

Practice papers

Editorial

This Practice section is devoted to a case study about how one hotel in Thailand coped with the aftermath of the tsunami that struck on Boxing Day 2004. One cannot help but be moved by such tragedies and this paper by Joan Henderson is a highly personal account of how people coped with the devastation and loss.

My own son returned from a round-the-world trip on Christmas Eve 2004. One day earlier, he had been walking along one of the beaches in Thailand struck by the wave — so he missed it by less than 72 hours.

I am slightly concerned that this section of the Journal has tended to focus on tragedy. In a recent edition we looked at how the media reported the death of tourists in a coach accident in South Africa. So I want to use this Editorial to do two things — first, correct misconceptions of what is meant by a ‘disaster’ and a ‘crisis’ and second, counterbalance the case study with some ‘good news’ about tourism.

In the tourism field, crisis and disaster are frequently interchanged as if they mean the same thing. A glance in any dictionary will show that they do not. A disaster is defined as a ‘catastrophe or event causing widespread destruction’ — so there is no

doubt the tsunami was a disaster. Whereas crisis is defined as a ‘turning point; a crucial or decisive point or situation’. Hence most disasters lead to a crisis, but it is possible to have a crisis without a disaster. We need to use these words more carefully.

Having got that off my chest, what is the good news? Well, that son of mine.. He had spent four months away from home in California, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia and Thailand and he came back from his travels with incredibly positive tales to tell about the places he had seen and the people he had met. There were some odd, scary moments — but then he did choose to go parachuting, white water rafting, etc. Overall, however, there is little doubt that he is a better person for his experience. Because he had walked on that Thai beach only four days before, no one in our family was better able to grasp the enormity of that tragedy than he. If people allow it to be, tourism is a mighty powerful teacher.

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