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Tourism crises: management responses and theoretical insight, E. Laws, B. Prideaux (Eds.). The Haworth Hospitality Press, New York (160pp), 2005, ISBN: 0-7890-3208-2

The tourism industry has faced a number of high profile crises at the close of the 20th and early part of the 21st centuries. The editors of this volume define a crisis as ‘An event, in whatever form it occurs, that creates a shock to the tourism industry resulting in the sudden emergence of an adverse situation’ (p. 1). Events usually (although not exclusively) arrive in the form of disasters (both human and natural in origin), examples of which include the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the terrorist attack at Luxor, Egypt in 1997. Tourism Crises: Management Responses and Theoretical Insight is one of a number of texts to appear in recent years that aim to assess the way in which the tourism industry is impacted by and responds to crises (see also Glaesser, 2003; Henderson, 2007). This volume consists of twelve journal articles which first appeared as a special issue of the Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing (vol. 19(2–3)).

In the opening chapter the editors provide a useful introduction to tourism crisis management by reviewing current literature. Within this chapter they address the problematic nature of some of the key terms used in crisis management and provide their own typology of crisis terminology. Importantly they highlight that it is not just the initial event that can have severe repercussions for the tourism industry but also the nature of the response.

Chapter two, by Peters and Pikkemaat, provides the first in a series of case study based chapters focusing on destinations that have been impacted by crises. This chapter analyses the avalanche disaster which struck Galtuer, Austria in 1999 and applies Faulkner’s (2001) six-phase disaster management framework. Their analysis, although not particularly revolutionary, highlights how issues such as antiquated infrastructure and dissonance between planning experts can lead to weaknesses in the response to any emergency and that disasters inevitably act as a catalyst for the implementation of new safety and security measures.

There is a focus within this book on three particular crises: the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001, the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) pandemic and the September 11th terrorist attack. Chapters three, four and five primarily focus on the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak on Scotland. Chapters six, seven and eight analyse the impact of September 11th on the Canadian, American and Washington tourism industries, respectively. Chapters nine and ten then provide a focus on the impact of SARS, utilising Hong Kong and Japan as case studies. While some of the literature used in these chapters is repetitive and some statistics contradictory, when read together a number of interesting themes emerge. In particular, these chapters highlight the paradoxical role that both government and the media can play in crisis management, as they not only play an important role in helping to ameliorate the crisis but can also inadvertently help to intensify and prolong them.

Cooper’s study of the impact of SARS on Japanese travel patterns (chapter 10) highlights this well by discussing the negative role both the media and the World Health Organisation played in spreading fear and panic during the crisis. He states ‘... the end result was that SARS Panic, rather than SARS itself, is in fact what had a devastating effect on many businesses worldwide, especially business in the tourism sector’ (p. 123).

McKercher and Pine’s study of the impact of SARS on Hong Kong (chapter 9) complements this point by highlighting how fear led to the implementation of draconian measures to manage travellers across South East Asia as governments attempted to control and eradicate the disease.

Three chapters focus on the management of the foot and mouth crisis in the UK (with a particular emphasis on Scotland). These chapters provide an interesting insight into the position of the tourism industry within the decision making process of a developed nation’s government. During the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001 the UK government implemented a raft of measures that limited access to the countryside in an attempt to halt the spread of the disease. This had a devastating effect on the UK’s rural tourism industry as people were stopped (either physically or perceptually) from visiting the countryside. In the aftermath of the disease the tourism industry was also largely overlooked when compensation was being awarded.

The last two chapters are perhaps the most interesting and (arguably) valuable as they challenge traditional concepts and thinking that surround tourism crisis management. In Ross’s penultimate chapter he examines the impact of work stress on individual organisations and their employees. This is an important chapter as the study helps broaden the perspective of what constitutes a crisis by highlighting that not all crises facing the tourism industry are high profile, global events.
The final chapter by Scott and Laws argues for the adoption of a system’s approach as a way of understanding the impact of crises on the tourism industry. They ground their argument in the notion that as tourism is a fragmented industry destinations can be perceived as a network of interacting organisations. This chapter is perhaps one of the most interesting as it challenges the traditional view that post crisis destinations merely “return to normal” (p. 157). What the authors contend is that crises are significant agents of change and that they can have a positive impact on destinations through the increased co-operation and networking that takes place between affected organisations.

As with many books derived from special issue journals the chapters are presented in their original format and there appears to be little in the way of additional editing during the transition from journal to book. This has inevitably led to some rather repetitive literature reviews and recommendations. The limited scale and scope of the case studies included in this volume is also a weakness. In their opening chapter Laws and Prideaux identify the wide range of events that can impact upon the tourism industry at different levels (from local to global). The case studies included in this volume tend to focus primarily on the impact of a limited number of crises (particularly the foot and mouth outbreak, SARS and September 11th) and on destinations in the developed world. The inclusion of studies focusing on more diverse destinations (especially those in less developed destinations) and on a wider range of scales would help provide the reader with a more rounded view of the problems faced by the tourism industry at the beginning of the 21st Century.

However, this volume does provide a much needed academic perspective on crisis management that some previous books lacked (see, for example, Lynch, 2004). This volume will appeal to those looking for a text which goes beyond an introduction to crisis management and the case studies contained in it have the potential to be used as excellent teaching aids in helping generate classroom debate.

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