

Hotel Online

News for the Hospitality Executive

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Attacks shake London tourism, but officials urge travelers to keep their plans (The Washington Times)

By Donna De Marco, The Washington Times
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Jul. 8--The terrorist attacks in London yesterday rocked one of Britain's busiest destinations, leaving the city and country vulnerable to canceled trips and a downturn in tourism.

Tourism officials, however, are urging visitors to keep their travel plans.

The attacks came one day after London was named the host city for the 2012 Summer Olympics, which is expected to attract millions of visitors and generate more than \$2 billion for the economy.

"We will see a quite significant impact on travel in the short term, especially from American visitors," Alex Kyriakidis, the global head of tourism, hospitality and leisure at Deloitte & Touche in London, told Bloomberg News. "It took about 18 months for New York hotel occupancies to come back to pre-September 11 levels."

The U.S. travel and tourism industries, particularly in Washington and New York, took a hit after the September 11 terrorist attacks as Americans stayed close to home. But U.S. travel officials say the adverse effect will be minimal, especially from Americans, who have learned to live with the potential of terrorist attacks anywhere they travel.

"I think the impact will be minor, provided there are no other terror attacks," said Terry Trippler, an airline analyst. "The world has accepted this is something we have to handle."

"People are not going to stay home. They are going to continue to travel."

Stuart Carroll, owner of Carroll Travel in Washington, said some of his clients are scheduled to go to London in mid-August and stay at Russell Square, where one of the explosions took place. Mr. Carroll will wait a few days before he calls his clients to see whether they still plan to go.

"It's a personal decision," he said. "I would go ahead with my plans. If you don't, then you let these [terrorists] win."

Travel groups, including VisitBritain and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), are urging travelers not to cancel their trips to London or other destinations.

"Now, more than ever, people should keep their travel plans and take the opportunity to visit family, friends and new places all over the world in order to meet others, thus creating an international community of understanding and peace," WTTC President Jean-Claude Baumgarten said. "Not doing this would be to play into the hands of the terrorists."

The WTTC said such incidents have shown that a desire to travel helps tourism recoup.

Spain's tourism industry bounced back almost immediately after the attacks in Madrid, which killed nearly 200 people and wounded 1,400 in March 2004, according to a study by Exceltur, a trade group. The industry reported a 3 percent to 4 percent growth rate in the first quarter of 2004.

In fact, Madrid posted an 11 percent increase in tourists last year and Spain had about 3.4 percent more visitors than the previous year, Exceltur reported.

International tourist arrivals overall in 2004 were up 10 percent to a record 763 million people, the World Tourism Organization said.

Tourism was dampened in 2003 from the invasion of Iraq and an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, but gained momentum as a result of pent-up demand and increased consumer confidence, travel officials said.

In the first four months of this year, global tourist arrivals grew by about 8 percent, the World Tourism Organization said.