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In mid-January, the death toll for Thailand stood at 5,303, of which 1,354 were foreigners. Another 8,500 people were injured. The estimated loss incurred due to structural damage is 30 billion baht (US\$769.2m, €586.6bn or £402.5bn).

Estimated loss of tourism income for 2005 is 43 billion baht (US\$ 1.1bn, €840m or £575m).

Immediately after the disaster, arrivals at Bangkok International Airport dropped 9.17 per cent (from January 1 to 16, year-on-year). However, unlike the SARS scare, the only areas that have been affected are those provinces directly hit by the tsunami: mainly Phuket, Krabi and Phang Nga. People are still travelling to other destinations like Bangkok, Pattaya, Koh Samui and Chiang Mai.

We felt the need for a better balance between reporting the crisis and reporting the recovery. TV crews rushed in when the crisis broke and then rushed out just as things were getting back to normal. The impression left behind in the minds of consumers was that the crisis was still lingering.

Six provinces were affected. Trang, Satun and Ranong have seen nominal damage and are fully operational, while debris in Phuket and Krabi has been cleared and most of the affected areas are



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operational. Phang Nga was the hardest hit province and has suffered serious structural damage. We’re estimating it will take at least a year to restore the province.

The crisis has presented a unique opportunity for the Thai tourism industry to embark on systematic and integrated tourism redevelopment of the affected areas. The government has pledged that all the post-tsunami development and reconstruction will be done in a sustainable manner. New zoning laws will be put in place to ensure the impact of development on the environment is minimal – we’re hoping this practice will be used in future development all over the country. Affected areas along the coast will be replanted with indigenous plants and coastal vegetation that will act as natural barriers and speed-breakers to waves. Every effort is being made to ensure that man-made structures complement natural surroundings.

Indeed, the tsunami managed to do some good as well. The water quality in the affected areas has improved considerably, now resembling what it was 20 years ago when development was at a low.

UDAYA NANAYAKKARA CHAIRMAN, SRI LANKA TOURIST BOARD



Sri Lanka still has much to offer tourists

The most recent tsunami death toll for Sri Lankans is 30,959, while the number of foreign nationals who lost their lives stands at 105. At the time the tsunami hit, it was monsoon season on the east coast, which is our low season. Of Sri Lanka’s 248 hotels, 137 were affected by the tsunami. Of these, 132 have

already reopened.

Tourist arrivals have dropped by 50 per cent. Before 26 December, arrivals had been increasing, resulting in a record number of visitors – Sri Lanka was well on target to reach 600,000 visitors by the end of 2005.

The Sri Lanka Tourist Board (SLTB) has launched ‘Bounce Back Sri Lanka’, a US\$320m (€244m or £167m) campaign combining international promotion of attractions unaffected by the tsunami with a rehabilitation and reconstruction programme designed to fast-track the development of world-class tourism facilities in beachside areas.

Over the next few months, more than 500 industry and media personnel will be invited to Sri Lanka as our guests and industry and consumer promotions will



be conducted.

The re-housing of people displaced by the tsunami and rebuilding of our beach resorts will be given top priority in the campaign. Fifteen zones along the south and east coasts will

now have proper masterplanning. Tourism is the life-blood of these towns – about 70 per cent were involved in the industry and it’s imperative we restore these communities as soon as possible. The estimated cost of the resettlement of people in beachside communities is US\$120m, while restoring the resorts is estimated at US\$195m.

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