

In the Maldives, 20 of the 199 inhabited islands were totally destroyed by the tsunami, and many of the country's luxury resorts will be closed for months



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£600m) – but India is providing aid to other affected countries, including medical workers, supplies and cash.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has said that the recent events will have only a limited impact on world tourism. Among the reasons are the present expansion of tourism in the region and Asia's capacity to deal with crises. An emergency assistance plan for tourism was adopted at a special session of the WTO Executive Council on 1 February. The 'Phuket Action Plan' listed a series of measures to kick-start tourism.

"We're focusing on the human element in tourism – saving tourism jobs, relaunching small tourism-related businesses, and recovering the visitor flow that makes these economies work," says WTO secretary-general Francesco Frangialli.

In Thailand, Phuket and other areas affected by the tsunami are to be rebuilt in

line with strict principles of sustainable development and will be used as a model for future development in coastal tourism.

According to Geoffrey Lipman, president of the International Council of Tourism Partners and special adviser to the WTO, among the lessons to be learned is the need

return," he says. "In the short term, this is a human tragedy requiring urgent humanitarian aid. In the long term, structural changes and recovery will see the emphasis on tourism because that is where the revenue will come from."

Lipman adds that there is now an

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for national crisis systems, a global disaster alert network and better public education.

"Everything in these countries – the people and the infrastructure – is affected. However, the impact on the tourism industry is limited to three per cent of world tourism, in a part of Asia that has seen high tourism growth, in a market that is very resilient and where people will

opportunity to take a fresh look at rebuilding tourism along sustainable lines, not just replacing what was lost. Pressure group Tourism Concern agrees: "The hope is that as tourist facilities are rebuilt, this awareness will inspire the tourism industry to ensure more of the benefits go to local people to help them in the reconstruction they so desperately need."