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# **RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CRIME AND TOURISM**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a general overview of the relationships between crime and tourism. Literature on crime and tourism is reviewed and elaborated to indicate the unexplored complexity of the relationships that exist to identify areas of potential research. Difficulties in defining crime are noted and the importance of appreciating the context of tourism in any understanding of tourist area crime is emphasized. Topics discussed include tourists as victims of crime, reducing crime against tourists and crime as an attraction. The great potential and need for future research in the area is highlighted. The paper concludes by introducing the remaining articles in this issue.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Travel has always involved some degree of risk and danger. As well as the often severe physical difficulties and dangers involved in moving across inhospitable terrain and the high seas travelers have also often been the victims of crime and violence. Travel along crude highways and on the high seas in previous times was done at one's own peril. Assault, robbery and persecution were the acknowledged risks of venturing beyond one's home territory and the borders of "civilization". However, historically, as far back as biblical times, there have also been injunctions to care for and deal honestly with sojourners. One of the main effects arising from the establishment of the various empires throughout history was the improved security for travel, especially trade (28). Not only were encampments of the Roman legions, for example, a physical

presence ensuring citizens and subjects with some measure of protection but they also established a common law for all Roman citizens within the boundaries of the empire. The protection and upholding of Roman law within the empire became a central expectation of the Roman citizen no matter where he or she might travel.

The World Tourist Organisation's study entitled "The Security and Legal Protection of Tourist" notes these factors as reasons why "one of the first codified sets of obligations to be established in law was that concerning the responsibility of the innkeeper for his [sic] clients and their possessions" (30, p. 2). This not only reflects the historical significance of all forms of risks involved in travel but also indicates the traditional obligations hosts have incurred for their guests. Hospitality, that is, has usually been understood to involve a duty to protect those who may be unfamiliar with the dangers of a new place, including vulnerability to various forms of crime and criminal activity.

Today, the protection of the traveler remains crucial, and for the destination as well as the visitor. Destinations that are perceived by tourists to be too dangerous or unstable can experience severe downturns in visitor numbers (e.g., Fiji after the military coup in 1987). In extreme circumstances world travel itself can be adversely affected. For example, during the Gulf War in 1991 a full 76 percent of European airlines, hotels and travel agents believed their business to have declined between 41 and 60 percent, while even in Asia and the Pacific 40 percent of respondents put the drop in that range (10). On a smaller scale, destinations with reputations for high general crime rates can also experience visitor downturns, or never reach their potential, especially in cases where tourists appear to be a target of particular types of crime (e.g., in the case of Florida,

31). Because of these potentially negative effects, businesses and governments involved in tourism, and those destinations reliant on tourist flows of visitor income have come to recognise the need to ensure the safety of tourists to their regions. In support of this concern studies have noted the disproportionate number of crimes committed against tourists as opposed to local residents (4). Additionally, the need to empower tourists and reduce their anxiety about becoming the victims of crime when travelling is also an area which warrants attention.

Of course, tourism itself has often been seen as the catalyst of crime either directly (through the criminal actions of tourists) or indirectly. Speculation about crime as a social impact of tourism (19) has been followed up by researchers such as Pizam (22) and Milman and Pizam (21) who have highlighted the perceived link that some host populations see between local crime rates and tourism. Interestingly, for many residents crime is one of the few perceived disadvantages of tourism although this is selective (17). In Liu and Var's study of Hawaiian residents only 37% thought that tourism had contributed to an increased crime rate, although certain types of criminal activity such as prostitution were thought by the majority to have increased because of tourism. Little empirical evidence exists for the link between tourism and crime rates although one exception was the study by Fujii and Mak which found a general increase in crime associated with increases in the proportions of tourists in a population (11).

This special issue seeks to explore some of the complex relationships that exist between crime and tourism. Crimes committed against tourists and the social and economic consequences of such crimes are of obvious

importance. However, to fully understand these issues the broader connections that exist between crime and tourism need to be understood. The following presents a discussion for understanding some of these connections. The discussion also serves to introduce and provide context for the articles which follow.

## CRIME

Crime, no less than tourism, is a difficult phenomenon to define. Chris Ryan, in an examination of crime and tourism (23, p. 173), uses a straightforward legal definition in which crime is "an action which is contrary to written or case law in either the tourist-generating or tourist receiving country." However, while legal definitions are useful some difficulties remain. For example, there is the question of *who* defines what is and is not legal and for *what* purposes? A revolutionary organisation may be outlawed, yet may not see itself as being criminal and may in fact label a government as criminal. At the other extreme an act by or against a tourist may be technically legal (and therefore not a crime) and yet may be injurious in some way and be ethically dubious and act to discourage further visitation.

Defined legally, a crime may also not always be an intentional act. In fact, ignorance of the law may well be one of the main reasons why visitors themselves commit crimes. So, while a legal definition provides boundaries for investigation it may preclude examination of behavioural and psychological factors that determine a tourist's susceptibility to being the victim or perpetrator of criminal activity. Cross-cultural differences in perceptions of what kinds of acts are considered to be criminal

complicate this even further. For example, cultural interpretations of and sanctions against sexual harassment vary widely by culture.

As well as cultural differences there are also individual or subjective differences in understandings of what is criminal and what is not. Particular individuals, for example, may not perceive an act they commit as a crime despite it being marked as such by law. A black market money-changer may see nothing wrong with offering such a service to visitors (and, similarly, the visitor may see nothing wrong in receiving the service) despite it being clearly illegal. It may be viewed by the participants as a "victimless crime" and therefore not "really" a crime at all. This raises issues that go beyond legal definitions and instead focus on the criteria and values that underpin the making and breaking of laws.

While this brief, and far from exhaustive discussion of the difficulty with definitions of crime should encourage caution in any study of crime and tourism, particularly when interpreting "objective" data, it does not imply that the relationship cannot be adequately and usefully understood. "Fuzzy" definitions and relationships may be a necessary and even desirable feature of research on tourism (7) or of social science itself if full accounts of the phenomena are to be given.

The following discussion outlines some of the more important aspects of this relationship. It is assumed that no aspect can be understood completely in isolation from the others. However, at least initially, this should not prevent (and should in fact encourage), specific research efforts into the different aspects, as well as between these various aspects.

## THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM

Tourism's relationship to crime is unique because of the context of tourism itself. Tourism, by definition, requires the movement of individuals or groups from their usual area of residence to a different locale (16). As a result, in many cases, tourists find themselves in novel and unfamiliar social, cultural and environmental contexts, which lack familiar cues and constraints (7). This placement of tourists outside the bounds of their "normal" or "ordinary" reality may result in increased vulnerability to crime through the inability to assess accurately situations of risk. Additionally, the staged authenticity or containment of touristic attractions, activities and facilities can lead to an artificial sense of safety. This may further exacerbate the chance that tourists become victimised.

Potentially, the context of tourism may also serve as a catalyst for crime. As the most prevalent form of face-to-face intercultural contact in contemporary society (9), tourism has been implicated in the introduction of foreign values and patterns of consumption. The adoption of these foreign values and patterns of consumption by host nationals is often referred to as the "demonstration effect". The demonstration effect may serve to undermine traditional systems of authority and social regulation (6), which in turn, may be associated with higher levels of criminal activity as host nationals turn to illegal means to achieve their desired objectives (1).

The context of tourism may also lead to the economic distance between tourists and host nationals being artificially widened. Tourism, for many tourists, is a discrete event, which requires adequate amounts of discretionary income to facilitate travel (24). Holidays are often saved for for a

considerable period of time, and spending patterns while on site often exceed those normally engaged in at home, thus leading to the impression by host nationals that all tourists are wealthy. Tourism, particularly mass or charter tourism, often results in "ghettos" of these apparently wealthy tourists. This perception that all tourists are wealthy may exacerbate the ideology that tourists are "fair game" for criminal victimisation. The policing of these highly visible and concentrated "targets for crime" may be difficult and restricted, as it is counter to tourists' expectations of relaxation and freedom at a site.

Due to the temporary duration of tourists' visits, and the superficial nature of their contact with host nationals, tourists potentially comprise an "out-group" within the host community. Social psychologists have consistently found that people tend to like their own in-group and dislike members of those groups (the out-groups) who are perceived as in some way competitors or opponents. Characteristically, out-group members are seen to be inferior, contemptible and weak and to blame for in-group troubles (20). As members of an outgroup, tourists may be more "acceptable" targets for crime than members of the in-group (comprising members of the host community). Related to this in-group-out-group differentiation, tourists' lack of position within the host community may denote tourists as highly visible marks for political, religious or "deviant" groups seeking to enhance their cause or profile, as was seen recently in the kidnapping and subsequent murder of a Western tourist in northern India. Additionally, tourists may be easily identifiable representatives of disliked foreign powers, races or societies, again exposing them to possible crime and persecution.

## TOURISTS AND CRIME

Most often, concern about crime and tourism focuses on tourists as victims of crime. Over recent years there have been several well publicised international cases in which tourists have been the deliberate targets of crime. Some of these have involved politically motivated terror campaigns (e.g., Egypt) in which tourists are targets both because of their symbolic role as representatives of foreign cultures and because of the host regime's perceived economic reliance on the tourism sector. Attacks on tourists also, of course, guarantee international publicity for any terrorist act since they are by definition residents of foreign locales. At other times (e.g., Florida) tourists simply represent easy prey (as noted above).

The popularity of destinations will in part depend on the extent to which they are perceived as places which are safe and even welcoming. But this is not to say that tourists will necessarily avoid places that are perceived as dangerous. Increasingly, touristic activities that seek out risk and danger are becoming popular (e.g., 2). Furthermore, at some destinations other attributes may make the risk appear worthwhile to the individual tourist or group of tourists. Knowledge of widespread petty theft, for example, may not discourage very many tourists from visiting a destination that has unique attractions particularly if relatively easy precautions can be taken to avoid theft (see below).

As research on risk perception has shown (15), people's estimates of risk (including personal risk) are often very different from objective judgments. According to cognitive and social psychologists this is because estimates of risk involve the use of a variety

of heuristics, some of which may end up either underestimating or overestimating likely risks (25). For example, the so-called "availability heuristic" describes the tendency to over-estimate the likelihood of an event happening the more easily instances of the event can be imagined or brought to mind. Thus, media emphasis on crimes against tourists may lead to tourists (and others) overestimating the risk tourists are taking in visiting a particular destination. That is, actual levels of crimes may not be particularly high. Obviously, availability of correct information relating to rates of crime (perhaps compared to those of the origin country) would be an important factor in influencing risk perceptions.

Conversely, people are also known to underestimate the chances of a hazardous event happening to themselves. As Slovic et al (25, p. 20) note, research "shows that the great majority of individuals believe themselves to be better than average drivers, more likely than average to live past 80 years old, less likely than average to be harmed by products that they use, and so on." Similarly, when people hear of other people being exposed to negative outcomes there is a general tendency to make what are known as defensive attributions (29). That is, there is a tendency to attribute the cause of a negative outcome to some feature of the individual involved (such as carelessness) or some very rare circumstance. Compounding the biases of these heuristics is the tendency to have greater than objectively warranted confidence in judgments made using them (25). Even experts are vulnerable to this over-confidence.

In any attempt to reduce the risks tourists take account should be taken of these tendencies. If these tendencies are ignored educational efforts could be wasted.

As Ryan has emphasised, the relationship between tourists and crime is multi-faceted (23). After discussing five types of relationship between crime and tourism Ryan constructed a "crime-tourism" matrix based on two dimensions: (i) Whether tourists are incidental or deliberate victims of crime; (ii) whether the determinants of the crime are intrinsic or extrinsic to tourism. This matrix combines tourists' roles as victims, participants and catalysts for crime and underlines the connections between these roles. Tourism and the motivations of tourists, therefore, can provide the seed-bed for crimes to occur (both those committed by the tourist and those in which the tourist is an incidental or deliberate victim). So, for example, the self-indulgence sought by tourists can lead to a demand for criminal activity (e.g., prostitution, see 26-27) while the relaxed and "off guard" nature of being on holiday that is associated with the same self-indulgence can itself leave the tourist open as an easy target for criminal activity. Ryan also distinguished the sense in which tourism may encourage crime in general because of the deliberately low key security aimed for at tourist destinations so as to minimise interference with the relaxed tourist experience. Crime that is encouraged in this way may not be directed at tourists as such but becomes possible because of reduced security and the presence of large crowds, etc. Ryan concluded with the interesting point that;

[t]he concept of a relationship between crime and tourism must recognize that both are derived patterns of action formulated by the social mores, cultures and economic systems that generate demands for escape from a current reality. From one perspective, both tourism and crime are

mechanisms of escape from a status quo. The difference may be within the social acceptability of the behaviour patterns evinced by each, yet both have their continua of varying degrees of tolerance by the wider society (23, pp. 181-182).

So the relationship between crime and tourism may be ultimately based on social processes that are the source of both of them. MacCannell, in his well-known account of the touristic quest for authenticity, suggests that this quest is initiated by the increasingly fragmentary nature of modern society which creates a sense of alienation for many tourists (18). Even those tourists who are simply seeking rest and relaxation rather than authenticity or some higher goal are still using tourism as a means of tension reduction to alleviate the stresses of day to day life (5). Presumably, similar processes of alienation are at work in the lives of criminals and may be one of the causes for the crimes of which tourists become the victims.

Tourists are also seeking something other than the everyday and ordinary (12, 28) and so, in their role as victims, they are less likely to be focused on mundane issues of security. The imperative is enjoyment and constant concern about personal safety is antithetical to the whole notion of "being on holiday" and can be perceived as a continuation of the stresses tourists seek to escape. In this regard, the industry and host country often promote their roles in terms of taking care of the everyday details of life for the tourist, and so both must take some responsibility to ensure that an acceptable degree of protection of the tourist is maintained.

## REDUCING CRIME AGAINST TOURISTS

Crime against tourists has negative consequences for both the tourists and the host community. Aside from the obvious threats to physical safety should a tourist become the victim of crime, there are social and emotional repercussions as well. The host community/nation may also experience the negative effects of crime against tourists through loss of tourism revenue (should tourists avoid the destination), costs to the tax payer through the legal processing of criminals or health care for injured tourists, and a broad range of negative socio-cultural consequences. However, tourists need not be passive recipients of victimisation while on holiday; measures can be adopted by both the tourist and the host community to reduce the likelihood that tourists fall victim to crime. Kromhout reported the success of a project specifically designed to reduce crime in tourist areas (14). There was a 20 percent reduction in registered crime within a year of implementation of the project which suggests that much can be done to alleviate the problem.

One of the most visible measures to control crime against tourists is the use of special tourist police, such as used in Egypt (30). Another means of addressing crime against tourists is the introduction of more severe penalties for crimes committed against tourists. Both of these measures may have some impact in controlling crimes against holiday makers, however, their exclusive nature may result in resentment on behalf of the host community, which, paradoxically, could potentially result in further victimisation of tourists. The responsibility for addressing crime against tourists does not belong solely to the host community; tourists may be empowered with information and skills to reduce the

incidence with which they fall victim to crime while on holiday. Very pragmatic measures, such as warning tourists about "no go" areas in a region, informing them about illegal activities they may be subject to, (e.g., bag snatching or "scams"), or becoming involved with (e.g., prostitution or drug trafficking), or advising them of precautions to take while holidaying, may help prevent crimes against tourists. Additionally, as some tourists fall prey to crime, (or perpetrate crimes), through ignorance of cultural differences, cross-cultural training may have scope for reducing these "unintentional" illegal activities.

## TOURISTS AS CRIMINALS

Crime commitment against tourists by host nationals is not the sole domain for crime and tourism. Tourists themselves may set out to commit criminal acts while traveling (as opposed to "unintentional" crimes committed through cultural naivete). A wide continuum of criminal activity may be perpetrated by tourists. Many tourists engage in "lesser" forms of criminal activity such as the under (or non-) declaration of goods through customs, the importation of restricted goods (e.g., ivory) and black market money changing, to name but a few common, minor infractions. On the more extreme end of the continuum are those who travel with purposeful intention of committing serious criminal acts, such as drug trafficking, acts of terrorism and organised crime activities. Crimes committed by tourists can be "victimless" (e.g., under-declaration of goods through customs), victimise members of the host community (e.g., acts of terrorism) or target fellow tourists (e.g., fraud and petty theft). Particular types of tourism "specialise" in what might be illegal in either the country of

origin, or the destination country, or both (e.g., sex tours to Asia, "opium" tours in Northern Thailand). Thus criminal activity in the context of tourism, in some cases, has reached a stage of institutionalisation.

The reasons why tourists engage in criminal activity while travelling are multiple and little research has been conducted in this area. Anomie is likely to be a contributing factor; the sense that there is less "social watching" and a "here today, gone tomorrow" attitude often encountered while travelling (8, 13) may contribute to an environment which could facilitate criminal activity. The use of drugs or alcohol while on holiday may reduce inhibitions and affect judgement, thus also promoting a milieu conducive to the perpetration of crime. Economic factors (e.g., economic distance and the apparent "wealth" of many tourists), though more commonly associated with tourists as compared to host nationals, may also contribute to tourists committing crimes; some tourists may feel justified in preying on holiday makers who are more (apparently) affluent than themselves.

### **CRIME AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION**

Crime in the context of tourism need not necessarily apply only to the perpetration of crime; crime may itself serve as a tourist attraction. Mentioned above were institutionalized forms of crime as an attraction, such as sex tours of Asia, and the opportunity to partake of opium as a component of tours in Northern Thailand; engaging in the illegal activity forms the primary attraction or activity in the touristic experience. Former crime sites or scenes may also constitute tourist attractions such as the Tower of London, the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussauds and Port Arthur in Tasmania. Other tourist

attractions "celebretise" crime and criminals. Examples of this include "Jack the Ripper walks" in London, Ned Kelly tours in Australia, and more recently, "OJ Simpson" tours in Los Angeles. Similarly, war crimes displays, such as Dachau and Auschwitz concentration campus, have long been popular destinations for tourists in Europe. Crime as a tourist attraction is not unique to specific sites or scenes, entire destinations may be attractive to some tourists because their image includes danger and high criminal activity (e.g., New York City, Sicily, Brixton, etc.). Tourists may visit these areas with the hope, or expectation, that part of their tourist experience will include witnessing some form of crime. Many popular anecdotal travel publications comprise narratives of such encounters.

### **CRIME AND TOURISM: RESEARCH AGENDAS**

Anecdotal and journalistic accounts of crime and tourism abound, but despite the abundance of topics (of which only a sample are discussed above), there is a paucity of scholarly research in the area. This may be, in part, due to problems associated with the definition and scope of crime and tourism, as discussed above. Additionally, separating out the effects of tourism (and tourists) on crime at a destination from those of other general acculturative influences is difficult. Pragmatic issues also exist in the measurement of the economic effects of crime on tourism. For example, determining how much of an economic downturn in tourism is a result of perceptions of criminal risk on the part of tourists, requires careful conceptualisation and operationalisation. Crime's development and impact on a host community must also be contextualized within the destination's touristic life cycle (3), which again

poses challenges to research design and implementation. This special issue endeavors to address this dearth of study by

presenting recent research into issues related to crime and tourism.

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