



Article Title

Severe acute respiratory syndrome, tourism and the media [Summary]

Citation

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Abstract

There has been an assumption, based on trends from the last two decades of the twentieth century that global tourism will continue to grow. A number of events in the early twenty first century, however, have called this into question. Some of these have been natural occurrences, others anthropogenic, such as the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, which indirectly affected global tourism, and that in Bali in 2002, where tourists were the major target. The outbreak of the disease severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in early 2003 had direct and significant impacts on global tourism. This article provides an overview of the SARS outbreak and its impact on global tourism, and focuses on the role of the media in relation to the disease outbreak. Eighteen months on from the height of the outbreak, SARS appeared to have been checked, but there have a number of subsequent cases and of particular concern, it has been predicted that the disease will return on a large scale, and therefore a future research agenda is also presented.

Summary:

By late 2003, the SARS outbreak appeared to over and was actually declared over by the WHO in July 2003. The diagnosis of new cases in Singapore in September 2003 and in China in January and April 2004, however, called into question this declaration. Nevertheless, the outbreak was at its height during the first half of 2003 and caused major damaging impacts to global tourism in general and was particularly disruptive in a number of tourism destinations in both developed and developing countries.

In terms of the way SARS was reported, it also demonstrated the power of the media. It would appear that media focus on SARS followed the ‘issue attention cycle’ (Hall,

2002). Although the large-scale outbreak of SARS ended apparently in mid-July and media attention, as predicted in the 'attention cycle' waned, the emergence of new cases in September 2003 and again in 2004, returned the disease albeit briefly, to the focus of the media spotlight. Severe acute respiratory syndrome also raised issues about the reaction and responsibilities of national and international bodies. There are still many unanswered questions about SARS, however, including those relating to its impacts on global tourism. Therefore much remains to be researched about SARS and tourism and findings from such research should be particularly useful if (or when, as predicted) a major new outbreak of the disease occurs in the near future. Such research also should be particularly helpful with decision making in the context of other crises that may yet affect global tourism.

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