Chapter 7
Safety and Security Perception as Strategic Issues for Hospitality Companies

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ABSTRACT

Safety, tranquility, and peace are a necessary condition for prosperous tourism, and security has been identified as one of the five global forces that will drive the tourism industry in the new millennium. Numerous studies have demonstrated that tourism destinations are heavily affected by security perceptions and safety and risk management. In this chapter, the reader may learn about the theoretical models and empirical evidence behind the assertion that security should be seen as a strategic issue not only by tourism destination managers but also by hospitality managers. By the end of the chapter, it will become evident that hospitality managers should take actions in terms of providing their guests higher levels of real and perceived security, as this will be not only ethically right as it will have a positive impact on the company’s profitability.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism and security are inevitably interconnected phenomena, as security often emerges as the determining factor in the choice of a given destination (Boakye, 2012; Pizam and Mansfeld, 1996; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998b). In literature, the words ‘safety’ and ‘security’ are often used as synonyms, although the two concepts differ in their approach. According to Enz (2009), the concept of ‘safety’ in hospitality is related to the protection of employees and guests within the limits of the property, against any injuries or deaths. In this way, the concept of ‘safety’ normally addresses the effects of accidents, hazardous materials, and fires inside the hotel. Among the ‘safety’ devices that tend to exist in hotels are the fire protection systems, the prohibition of smoking in the rooms, smoke/fire detectors, security cameras, and safety instructions. In turn, the concept of ‘security’ goes beyond the protection of staff and guests, while also concerned with the safety of guests’ property and the security of the hotel itself. This concept includes issues related to robbery and violent crime, thus having a wider scope/coverage. In the present work, the word ‘security’ refers to its more comprehensive concept.

Security issues related to terrorism, war, crime, political instability and disrespect for human rights tend to constitute barriers to the decision to travel and affect the decision-making of tourists when choosing a destination (Hall et al., 2004; Pizam and Mansfeld, 1996; Saha, Su, and Campbell, 2017). Empirical evidence reveals that a substantial decline in tourist flows tends to happen associated with lack of security in the destination country (Frey, Luechinger, and Stutzer, 2007; Ghaderi, Saboori, and Khoshkam, 2017; Henderson, 2003). In other words, security is an essential prerequisite for the success of the tourist operation as tourists’ perception of risk has a significant impact on demand, causing insecure destinations to have difficulty attracting tourists (Seabra, Dolnicar, Abrantes, and Kastenholz, 2013). When tourists feel insecure in the destination country, they tend to develop a bad impression of that destination, and the spreading of that bad image in the various channels of information available on the internet, they can lead to a decline in future tourists (George, 2010).

It is not only terrorist and criminal acts that tend to affect the perceived security risk of a given destination. The violation of human rights also tends to negatively affect the influx of tourists into a country, which might even be greater than the negative effect caused by terrorist acts and political instability. According to Neumayer (2004), the occurrence of terrorist acts in a given country tends to reduce on average the flow of international tourists by 8.8%, while the increase of human rights violations tends to cause a reduction in the flow of tourists in 32%.

The issues regarding security in tourism are most relevant to hospitality managers since tourists and their lodgings are privileged targets for the accomplishment of criminal acts. Crime rate on tourists tends to be higher than that reported for national citizens (Albuquerque and McElroy, 1999; Boakye, 2010; Chesney-Lind and Lind, 1986) and accommodation choice is a crucial factor in explaining crime rates, as half the incidents reported to the authorities occur in these spaces (Barker, Page and Meyer, 2002). Thus, it is not surprising that tourists are willing to pay a premium in terms of price when the accommodation facilities show signs of increased security (Enz, 2009, Feickert, Verma, Plaschka, and Dev, 2006).