

GOOD INTENTIONS?

New research published by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) shows there is still a long way to go to attract international visitors back to Asia. We take a look at its key findings

Conducted by Visa International on behalf of the WTO, the *Post-Tsunami Global Travel Intentions Research*, published in March, shows the tsunami has had a significant impact on the travel plans of potential visitors to Asia.

Up to 9 per cent of international travellers planning an Asian holiday in 2005 have switched their travel plans to other regions, while 30 per cent of those committed to holidaying in Asia say there are destinations they will not consider as a direct result of the tsunami. The countries worst hit by the disaster are also the ones most affected by these changes in behaviour, but stopover destinations – such as Singapore and Hong Kong – have also suffered.

The report highlights concerns about infrastructure and sanitation as key reasons why visitors plan to stay away – issues which could be addressed with targeted information and communication strategies. Safety concerns, including fear of lawlessness or the risk of another tsunami, may be harder to counter in the short term, the report says.

Some travellers, particularly those from Sweden, Canada, Britain and Australia, expressed a desire to holiday in the affected areas as a way of showing support to the local community and economy. However, others felt uncomfortable about holidaying in a region where local people are experiencing difficulties. To encourage more travellers to take the former view, the WTO has produced 20,000 stickers with the slogan 'Tsunami – Tourism Helps Recovery'.



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PHUKET YACHT CLUB, PHUKET, THAILAND



We were caught by surprise. It was quite early: 10am on a Sunday morning, the day after Christmas. Thankfully, we didn't have too many guests out on the beach. Some boys who are out there everyday were watching the sea and they realised something was not

quite right: they saw the sea drop and warned the guests to evacuate.

The position of the hotel is quite high up, so we weren't affected too badly. The only direct damage was to our beachfront restaurant. Across the beach from us, shops and restaurants were totally destroyed. We were really lucky, you could say. We continued operating but lost electricity for 30-odd hours.

In terms of tourism, we were very badly affected. In January, we typically have 85-90 per cent occupancy. At the moment it's around 20 per cent, so our business has been dramatically affected.

The main income in this area is from tourism and everyone is hurting. Staff usually have service charges to supplement their income, but without guests that doesn't happen. Some have lost relatives and possessions. We have tried to help by collecting money



The elevated location of Le Royal Meridien Phuket Yacht Club protected it from the tsunami (both pictures this page)

through Meridien. We're working through UNICEF at the moment and we're doing lots of things to try and support the community.

The tourism authorities are being very, very active, trying to restore everything and getting journalists and tour operators to come and have a look at Phuket, to see it hasn't been so badly affected. Phuket needs to be back in business and the Thais are being very brave. The future will depend on the media and on when people are ready and want to come back.