority and other transportation officials will be involved in restoring these services and communicating their operational status. The tourism industry may need to work closely with these officials to ensure the movement of tourists to, from and within the community.

Private sector leaders can provide cash, services and supplies for recovery. Many larger corporations have disaster preparedness and recovery plans in place and resources to aid in recovery.

Institutes of higher education can help by providing technical and marketing assistance; convening resource providers and providing meeting space; grantwriting and other services. This is especially helpful at schools with hospitality, business and other tourism-related departments.

Community and historic preservation foundations can be good resources for economic recovery donations to rebuild the tourism industry. When a disaster strikes, there are many people and businesses looking to donate to recovery efforts. Groups with 501(c)3 designations can accept donations directed toward rebuilding on behalf of the community.

State tourism offices are potential partners to help set up one-stop shops to support the tourism industry. They may also have communication and business recovery resources and aid in regional collaborations.

Nationally, **Brand USA** (www.thebrandusa.com/) is a public-private partnership founded by the 2010 Travel Promotion Act to promote tourism in the United States to international visitors. Brand USA offers a range of partnership opportunities including marketing and co-op programs for international promotion for American communities. Through partnerships with leading tourism marketing outlets, Brand USA is able to help American communities market internationally and for some partnerships, even offer a cost match option for a minimum investment level.

What to Do When a Disaster Occurs: Short-Term Recovery Strategies

For most disasters, the immediate response phase can last from one week to six months. During this phase, the community is triaging the initial impacts of the disaster and assessing the real physical impacts to the tourism industry, as well as the perceived impacts. This section suggests steps to take when a disaster occurs.

- Acknowledge the Disaster is Occurring**
- To Withhold Information or Not, That is the Question**
- Communicating with Tourists**
- What to Do When The Tourism Organization is Impacted by Disaster**
- Role of the Tourism Industry in the Community, Post Disaster**
- Assessing the Damage**
- Is the Community Ready to Receive Tourists?**
- Convene an Industry Stakeholders Meeting**
- Create an Industry Task Force**
- Financing and Fundraising**
- Addressing Impacts on Workers**
- Communicating After a Disaster**
 - o **Identify a Spokesperson for the Tourism Industry**
 - o **Assigning Roles for Multiple Organizations**
 - o **Open for Business Messaging**
 - o **Following Travel Forums and Web Sites**
 - o **Marketing as the Community Recovers**
 - o **Bringing Outside Attention to the Community**
 - o **Create Opportunities to Encourage Visitors and Meetings**
- Developing New Marketing to Encourage Visitors**

Acknowledge the Disaster Is Occurring

If a weather event such as a tornado or hurricane is clearly on its way, a community's tourism-related organizations should acknowledge it through all communication channels (social media, email, website, phone recordings, TV, radio). Messages should acknowledge the disaster, mention any factual information and if possible, provide a time for the next update. The message does not need to be lengthy but should be positive. For example, Branson, Missouri's Convention and Visitors Bureau posted the following message on its Facebook page after an EF-2 tornado hit on February 29, 2012:

*Good morning fans. We experienced some strong storms early this morning and did sustain some damage in Branson and surrounding areas. Thankfully, we received ample warning and have no reported fatalities. We have already been overwhelmed with the outpouring of support from local and regional agencies. Cleanup will start in the morning and we look forward to seeing you here in 2012 to celebrate our Centennial year!*ⁱⁱⁱ

On October 28, 2012, Atlantic City, New Jersey's 12 casinos had evacuated in advance of Hurricane Sandy. One day after the storm hit, the Atlantic City Tourism District posted the following message on Facebook with a photo, and a link on Twitter:

*STATEMENT ON THE CONDITION OF THE ATLANTIC CITY BOARDWALK
by Atlantic City New Jersey (Notes) on Tuesday, October 30, 2012 at 8:03pm*

"The entire oceanfront Boardwalk in front of the Atlantic City casinos is undamaged with all dunes and lights intact. There is minimal-to-no visible damage to casinos and other businesses fronting the Boardwalk along the ocean.

The Atlantic City Boardwalk that was washed out by Hurricane Sandy is an area limited to the Boardwalk fronting the Absecon Inlet only. That small section of the Boardwalk is located in South Inlet, a prominent residential section of Atlantic City. It is a small stretch of Boardwalk that is being shown in video footage and photos."^{iv}

To Withhold Information or Not, That is the Question

Sometimes it is not possible to provide all available information to the media. It is okay to withhold information for reasons such as public safety or the potential for a criminal investigation. However, presenting factual information as soon as it is known helps avoid the spread of inaccurate information.

Communicating with Tourists

When a disaster occurs without notice, tourists already in an area need information about local conditions and where to find help – for example, whether the airport is open and flights are departing. If not, or if roads are closed or transportation is comprised in other ways, visitors need information and help to determine how they'll get home, or whether they can continue with a planned trip to the community. Any updates should note the availability of accommodations, transportation links, open attractions and other resources and services needed by tourists.

Before Hurricane Isaac struck in August 2012, the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau created a webpage to provide tourists and tourism stakeholders with updated information. A sample of the website can be found at <http://www.neworleanscvb.com/isaacupdate/>. It also included the announcement on the next page on its Facebook profile, and invited partners to post updates there about their status.

Example of Communication in Advance of the Storm

Dear Members of the New Orleans Hospitality Industry,

The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) and the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC) continue to coordinate with Mayor Landrieu and city officials on the latest information about Tropical Storm Isaac. The CVB and NOTMC are working with the Greater NO Hotel Lodging Association and the entire hospitality community to keep our visitors and customers informed.

At this time, the New Orleans metro area remains under a hurricane warning. An evacuation has not been called for New Orleans, but people who live in residential areas outside of the levee protection system are being encouraged to evacuate. This evacuation will not affect visitors to the French Quarter, downtown or any tourist centers of New Orleans.

The official source for updates will be the New Orleans CVB website www.neworleanscvb.com/isaacupdate.

New Orleans residents are encouraged to "shelter in place," which means stay home and prepare for power outages and up to 12-16 inches of rain. Most local schools are closed Tuesday and Wednesday, so residents are staying home with their families.

Hotels - Hotels are expected to remain open and serve guests, as long as there is not a mandatory evacuation order. A mandatory evacuation order is not expected at this time. Visitors, you may wish to contact your hotel if you have questions about your reservation.

A number of hotels are continuing to accept reservations at this time, however, some have decided to suspend new reservations during the time of the storm.

Louis Armstrong International Airport - Visitors are encouraged to call their airlines for any flight schedule changes. The airport is currently open but airlines will stop flights once winds reach 40 mph. Only ticketed passengers are allowed in the terminal.

Restaurants and attractions - schedule changes will be posted to the CVB website and Facebook page.

The latest forecast calls for landfall of Isaac on the Louisiana coast as a category one hurricane on early Wednesday morning. Tropical storm force winds of 40 mph will be felt in New Orleans beginning at 1 a.m. Tuesday. Winds could hit 90 mph, with gusts up to 120 mph possible through Wednesday morning.

Tourism and city officials are prepared to respond to any scenario that we may face. The Corps of Engineers reported that the city's levees and flood protection systems are ready and are stronger than ever before.

We strongly encourage members of the hospitality community to post their updates for visitors to the CVB Facebook page, www.Facebook.com/neworleanscvb, using either your personal or business Facebook account.

We will stay in touch and will update the website every few hours for the next several days.

Sincerely,
 Stephen Perry, President and CEO, New Orleans CVB
 Mark Romig, President and CEO, NOTMC

When the Cedar Rapids Area Convention and Visitors Bureau Went Under Water

In 2008, downtown Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the Cedar Rapids Area Convention and Visitors Bureau offices flooded. Everything was destroyed.

Fortunately, two nearby malls had vacant space available. The CVB relocated to the Lindale Mall, while many city government offices relocated to the Westdale Mall. As part of the initial messaging, CVB staff had to let stakeholders know where the office was, and that it was different from city government's new location.

Five years later, the CVB has relocated to a permanent home in the National Czech and Slovak Museum & Library's Kosek building in the Czech Village neighborhood, which also houses a free exhibit for visitors focused on the 2008 flood, titled "Rising Above: The Story of a People and the Flood."

What to Do When the Tourism Organization Is Impacted by Disaster

The first thing a tourism organization must do after a disaster is assess damage to its own facilities and the disaster's impact on its employees. It may need to secure a temporary location if its offices or visitor center have been damaged. This space could be a vacant storefront downtown or in a shopping center or mall; a place in a hotel, arena or other event space; a trailer in a parking lot, or office space that was not damaged by the disaster. The new location and the services available will need to be well publicized.

The organization's staff, board of directors and volunteers will be indispensable during the immediate recovery period, but may have suffered their own losses to property or health. Understanding the capacity of staff and volunteers to help will determine in part what services the organization will be able to offer.

Role of the Tourism Industry in the Community, Post Disaster

During the short-term recovery period, the tourism industry may want to use its external marketing channels to spread the word about resources needed from outside the community. However, this should be discussed with the community's disaster recovery coordinator or team to determine what is needed most and how best to receive it.

Tourism service providers also may be in a position to provide much-needed services to other local businesses and citizens during the recovery period. These may include discounted prices for rooms, food and beverages, showers, laundry services, meeting

space, the use of a hotel business center or even just a wi-fi connection. The tourism industry's regional, state and national connections may be able to identify partners to help local business get up and running.

The leading tourism organization also will need to serve as a liaison between the industry and public officials. It may need to help coordinate the restoration of basic services, such as electricity, Internet service and water. Or, it may need to help with stop-gap measures in the meantime, such as helping businesses locate generators or sources of bottled water.

Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission Steps Up During Recovery

On April 27, 2011, an F4 tornado wrecked many of Tuscaloosa, Alabama's neighborhoods. In six minutes, the tornado killed 52 people, left 7,000 others unemployed, damaged 356 commercial structures and left a 5.9 mile path of destruction.

The newly merged Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission (TTSC) became an active partner in community recovery efforts. The Tuscaloosa mayor borrowed a staff person from TTSC, a marketing organization, to address the community's public relations needs. As a 501(c)3 organization, TTSC used its nonprofit status to accept donations and helped distribute them to members of the community.

But it did much more than that. As a city-funded, central organization, TTSC became a conduit to connect volunteers to areas where assistance was needed. It also provided office space in which FEMA and SBA set up a call center to aid residents. In addition, it set up cooking stations to provide food for those impacted, secured an 18 wheeler to collect and deliver donations to low-income communities, and its board members set up events such as "Towels and Tennis Shoes," in which hotels donated towels and businesses donated shoes. Facebook and Twitter were used to share updates with the community, including where volunteers were needed.

Assessing the Damage

Assessing the extent of the damage to tourist infrastructure is a critical task immediately following a disaster. This may be done most effectively with a brief survey – using broad questions and no more than a page in length – that asks whether and how any staff or visitors were impacted by the disaster; what the operational issues are post-disaster; and what (if any) services or products the stakeholder could offer to assist with the recovery (e.g., hotel rooms, meeting space, volunteer labor).

Survey recipients should include all stakeholders mentioned in the community's tourism industry crisis communication plan. Or, lacking such a plan, the survey should be sent to major attractions and destinations, larger hotels and restaurants. Ideally, the survey is deployed electronically, but if electricity or Internet service is unavailable, volunteers may be needed to deploy the survey over the phone or on the ground. Survey communication can also be an opportunity to let affected stakeholders know where services are available and to get their updated contact information.

Is the Community Ready to Receive Tourists?

Survey results can be used to create an industry-wide "reconnaissance report" that outlines the disaster's immediate impacts and resources needed to support its recovery. The report will help determine whether the community is ready to welcome guests immediately and if not, what needs to be done to prepare for the return of tourists.

Once that determination is made, the community should make a public announcement about its availability to visitors – either that it is "open for business" or that tourists should wait to visit until after the immediate recovery phase is over. It should then provide regular updates as it prepares for the return of visitors.

The reconnaissance report should be distributed to all other tourism and disaster recovery stakeholders, to bring attention to the industry's status and needs. The community may not be focused on the visitor industry, so it is important for the tourism leadership to bring it to their attention.

Independent Stakeholders Create a Task Force

In 1989, Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston, South Carolina, damaging nearly three-quarters of the historic downtown's buildings. Approximately 40 independent tourism stakeholders decided to create a task force to "Save the Season" (the 1990 tourism season, that is).

Led by a local hotel manager, a retail business owner and a tourism video producer, the task force met weekly to discuss disaster recovery priorities. Joseph Riley, then the mayor of Charleston, and John Bourne, then mayor of North Charleston, met with the group and heeded its counsel to prioritize cleaning up the visitor-heavy Charleston Market Area.

The task force eventually integrated into the Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau as the Travel Council. It became the bureau's private-sector marketing fund as the CVB took over long-term, comprehensive recovery efforts.

Of course, a community without clean water and electricity clearly is not ready for tourists. As well, transportation routes of all modes should be accessible, both for visitors to get into and around a community but also for the distribution of goods (e.g., fresh food, linens) and the movement of workers.

The reconnaissance report and other information can be used to create a map or list of operational service providers (e.g., hotels with rooms available, open restaurants). The list may be useful for residents, first responders, and for relocating tourists who are unable to leave to community yet. Regular updates to the document will be useful as recovery continues in the short-term. As an additional benefit, the list helps small business let their customers and other know that they are open. Following Hurricane Sandy, the Jersey Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau hosted an online database of shops and restaurants that were open for business in Monmouth and Ocean counties, New Jersey.

Many businesses in tourist areas depend on regular foot traffic to stay afloat, yet it is important not to encourage the return of visitors before the community is ready to handle them.

Convene a Industry Stakeholders' Meeting

Tourism industry stakeholders should come together to discuss how the industry was affected and what resources are available to help. Such a meeting or series of meetings is also an opportunity for people to connect with others who have the same issues, or others who can help them. The community may want to invite representatives from the state and federal government to share information about available resources and answer questions. The meeting(s) should be well documented for sharing with disaster recovery officials and for telling the story of the disaster's impact in grant applications, for example.

Attendees may need to air grievances about the recovery process for themselves and their businesses. The opportunity for members to share their emotions with the group is important and should be addressed with sensitivity. Two weeks after Hurricane Ike, the tourism industry in Galveston, Texas, found a way to get together to laugh and share stories.

Within the first month, a major benefactor in Galveston held a party for all those in the tourism industry. It was another opportunity for the industry to come together, de-stress and be energized that everyone was working on recovery.

Create a Tourism Industry Taskforce

A task force of industry stakeholders should be formed that is large enough to represent broad interests but small enough to accomplish the work that needs to be undertaken. The committee may need to address:

- **Creating an industry recovery strategy and response plan**
- **Policy recommendations**
- **Financing and fundraising**
- **Trainings**
- **Collaborating with transportation linkages**
- **Communication issues**
- **Business retention strategies**

During this time, many businesses may be faced with the decision of whether or not to reopen or rebuild. The committee members can work on strategies to help businesses through this tough period.

Financing and Fundraising

If the disaster is presidentially declared or designated by a federal cabinet member, financial assistance will be available from the federal government for local businesses and organizations in their recovery efforts. Though it varies based on the type of disaster, typical funding sources include U.S. Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grants-Disaster Recovery Assistance; Small Business Administration programs; FEMA's Public Assistance Program, and Economic Development Administration grants. The community's disaster recovery coordinator or emergency manager may be able to help determine what federal financial assistance is available.

Foundations are a great resource to help rebuild 501(c)3 tourism assets, such as arts venues, museums and historic properties. By law, foundations grants must be used to benefit the public. Before applying for a grant, it is important to be clear on how the funds will be spent and what the project will entail, and to apply to foundations whose area of interest is a good match. Community foundations, local family foundations and the foundations of corporations located in the community all are promising sources likely to be interested in supporting local recovery efforts.^{vi}

National Czech & Slovak Museum and Library Raises \$25 Million for Recovery

Following the 2008 floods in Cedar Rapids, the community's museums went into full swing applying for grants for disaster recovery efforts. The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library conducted a \$25 million campaign to move its building to higher ground and repair the five buildings that were damaged in the floods.

The Hall-Perrine Foundation, whose mission is to improve the quality of life for the people of Linn County (of which Cedar Rapids is the county seat), provided a \$3 million grant that required a \$6 million match. To meet the match, the community applied for and received \$3.5 million from other foundations. Those included:

- Vision Iowa's Community Attraction and Tourism grant of \$2.9 million,
- Western Fraternal Life Association's pledge of \$355,000, and
- AEGON Transamerica Foundation's grant of \$300,000.

The museum reached its fundraising goal of \$25 million and re-opened in July of 2012.

Some tourist attractions may need to embark on full-fledged capital campaigns to rebuild their facilities.

Galveston, Texas: The Show Must Go On

The Grand 1894 Opera House is the center of cultural programs and education in Galveston. Approximately 80 percent of its audiences are from out of town. Many theater-goers make a trip out of going to see a show, which may include a meal on the island and a night at a local hotel.

In September 2008, the staff at the Grand received two days' notice to prepare their homes and the theater and evacuate the island before Hurricane Ike made landfall. Fortunately, the staff had a plan to prepare the theater for a hurricane. They moved everything they could to upper levels of the building (except a piano in the orchestra pit, which they would lose in the storm). Maureen Patton, executive director at the Grand, evacuated with a red binder that included bank and insurance account information and contact information for key stakeholders, suppliers, vendors and employees. The server was evacuated with the box office manager.

When the 1900 Galveston hurricane hit, the Grand reopened within one year of the storm. Standing on the stage two weeks after Hurricane Ike, Patton decided to plan to reopen the Grand on January 3, 2009 - 92 days after the storm made landfall. The theater was already in the middle of renovations and had a contractor committed. Without knowing what funding would be available to make it happen, Patton convinced her board of directors and contractor to push ahead with renovations in order to reopen the theater by its 114th anniversary. On January 3, 2009, the Grand reopened after canceling only three shows. The shows brought many visitors back to the island and stimulated the economy; restaurants were eager to host theater-goers.

The Grand was in the midst of a capital campaign when the storm hit and had cash readily available to start repairs. The staff continued the capital and grants campaign (though the grants could not fund the repairs). With a \$2 million endowment as collateral, the Grand was able to borrow additional money to help until it received funding from FEMA and payment from its insurance company. All of the full-time staff was able to stay on salary.

The storm hit the night of the season opener. While many who were impacted by the storm requested a refund of their season tickets or individual tickets, many moved their tickets to a new date, a different show, or donated the refund to the Grand. In the end, the theater refunded over \$200,000 in ticket sales.

Preparing for the Economic Impact of Recovery Workers

First responders from outside of a community often need many of the same resources used by tourists. For example, they may occupy many of a region's hotel rooms, leaving little space for tourists.

With out-of-town recovery workers, service providers may experience a sudden influx of customers, then an immediate and possibly significant decrease in business when they leave. Without knowing how long recovery workers will stay, hotels may not be able to take future tourist reservations, and restaurants and stores may have trouble knowing what and how much to order from suppliers. Through business retention and expansion visits, businesses that serve first responders should be counseled to prepare for a decline in business following the departure of first responders.

Grand Isle is a barrier island off the coast of Louisiana that attracts tourists for its recreational fishing and bird-watching opportunities. During the oil spill in the summer of 2010, Grand Isle tourism business was down 80 percent. A moratorium on fishing directly impacted the recreational fishing industry, and many of the hotels and camps that typically would be filled by tourists were filled with oil spill recovery workers.

While the cleanup provided additional revenue for some sectors of the economy, tourism industry operators on the island feared that a prolonged cleanup would stall a full economic recovery by limiting the availability of short-term rentals and hotel rooms. (Many recreational anglers and tourists make their reservations months in advance, so business for the following summer hinged on lodging availability being known before the end of 2010.) Fortunately, the hotels and camps were available to tourists in time for the 2011 season. Tourism-related sales tax receipts returned to pre-spill records in 2011, and as of July, camps were rented out most weekends.

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Addressing the Impacts on Workers

In addition to disasters' impact on the built and natural environments, they often are tough on survivors as well. Residents (including tourism workers and business owners) may have experienced the loss or compromise of their homes, loved ones and livelihoods. In addition, stress can come from disrupted transportation services, the closures of schools and daycares, and other interruptions to daily life.

Tourism industry leaders must be mindful of the disaster's impact on workers and help them secure basic needs, if necessary, such as housing, food and transportation. The tourism industry may be part of the solution for other dislocated families as well; for instance, Carnival Cruise line loaned three ships to the government for temporary housing following Hurricane Katrina. When employees are able to remain in the community after a disaster, businesses and organizations are able to reopen more quickly. Sometimes, however, businesses or organizations are unable to reopen in the short or medium term, or at all, regardless of whether workers are available.

Aiding Dislocated Workers Find Jobs

Two weeks after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, the Travel Industry Association of America, in partnership with the Travel Business Roundtable and the Travel and Tourism Coalition, created a job bank at www.katrinajobs.org for postings jobs and resumes. Initially, the goal of the website was to help dislocated workers from the Gulf Coast find jobs and rebuild their lives. The site's partners also aimed to help rebuild the region's tourism industry by finding workers for positions that opened up as the tourism industry returned to business. The site launched with over a thousand jobs and allowed job postings from outside of the impacted states.

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In other cases, disrupted childcare arrangements may impede employees' ability to return to work. After a tornado hit Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, damaging many schools and daycares, many families found themselves without childcare providers. The Joplin Family YMCA, in partnership with the region's United Way and Red Cross chapters and Missouri Southern State University, teamed to offer free childcare for children from ages 5 to 14, cobbled together through a combination of existing summer camps and a collaboration of area daycare providers. The Joplin Family YMCA requested donations from individuals and corporations and found local teachers and educational professionals to staff the daycare center. The Red Cross directed impacted families to the childcare services available.^{ix}

Communicating after a Disaster

The media, Internet and word-of-mouth all are avenues through which the tourism industry communicates with potential customers. In the event of a disaster or even the perception of a disaster, it's all too easy for inaccurate information and negative publicity to spread. This can be a challenge to combat and requires unique crisis communication strategies.

The following section explores these communication challenges and strategies to deal with them.

Identify a Spokesperson for the Tourism Industry

To avoid conflicting messages from multiple tourism industry organizations (e.g., the convention and visitor's bureau, tourism authority, chamber of commerce, etc.), a unified voice is needed. One group or individual should be designated to deliver tourism industry messages to the public.

The spokesperson does not have to be the top executive of the organization but should have some seniority and authority among industry stakeholders. A secondary spokesperson should be selected in case the primary spokesperson is unavailable to fulfill the role or a conflict arises. Ideally, the spokesperson will have public relations and communications training or experience in working with the media. While marketing statements can be crafted by a team, the spokesperson should be good at fielding questions on the spot.

Assigning Roles for Multiple Organizations

When there are multiple public and private organizations working in the tourism industry, it is helpful to delegate roles to each in order to increase efficiency and decrease confusion. The case study on the next page illustrates how this worked in Canterbury, New Zealand.

Delegating Roles After an Earthquake

The Canterbury region is a popular tourist destination for international visitors to New Zealand. Ordinarily, there are 24,000 to 33,000 visitors on average per night. On September 4, 2010, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck the city of Christchurch. There were several aftershocks and an additional 6.3 magnitude earthquake on February 22, 2011, which yielded the greatest damage to the city, including the 181 fatalities. Of the fatalities, 80 were visitors to the city. On that February day, it is estimated that 12,000 visitors were in Christchurch. The infrastructure in the inner city was badly damaged and accommodation capacity was decreased by approximately 50 percent.

The Tourism Strategy Group at the Ministry of Economic Development conducted an evaluation of the responses to the earthquake by the tourism sector and presented the results in a report entitled [“The Christchurch Earthquake and the Visitor Sector”](#) (PDF). Selected lessons learned are highlighted here.

Community emergency plans did not identify a clear role in advance for many of the tourism industry organizations. The tourism industry quickly responded on its own with the creation of the Visitor Sector Response Group (VSRG), whose purpose was to assist displaced tourists and residents. The members of the group and their roles were as follows:

- The Ministry of Economic Development (MED) focused on coordination and other government agencies. MED used its status to emphasize the seriousness of the tourism industry’s requests and initiatives.
- The Tourism Industry Association (TIA) was the link between the industry and recovery networks and agencies. TIA gathered information from within the industry to share with the recovery networks and agencies, and in return, provided businesses with information and helped them access support packages.
- Tourism New Zealand (TNZ), under its mandate to market New Zealand internationally, used its networks to provide information to tourists both within and outside of New Zealand. Throughout the recovery stages, TNZ promoted Christchurch and New Zealand as a tourism destination.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) provided assistance to foreign nationals impacted by the earthquake, worked with foreign governments’ missions both within New Zealand and abroad and influenced foreign travel advisories. Immediately following the earthquake, MFAT created a crisis team and set up a crisis center linked with the National Crisis Management Center. MFAT established an emergency response team working out of Christchurch.
- Education New Zealand (ENZ) identified foreign students and helped them with administrative tasks including insurance, Accident Corporation Claims and changes in their educational programs.
- Immigration New Zealand (INZ) aided with all matters related to passports, visas and travel documents, including helping families of victims enter New Zealand on a “fast track” system.
- Regional tourism organizations throughout the country aided tourists at the destination level. Positively Wellington Tourism aided tourists in finding alternative accommodations and itineraries.
- I-Sites are information centers located throughout the city. These information centers were available to help both locals and tourists identify relief centers, find alternative accommodation, make phone calls and address other logistical needs. They also assisted in setting up relief centers and providing information they learned from their networks, including TNZ.
- Airports and airlines helped visitors and locals depart from Christchurch and facilitated victim support information and assistance as needed by tourists. They helped tourists with transportation to other cities within New Zealand, where they could find assistance to continue their trip or facilitate trips home.

“Open for Business” Messaging

Following a disaster, the tourism industry still needs to make a living. This was acknowledged in the message below, which was posted on the Facebook page of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau on June 3, 2010.

“Don’t let the media discourage anyone from vacationing in Mississippi. The oil spill is very unfortunate, but life for those who make a living there has not ceased. If you want to really help the residents, vacation, enjoy, and bring back lots of fond memories.”

Though some attractions may be closed after a disaster, it is important to highlight those that are still welcoming tourists. The Mississippi Gulf Coast CVB released the following message on April 30, 2010, in response to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau Announces Mississippi Gulf Coast Remains Open for Business

In light of the recent oil spill, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (MGCCVB) announces, “The Mississippi Gulf Coast remains open for business.”

Richard Forester, executive director of the MGCCVB, says, “Although we are most concerned about the impact this accident will have on our one of a kind ecological system and the economic ramifications of that, we want to stress that we are still a viable destination of choice today and for the future. The Mississippi Gulf Coast has a lot to offer including golf, shopping, attractions, and of course, our casinos. We will continue to do our job to promote our destination.”

All advertising and promotions planned by the MGCCVB will continue in an effort to attract visitors to the area.

Linda Hornsby, executive director of the Mississippi Hotel and Lodging Association, says, “Of course, we in the hotel association are taking this potential situation very seriously and are prepared to work with the authorities and experts to assist in any way possible to minimize any possible impact. That being said, I must point out that, fortunately, the Mississippi Gulf Coast’s diverse tourism industry is no longer totally beach-dependant, as it was many, many years ago. We have now evolved into a destination with so many indoor activities, entertainment and events, as well as non-Gulf outdoor attractions. This variety and mixture of tourism components will allow us to continue to welcome our visitors, without interruption, while, at the same time, we all focus on directing our efforts toward any aspects of tourism which may become negatively affected by the oil spill.”

Coast casinos are unaffected by the spill and will remain open. Area restaurants, another integral component of the tourism industry, are preparing for the potential consequences.

Scott Weinberg, president of the Mississippi Hospitality and Restaurant Association (MHRA) and owner of Gulfport’s Blow Fly Inn, says, “We will support our local seafood producers as long as possible. Our restaurateurs are reflective of our communities along the coast - we each have our own unique flavor and a strong ability for weathering storms. We are all resilient and will weather this storm as well.”

As more information becomes available, it is important to continue to release updates. Once the state opened the beaches and charter fishing waters, the MGCCVB released the following news item on May 3, 2010:

Update Announcement: The Beaches are Open

The state waters of the Mississippi Sound, all beaches along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and beach vendors are open for business as usual. This includes charter fishing in Mississippi State waters 3 miles south of the barrier islands.

Richard Forester, executive director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, says, "We are very happy to announce that all of our beach activities are still operating and invite visitors to take full advantage of all that the Mississippi Sound has to offer from fishing charters to Ship Island excursions to Biloxi Schooner sails to jet ski rentals to the Biloxi Shrimping Trip."

Thomas Becker, president of the Mississippi Charter Boat Captain Association, says "Charter fishing was suspended only because of weather conditions and will resume Tuesday in the Mississippi Sound. We expect fishing to be just as good as before this frontal system passed through. The oil has not come close enough to affect the fishing."

"We have full trips planned and encourage our visitors to keep coming to enjoy the natural resources of the Mississippi Gulf Coast" says Captain Brandy Moore of the Biloxi Shrimping Trip and Biloxi Fishing Trip "All of our shrimping trips, fishing trips, sunset cruises are operating at full schedule."

Connie Rockco, president of the Harrison County Board of Supervisors stated, "The warm hospitality that matches our sunshine is still abundant and vibrant along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We welcome all visitors interested in gaming, water recreation, delicious cuisine and entertainment of all types. The recent events to date have not entered the Mississippi Sound and all systems are go for prevention."

Linda Hornsby, executive director of the Mississippi Hotel and Lodging Association (MH&LA), says, "MH&LA has had no reports of cancellations, and, in fact many of our hotels on the Coast were full this past weekend. We are open and doing business as usual and are welcoming our visitors with a multitude of activities and attractions, some of which, as of very recently, can now be booked with E-Tickets through the hotels or through the Hotel Association at the same time our guests are making their reservations. This is an exciting new free service being offered, which combines to enhance the Mississippi Gulf Coast as a destination. There is no better time to make your plans and reservations to visit the Mississippi Gulf Coast than now."

In addition to the water recreation and beaches being open, all coast casinos are open. Visitors can obtain up-to-date information at <http://www.gulfcoast.org/> as well as links for information regarding the Deepwater Horizon incident.

Wilmington, North Carolina, Dispels Myths Collaboratively

In 1999, three hurricanes hit the Cape Fear coast within three months. The Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau organized a collective marketing campaign with state and local organizations, including the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development; Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce; City of Wilmington; New Hanover County and the local board of realtors.

The CVB and its partners' first campaign - to let potential tourists know that the coast was open for business - lasted six to nine months. A few months after, the collective partners updated their messaging to say that the coast was back and "Better than Ever," aiming to correct inaccuracies shown in the media. A detailed case study on the Wilmington/Cape Fear area and other tourism recovery case studies can be found at <http://restoreyoureconomy.org/resources/case-studies/>.

Following Travel Forums and Web Sites

Travel websites such as Trip Advisor and Virtual Tourist, as well as travel forums like Fodors and Lonely Planet, are great assets for communicating with tourists about a community's capacity to receive guests. Many tourists will check travel websites while planning their trip and ask questions on forums. In 2012, there were over 20 discussions on the Trip Advisor Louisiana forum related to Hurricane Isaac. Ideally, a tourism industry staff person or volunteer should monitor these sites and participate in discussions as necessary.

Marketing as the Community Recovers

As the community recovers, marketing messages should be tailored to reflect that progress. However, it's important to be strategic and honest about the availability of resources and attractions for visitors. If most attractions have not yet returned to operation, the messaging should be tailored to specific audiences and activities that are available, such as golf, shopping or gambling. For instance, if the recreational fishing industry is mostly operational but the local amusement park has not reopened, marketing should focus on recreational fishing markets rather than families.

Celebrate all rebuilding progress with enthusiasm. For example, following Hurricane Sandy, the city of Seaside Heights, New Jersey, posted several messages on its Facebook page to get people excited about newly reopened attractions:

Come enjoy the sights from our Brand New Boardwalk, open from Grant Ave to Dupont!!! While you are in town don't forget to get your seasonal beach badge from 11am-3pm at Borough Hall!

The progress is moving along at Casino Pier!! Who's excited, cause we are?!!

Lots of work still to go. But the guys @ Casino Pier are on it!

And the tradition continues... Maruca's Pizza is now open!!! Come get the yummy slice you've been missing!! Maruca's is open! New location but still the best pizza ever. Seaside is officially back!

We are making progress!! Join us on this beautiful day for a late lunch or dinner at one of the restaurants that are now open along the boardwalk and take in the sights!!!

Bringing Outside Attention to the Community

If a region is able to accept visitors shortly after the disaster, efforts should concentrate on showing that the community is safe to visit. For example, a community can invite national news shows such as the Today Show or Good Morning America to film there, or host familiarization (fam) tours for travel writers, journalists, meeting planners and travel agents.

Fam tours are an opportunity to tell the story of the disaster from the community's perspective. Writers can see the disaster's impact firsthand, get accurate information, and be encouraged to write articles about attractions that either were not damaged by the disaster or have been rebuilt. These articles can dispel misconceptions about the disaster while showcasing what the community has to offer.

For instance, following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Gulfport, Mississippi, hosted a familiarization tour for travel writers during Mardi Gras. Many of the travel writers were unaware that the Mississippi coast celebrated Mardi Gras and ultimately provided positive press for the region. Fam tours often are sponsored through a partnership that includes the local or regional government tourism office, economic development organization, chamber of commerce and local businesses.

Create Opportunities to Encourage Visitors

To attract and retain interest in the community, use the available attractions and services to create special packages focused on the rebuilding experience. For example, a hotel that has reopened half of its rooms but is still renovating damaged rooms should be included in the rebuilding experience package. That brings in guests that the hotel would miss if it chose not to market itself until renovations were complete.

Art Basel 2001: Disrupted by Disaster 1,300 Miles Away

Art Basel is one of the world's leading international contemporary and modern art shows, with over 300 top art galleries participating annually. In 2013, the show is held in Basel, Switzerland, Miami, Florida, and Hong Kong.

The city of Miami signed a contract with Art Basel to bring the event to Florida for the first time in November of 2001. Approximately 40,000 hotel rooms were reserved for the show. Unfortunately, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the show had to be canceled due to a fear of flying by the highly international audience. Further, galleries could not obtain affordable insurance to bring the artwork to Miami. (Art Basel has taken place successfully in Miami in subsequent years.)

To help the region's tourism economy recover, the state of Florida created a marketing fund to advertise that it was safe to travel to Miami, and an industry taskforce focused on public relations. Record producers organized a benefit concert on the beach on Veterans Day in 2001 for the 9/11 New York City Fire and Police Departments (which also generated significant interest and attention to Miami Beach). N*SYNC performed and every major television network and magazine covered the concert. Pulled together quickly, the concert was organized with less than \$100,000 in donations from the industry.

Example of a special recovery package announcement

Galveston Hotel – Hotel Galvez Offers Giving Back to Galveston Voluntourism Package
Galveston Island, Texas (Vocus)
 March 23, 2009

Hotel Galvez, A Wyndham Historic Hotel and National Trust Historic Hotel of America, is offering a Giving Back to Galveston Voluntourism package geared at travelers willing to roll up their sleeves to help the city recover from the effects associated with last year’s Hurricane Ike. According to city officials, Galveston has sustained an estimated \$3.6 billion in damages and losses from Ike.

The \$159 package is available for a single-night stay, Sunday through Thursday through May 2009. The discounted rate includes breakfast. Guests interested in extending their stay can make a reservation for a second night for a rate of \$119 plus tax.

Confirmed guests are introduced to Help4Galveston, an organization dedicated to helping the city recover from Hurricane Ike. The package is based on double occupancy and is subject to availability and blackout dates. This package is not applicable for groups that otherwise are eligible for a special group rate.

The Tremont House, A Wyndham Historic Hotel which is anticipated to reopen in June, will offer its Giving Back to Galveston Voluntourism Package beginning in June.

“There are many people are interested in helping Galveston recover,” said Patty Rouse, Hotel Galvez area director of sales and marketing. “We encourage these individuals and couples to visit and give a helping hand to the island and its residents.”

Establishing new events also can create opportunities for visitors to explore the community. Following a disaster, many of the first visitors to an affected community come from within driving distance. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Highway 90-Bay St. Louis Bridge in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. When the bridge reopened in 2007, the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce initiated the Bay BridgeFest, now an annual festival, to celebrate the new bridge. The festival features regional bands, food and arts and includes a 5K race and art walk over the new bridge span. In 2012, the two-day event attracted over 27,000 people from over 25 states, 40 percent of which were from outside Hancock County.^x Information about the festival can be found at <http://www.baybridgefest.org/>.

Developing New Marketing to Encourage Visitors

As the community’s tourism industry recovers and evolves, it is important to create a marketing angle that speaks to those changes.

When Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012, the Jersey Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau (JSCVB) in New Jersey had a limited budget for a new branding campaign. While many of the communities along the coast were impacted by the hurricane, businesses located in the main street areas were open but had little foot traffic. Something had to be done to attract customers to the open businesses.

Shortly after the storm, the executive director and board of directors of JSCVB created a grassroots campaign with the slogan “The Jersey Shore is Open for Business.” The campaign included logos, signs, and an expanded webpage to help visitors find open businesses. With limited funds and sponsorships, much of the work was done in-house by the executive director himself.

The Asbury Park Press published a book about Hurricane Sandy, the proceeds of which were divided evenly between the Red Cross and JSCVB. The money helped pay for signs that were placed in open businesses in Monmouth and Ocean counties. After the initial campaign focusing on the tri-state area, JSCVB then turned to gaining national attention. A motor home was donated and sponsorships collected to offset the costs of driving across the country to appear on the Jay Leno show with the message that the Jersey Shore is open for business.

Long-term Strategies

For many communities, the recovery process continues for years, if not decades, so long-term recovery strategies are needed to help a tourism industry rebuild stronger and be prepared for future disasters. The strategies below provide guidance as the community moves further away from the disaster and immediate response.

- Re-evaluating the Community**
- Conducting a Tourism Inventory**
- Learn from the Community's Experience**
- Sharing the Community's Recovery Story**
- Thanking the Recovery Workers**
- Create and Update Crisis Communication Plan**

Re-evaluating the Community

The community will need to realistically appraise how its tourism assets and overall situation have changed over time. Have new tourism markets been created? Have any traditional markets transformed or disappeared? Are there new tourism assets that should be promoted? Such an inventory will help determine whether the local tourism industry needs new infrastructure or updated marketing angles and campaigns.

Conduct a Tourism Inventory

A tourism inventory allows the community to understand what assets it has, the quality of the assets and how to best market itself as a tourism destination. Some tourism assets may have closed or shifted in quality and new assets may have opened. Additionally, a new market may have emerged. The inventory will provide tourism stakeholders with valuable information that can be used to encourage repeat visitors and attract new ones. Universities, colleges and extension offices often are great resources in conducting a tourism inventory.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Community and Economic Development department has created a [step-by-step tool](#) that communities can use to conduct a tourism inventory. The tourism inventory includes nine steps:

- o Organize a tourism action committee
- o Identify the tourism resources in the community
- o Evaluate the tourism resources
- o Conduct a strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis
- o Develop goals
- o Identify objectives and strategies
- o Measure your progress
- o Prepare a written report
- o Determine what's next

Learn from the Community's Experience

With the work of the tourism industry task force well under way, schedule a workshop to evaluate the experience and create a strategy from the lessons learned. All tourism industry stakeholders in the community should be invited to participate and share their perspectives. In addition to general feedback from the committee, here are some questions to consider when evaluating the disaster recovery experience:

- o What are the lessons learned from the experience, both positive and negative?

- What issues still need to be addressed? What efforts are lingering or stagnant? What resources can be provided to re-ignite recovery efforts?
- Are there new tourism markets that the community can take advantage of? How?
- What attractions or services are missing from the local tourism industry? What is needed to develop these services and attractions in the community?
- Are there other partners or stakeholders that should be involved in future recovery efforts?

Sharing the Community's Recovery Story

Create a reputation of resilience and resurgence for the community in the minds of potential tourists. This can be done by telling the community's rebuilding story through articles, presentations and advertisements. The story can highlight what a visitor will see and experience on a visit to the community.

Following the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating and his wife, plus Oklahoma City Mayor Ron Norick and a delegation, took part in a "Thank You America" tour. They visited New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and Phoenix, holding ceremonies and celebrations to express gratitude for the aid they received to help the city recover from the bombing. The tour was sponsored by Southwest Airlines, Doubletree Hotels, the National Association of Independent Insurance Agents and McDonald's Corp.^{xi}

Thanking Recovery Workers

Leverage the visiting recovery workers' experience to create a positive buzz. Prepare them to tell positive stories about the recovery they participated in when they return to their communities. In addition, showing appreciation for their service can encourage workers to return later as tourists.

Polk County, Florida, Says “Thank You”

In 2004, Polk County became the first county in the country to be hit by three hurricanes in one season, let alone in 45 days. Situated in between Orlando and Tampa, Polk County is approximately the same size of the state of Rhode Island. In addition to its location between two major tourism destinations, Polk County has its own thriving tourism industry.

When electric company recovery workers were in Polk County, a power line worker from North Carolina commented to the executive director of the Central Florida Development Council (CFDC), the economic development and tourism organization for Polk County, that he would like to return to the area with his family after the community recovered. CFDC came up with the idea of “hurricane heroes” as a strategy to jump-start Polk County’s tourism industry, while at the same time thanking to the companies that helped in the post-storm recovery process.

Following the initial recovery phase, CFDC had plaques created for the companies that sent workers to help with the recovery. The executive director of CFDC then went to deliver the plaques to the CEOs of those companies, personally visiting six of the 15 companies. While there, he asked the CEOs to publicize a discount program for their employees. (A brochure and coupon book were available to help promote the program.) Throughout Polk County, employees were eligible for discounts at hotels, restaurants and attractions to encourage them to return as tourists, as well as to offer gratitude for their recovery work.¹ The companies spread the message to their thousands of employees, many of whom did take advantage of the discounts; the county had one of its best tourism seasons as a result of the campaign.

Create and Update a Crisis Communication Plan

The tourism industry’s recovery depends significantly on communications with external customers, so a crisis communication plan will help it be prepared for future disasters. The tourism industry’s plan is different than a regular community crisis communication plan in that it is externally focused, typically on customers from more than 50 miles away, and is heavily focused on marketing. Five steps to creating a community’s crisis communication plan can be found at <http://restoreyoureconomy.org>. These include:

Step 1: In advance of a disaster, convene organizations that can play a role in post-disaster business recovery.

Step 2: Identify how economic recovery partner organizations will communicate with each other after a disaster and what their roles will be.

Step 3: Designate one group to take the lead in coordinating communications in a post-disaster situation.

Step 4: Create a web page to serve as a post-disaster economic recovery portal.

Step 5: Ensure that economic recovery partner organizations are prepared to function effectively in a post-disaster situation.

In the book “It’s a crisis! NOW what?,” author Peggy Bedel outlines a four-step process to create a crisis communication strategy specifically for the tourism industry:

Step 1: Design your tourism industry Crisis Communication Team.

Step 2: Brainstorm the “What Ifs”

Step 3: Create your crisis contact list

Step 4: Update your plan regularly!

More details can be found on her blog: <http://itsacrisisnowwhat.com/>.

Appendix A: Disaster Recovery Types of Tourism

Dark Tourism

“Dark tourism” is the term used to describe the attraction of visitors to areas impacted by death and tragedy. Visiting historic battlefields is one of the oldest forms of dark tourism. Dark tourism can take place at a museum, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., or at the actual site of a tragedy, such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. On the site of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, a memorial and museum were built to help visitors understand the events and impacts of the bombing and allow the opportunity to peacefully reflect.

This form of tourism can be both beneficial and harmful. While it brings people to the community who patronize local businesses, it also can increase the emotional toll on citizens who are rebuilding, or physically impede recovery efforts. In instances of mass shootings, kidnappings and terrorist events, the disaster may have a widespread emotional rather than physical impact. Tourists may be curious about what happened, or want to pay their respects to those impacted. Marketing organizations should tread carefully when considering promoting dark tourism. They should work from a deep understanding of where the community is in its recovery, how residents would feel about tourists interested in its tragedy, and how tourists could help or hinder recovery.

Ready for Dark Tourists?

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the World Trade Center site received over nine million visitors a year and saw a growth of 12 new hotels to the surrounding area. Visitors to New York City can take a tour of Lower Manhattan with a guide who was directly impacted by the attacks or visit the Tribute WTC Visitors Center. In New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, tour operators created special tours to showcase the destruction. Joplin, Missouri, is between two highways that lead to the popular vacation destination of Branson, Missouri. On May 22, 2011, an EF-5 tornado came through Joplin, killing 161 people and leaving a path of destruction. Tourists, both curious and wanting to support the community, started visiting Joplin and asking the hotels and restaurants about the destruction.

Six months after the tornado, the Joplin Convention and Visitors Bureau printed a map of sites impacted by the tornado, while keeping tourists on the main thoroughfares. The map told visitors about the community’s recovery and the work of volunteers who have helped in the process. Yet there were many in the community who were not ready emotionally to welcome visitors. A Facebook group created by local citizens caught the national media’s attention on the emotional impact of dark tourism. The Joplin Convention and Visitors Bureau did not immediately reprint the map.

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Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism, also known as “voluntourism,” has become a recent trend in niche tourism. Typically, it involves organized groups who travel to an area to work on poverty alleviation, environmental restoration or research. Following a disaster, many tourists choose to use their vacation time to volunteer on recovery efforts.

While the circumstances are less than ideal, tourism organizations can use the opportunity to encourage visitors to come help with the recovery. In Tuscaloosa, Alabama, following an E4 tornado in 2011, the Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission helped direct people who wanted to volunteer in the recovery efforts to local groups that were hosting volunteers and answered questions. Many of the groups coordinated directly with Habitat for Humanity and local church organizations to organize their community service. In fact, the First Presbyterian Church of Tuscaloosa [created a handbook for mission teams](#) (PDF) to aid with tornado relief.

Appendix B: Additional Case Studies

Atlantic City: Open for Business

Media coverage of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 commonly showed part of the Atlantic City boardwalk being swept into the ocean—a portion that was north of the casinos and had been closed to pedestrians for years. The casino resorts all were open for business within five days of the storm. However, within days of the hurricane, organizers of nine events scheduled at the convention center and 90 meetings booked at 12 of the casino resorts had canceled their events. This resulted in the loss of 13,000 room nights and \$30.7 million in delegate spending.

In response, the Atlantic City Convention and Visitors Authority quickly spread the word that Atlantic City area attractions and meeting facilities were open for business. The Atlantic City Alliance reintroduced its “Do AC” (Do Atlantic City) campaign with new images of undamaged landmarks and the boardwalk in television, billboard and print ads. In addition, it undertook social media campaigns in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore markets, all of which are within driving distance.

Additionally, the city’s 12 casino resorts funded a \$1 million campaign to attract new meetings and convention business for the city for 2013. The campaign offered financial incentives to all new tour groups and meetings that signed contracts and held events in 2013 that generated a minimum of 1,000 room nights. Incentives included transportation from the airport, receptions, rent and electric bills to decrease the meeting and event costs.

Oil Spill Economic Impacts on the Florida Shore

Having recovered from Hurricane Ivan (2004) and the economic downturn, Escambia County, Fla., which includes Pensacola Beach, was prepared for a thriving tourism season in 2010. Then in April, the Deepwater Horizon well began leaking oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Tar balls were first reported on Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key, with oil reaching Pensacola Beach on June 23. NOAA expanded the fishing closure zone to include Northwest Florida waters and “Oil Impact Notices” were placed along all 52 miles of county beaches by the Escambia County Health Department.

Tourism activity dropped significantly as a result. Compared to 2009, hotel bookings dropped 23 percent in June and 16 percent in July. Lodging revenues in June dropped 14.7 percent in Escambia County, with an overall downturn for June through August, 2010, of 17 percent compared to the same period in 2009. Businesses experienced 50-80 percent revenue losses during the Independence Day weekend, historically the busiest time of the tourism season. Some businesses never recovered.

The tourism industry approached the issue with marketing tactics that would yield long-term results and grow the tourism industry overall. For example, it:
Created an “Oil Spill Update” hot button to provide visitors the most current information.

Developed a blog, “Curious About Our Coast,” to provide daily updates from the beach, including unedited photos, videos and reports from the health department.
Introduced an “Invite a Friend” campaign that gave away a free trip (including airfare, lodging, meals and attraction tickets) to friends and family to visit residents.
Made personal follow-up calls between August 2010 and April 2011 to the more than 100 media outlets that visited the Pensacola Bay area to cover the spill.

As a result, lodging revenues started increasing in September 2010, climbing 17 percent over 2009 and increasing each month for the remainder of 2010. From April 2010 to April 2011, there were over 32,000 views on the Pensacola Bay Area Convention and Visitors Bureau’s Facebook page, \$3.1 million in positive media coverage and over 770,000 visits to visitpensacola.com. While there was a significant economic impact over the summer of 2010, overall, the tourism industry rebounded in time for the 2011 season. For more information on the strategies, visit the [Pensacola Bay Area Convention & Visitors Bureau’s oil spill recovery page](#).

Missing Person Incident Impacts Island's Tourism Industry

On May 30, 2005, Alabama student Natalee Holloway disappeared while on a senior class trip in Oranjestad, Aruba. The community did not have a spokesperson identified; without a source to provide accurate and updated information, the media followed any leads they found.

This led to some inaccurate stories and a negative image for the Aruba tourism industry. In support of the family, Alabama governor Bob Riley called for a boycott of travel to Aruba and asked his fellow governors to join him.

The Aruban government hired a crisis communications firm in the United States to clarify information and speak to various markets, including with members of the United States Congress. According to Jorge Pesquera, former president and CEO of the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association, the lessons learned from that experience include:

- Designate one or several spokespersons for the community. In this case, they were from the police department and the attorney general's office, plus elected officials. The elected officials indicated that the event was being taken seriously and that they fully supported the case's investigation. Spokespersons should be practiced in crisis communication.
- Any information that can be shared should be provided, along with updates on a regular basis. For example, the Aruban police could discuss the assistance the FBI was providing in the investigation.
- Use an official setting for press conferences and include positive, honest messages that express confidence in those involved in the investigation and the commitment to solving the case.

National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library Moves to Higher Ground

Five buildings of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library were damaged in the flooding of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that occurred in June of 2008. Fortunately, about 80 percent of the museum’s collection survived the flooding. But with the damage to the building, the museum could not reopen immediately.

From October 2008 to December 2009, an exhibit and the museum store relocated to the Lindale Mall, a local shopping mall that was also the temporary home of the Cedar Rapids Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. The storefront location allowed the museum to remain connected to the community and earn revenue from retail sales.

In 2011, the museum building was moved approximately 480 feet to higher ground. The museum reopened to visitors in July of 2012, just over four years after the flood. Available at the museum’s website are both [the story of the museum’s flooding](#) and [the story of the building relocation](#).

The Ohr-O’Keefe Museum Travels, Relocates, Then Rebuilds a Permanent Home

The Ohr-O’Keefe museum in Biloxi, Mississippi, was in the process of constructing a six-building complex when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. The complex originally was scheduled to open to the public in July of 2006. But after Hurricane Katrina, the museum operated for 14 months in a 256-foot trailer, which traveled to schools to provide arts programming. In October of 2006, the museum relocated to a vacant historic home that was owned by the City of Biloxi. Museum leaders later signed a contract to rebuild the facility, the first part of which opened in November 2010 and the second part in September 2012.

Restoring Historic Properties

Galveston Historical Foundation (GHF) manages a dozen historic properties that highlight the region's architectural, cultural and maritime heritage. While the properties primarily are museums, a number also are used for weddings, family reunions and other special events. These special events provide income for the foundation, as do the retail shops in the museums.

When Hurricane Ike struck Galveston in September 2008, it caused significant damage to the historic properties managed by GHF. All of the properties were closed for a long time after the storm, and hourly staff were laid off for a period. All deposits on events scheduled during the closures were returned. This resulted in a loss of income for at least six months (though some events were rescheduled).

GHF was eligible for government assistance for clean up and rebuilding of its properties, but gift shop items lost or damaged were not covered either by federal aid or by flood insurance. Recovery would have been a challenge without a healthy endowment, foundation grants and a capital campaign.

Fortunately, foundation staff was able to protect the organization's server so that the database was available after the storm. Within in two weeks of Hurricane Ike, the foundation sent out an urgent appeal for donations. To compensate for limited phone service, GHF worked with partners in Austin to communicate with stakeholders, members and the public. The campaign provided enough income to fund several months of operations. As a result, GHF was able to retain all of its 40 full-time employees and consistently make payroll. Though GFH expected to lose members from the closures, it gained donations instead.

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