

Tourism and Crime – Why Tourists become Victims

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Introduction

Frequently, the increase of crime in tourist destinations is connected into deeper socio-economic problems. These give an image of insecurity that directly or indirectly affects the decision-making process, and the destination choice.

Tourists are less likely to pay attention to security issues while on vacation, and more willing to take risks, or to visit unfamiliar environments. In fact, tourists seek to rest and enjoy their leisure time; holidays are generally associated with tranquillity and a break from the negative aspects and events of everyday life. While in vacation, security becomes physically and psychologically a secondary concern, like Mawby said: “(...) in the case of tourism and crime it appears that risk exceeds fear.” This increases their vulnerability and exposure to criminal activities.

To understand the relationship between crime and tourism, we need to be aware that it goes beyond the mere sense of opportunism. The explanatory factors (causes and consequences) of this relationship are deeply cemented in ideological frameworks sustained by the tourist/host dualism. Indeed there are several theories which help to explain and clarify this link and which, in turn, will enable proactive and/or reactive measures to be taken in combating crime against tourists.

I - Analysis of the relationship between tourism and crime

Regarding the relationship between tourism and crime, there are two generally accepted points of view: The first establishes a direct link between the increase in number of crimes and the increase in tourists in the destination; the second considers that an increase in crime can be directly linked to the type of tourist found in the destination, since this typology is important in the categorisation of tourist experience and security aspects. Mass tourism is the most obvious example of this. There are

also other important factors in the victimization of tourists, such as ethnicity, the choice of accommodation type, age, whether on is travelling alone or with others, gender, nationality, among others. It should also be noted that studies of the relationship between crime and tourism seasonality have concluded that crimes such as thefts, robberies, kidnappings and murders increase dramatically during 'high season' periods when compared to other times of the year.

There are two categories of crime that directly affect travellers, namely:

- 1) Planned crimes (for example, terrorism);
- 2) Opportunistic crimes, with or without violence, against an unknown victim and from which the perpetrator has some form of gratification, be it economic, psychological or sexual.

Tourism establishes an interactive relationship among different elements: the tourist, the place, local residents, the tourism industry and services in general. Its growth leads, in most destinations, to a significant increase in security incidents, since it provides more opportunity for crime, especially economic crimes (e.g. theft, fraud)¹ but also crimes involving physical or sexual assault, among others. This is mainly due to six major factors:

- (1) Tourists are the preferred target because, in general, they carry large amounts of money or other valuables and often carry them visibly, in public, and in a relaxed way;²
- (2) Tourists are more vulnerable in a physical and social space that is not their own, and they often give out obvious signs that they are tourists (e.g. having a rental car, constantly using the camera, consulting maps, etc.);
- (3) The probability of a tourist reporting a crime to the local police is lower compared to a local resident;
- (4) Tourists, in general, ignore many 'normal' security precautions;
- (5) Tourists have difficulty identifying assailants or aggressors;
- (6) Tourists rarely return to testify in the case of criminal.

¹ The most reported crimes on an international level are: prostitution, pickpocketing, vehicle break-ins, fraud, organised crime and gang activities, illicit gambling, burglaries in accommodation, robberies in bars or other establishments, crimes on public transport (on buses, underground trains, in airport terminals, among others) and terrorism (Glensor & Peak, 2004).

² Tarlow (2006) calls these *CoD* – "Crimes of Distraction", the most frequent is the pickpocketing.

As a general rule, at least one of the following scenarios is present in the case of crimes against tourists:

- (a) The tourist is an accidental victim who is 'in the wrong place at the wrong time' and is thus an easy target;
- (b) The type of places that the tourist visits often leads to a greater likelihood of crime, for example busy nightlife areas where there is less policing;
- (c) Tourists are preferred targets of some groups, including terrorists, due to what they represent socially and culturally in terms of their country of origin.

II - Some perspectives in the study of the relationship between crime and tourism

In recent years, various psychosociological theories have been adapted to the study of the victimization of tourists:

- Social Disorganization Theory;
- Hot Spot Theory;
- Routine Activity Theory.

Social Disorganization Theory

There can exist three factors that leads to an increase in the level of crime in tourist destinations: (1) the attractiveness of the destination; (2) opportunity and (3) accessibility. The model of mass tourism development from the 1980's onwards brought social, cultural and economic changes to many tourist destinations which boosted the growth of crime against tourists. Thus, these authors posit three hypotheses:

- 1) Mass tourists are more often targets of crime compared to local residents;
- 2) Tourists are more likely to be victims of property crime whilst local residents are more often victims of violent crimes;
- 3) The number of victims of crime is directly influenced by levels of tourist density or urban growth in the destination at specific times of the year.

Criminal activities in tourist destinations are linked in large part to ethnic heterogeneity and urban growth in specific seasons (seasonality)³. When a community is socially disorganized due to urban growth, it will reveal a lower capacity for social control and for engaging in socio-cultural activities with tourism, which can potentially lead to increased criminal activity.

Hot Spot Theory

This has been one of the most commonly used theories to study the relationship between tourism growth and crime. It postulates that there are places (geographic areas) where tourism activities converge (restaurants, bars, discotheques, attractions, transport hubs) and which are particularly prone to incidents of tourist victimization. Ryan and Kinder (1996) call these areas 'criminogenic' locations, where tourists and criminals converge, and where there is a greater exposure to risk and insecurity and, in most cases, an insufficient number of police to ensure the safety of tourists. As an example, we may cite the case of Dade County, the most important area of tourist attractions in Miami, where around 29% of property crimes and 37% of violent crimes against tourists occur.

This theory considers that a series of conditions are generally unified to make tourists an easy target for crime:

- The 'accidental tourist' (being in the wrong place at the wrong time);
- The tourist industry 'provides' victims (due to lack of information about criminogenic locations);
- The tourist is seen as a specific target because of the ease of carrying out the crime and the low probability that an official report will be made;
- The tourist is considered by the criminal to be a legitimate target because tourists are seen as symbols of global capitalism, thereby making it justifiable to commit crimes against them.

Routine Activity Theory

This theory is based on the idea that a break in the individual's routine influences the subsequent degree of exposure to crime, namely by a decrease in one's level of alertness and an increase in one's sense of security. The theory assumes that there are three elements associated with the time and

³ This theory advocates that criminal behaviour is not caused by issues at the individual level, but is rather a normal response, by normal individuals, to an abnormal social situation, for example an excessive number of people in the same space.

space of crime: a target, an offender, and security. If these elements do not simultaneously converge, the likelihood of crime is lower or even zero.

According to this analytical perspective, the 'crime triangle' is based on a suitable target (less vigilant tourists, with more money, who are less compliant with safety norms and frequent places where they are unaware of the potential danger); a likely offender; and the ineffectiveness of security measures to prevent criminal acts.⁴

This theory supports the hypothesis that the increase of tourists in an area makes them potential victims of crime, when the level of security is reduced or ineffective. We consider, therefore, that this theory supports the existence of four elements that enhance the risk of criminal acts against tourists: values (visible and quantity); Inertia (lack of response from police or law enforcement officers); Visibility (exposure of the tourist-target); Access (proximity and access to the tourist-target).

Conclusions

The relationship between tourism and crime is an observable fact in most tourist destinations. There are differences, however, in terms of quantity and types of crime. In fact, all kinds of incidents can negatively affect the destination image and lead to a decrease in tourist arrivals, which will bring serious consequences in economic and social terms.

In general, tourist destinations are perceived as either safe places, or, on the contrary, as unsafe, regardless of their tourism resources. In the evaluation of safe destinations, it is important to note that in the conceptualization and management of security, particularly with regard to crime prevention, several aspects must be considered. Rather than taking a global perspective, a *glocal* perspective should be adopted. This means that what makes tourist destinations unique (culture, hospitality, infrastructures, attractions) also makes them particularly vulnerable. Thus, any measures to be employed should take this into consideration.

⁴ According to this theory, the sense of 'security' is not exclusively focused on prevention or repression from police, but at anyone whose presence discourages a potential crime – what Felson and Clarke (1998) call 'guardians'.

A decrease in crime in tourist's areas should be equated with measures to ensure the security and well-being of tourists, this includes:

- ♣ Sharing responsibilities through the different competencies within the public and private sectors;
- ♣ Adoption and compliance with standards and practical security measures (hotels, attractions, events);
- ♣ Implementation clear and objective communication with all stakeholders regarding the identification of potential safety and security problems;
- ♣ Control of possible risks involved in tourism practices and the provision of information on the support services available in cases of emergency;
- ♣ Existence of public and/or private forces, able to intervene and solve problems whenever necessary;
- ♣ Promote communication between local police, tourism authorities and representatives of the tourism and hospitality industry;
- ♣ Facilitate access to information relating to areas of higher criminality in tourist places in order to identify hot spot areas.

The measures to prevent or reduce crime, proposed above, just make sense, in our opinion, if we insist in education and training of tourists and host community. In sum, further research of this topic seems to be appropriate, particularly when the aim is to give tourists a feeling of greater security and simultaneously contribute for the viability, image, and sustainability, of a tourism based on quality.

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