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An Analysis of crime statistics to tourist areas and non-tourist areas in New Orleans

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Introduction

The economic impact of travel and tourism to New Orleans, Louisiana is immense. In New Orleans, tourism is one of the leading industries which accounts for the city’s economic recovery in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Tourism was one of the major industries to the New Orleans economy and accounted for 35% or $210 million of the City of New Orleans’ annual operating budget (New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, 2008). Yet, tourism leaders and officials are plagued with the negative perception of crime as New Orleans tops U.S. cities as the murder capital of the United States (McCarthy, 2007). The negative perception of crime through the media, in spite of law enforcement officials and tourism leaders suggesting that the crimes are isolated to poor neighborhoods, deter leisure travelers and convention business from selecting New Orleans as a tourist destination (Tatko-Peterson, 2008). This study will examine the types, times, and number of crimes committed in the tourism police district as compared to other police districts in New Orleans to determine if more crimes occurred in the tourist police district than in other police districts. The results will be used to help New Orleans tourist organizations determine the best methods to address negative reports by the media and address meeting planners and tourists fear of safety.

Literature

Crimes committed against tourists effect tourism by damaging the destination’s image. Thus, Glenson and Peak (2004) found that “the most important prerequisite for a successful tourism industry is a reputation for keeping crime under control and guaranteeing tourists’ safety.” The media plays an important role in the perception that people have regarding a specific destination. Crimes are sometimes over reported or not reported in proportion that is consistent with the risks. Tourists contribute to these
risks by participating in what Glensor and Peak (2004) refer to as “vacation behaviors.” This includes participating in excesses and dangerous practices in sport and leisure activities such as driving, gaming, and drinking. Additionally, tourists carry large sums of money, visit dangerous locations at night, leave property in view, and look like tourists (Glensor and Peak, 2004).

Tourism, Crime, and Crime Prevention Theories

Limited theories and research are available to aid and explain the relationship between tourism and crime. In fact, Pizam (1996, pg 12) cites that “only a small number of empirical studies have explained the relationship between tourism and crime”. Schiebler et al. (1996) and Crotts (1996) recognized two theories called routine activities theory and hot spot theory to offer potential insight into the relationship between tourism and crime.

Routine activities theory states that criminal acts are routine activities for offenders. Three elements are required for the crime to take place: a suitable victim or target, a motivated offender, usually someone who has adopted a criminal lifestyle, and a relative absence of “capable guardians”—law enforcement officers, security guards, etc. to police tourist areas. The key to minimizing crimes, according to the routine activities theory, is increasing the presence of law enforcement in tourist areas.

The hot spot theory focuses on the locations which “provide convergent opportunities in which predatory crimes can occur” (Crotts, 1996). Ryan and Kinder (1996) refer to hotspots as “crimogenic” places containing bars, nightclubs, and strip joints catering to tourists. Tourists visiting these areas are more likely to be victimized by crime (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1999).

Crime and Tourism Studies

In order to better understand the relationship between tourism and crime, researchers have conducted studies that look at crime characteristics, tourism destinations most vulnerable to crime,
tourism destinations where a considerable amount of crime occurs, and the type and amount of law enforcement personnel located in these areas.

According to Prideaux (1996), a number of studies have been undertaken in an attempt to discover the effect that crime has on tourism; however, researchers have yet to succeed in identifying those elements within destinations which encourage an increase in criminal activity. To illustrate his argument, Prideaux (1996) presents what he refers to as “The Tourism Crime Cycle.” The basic assertion of “The Tourism Crime Cycle” is that crime is related to the image created and the type of marketing undertaken. Prideaux used two types of destinations to support his argument. He represented these destinations as Hedonistic destinations and Family Values destinations. Hedonistic destinations were represented as adult destinations where tourist could experience “…adventure, romance, escapism and sex.” Examples of Hedonistic destinations include Cairns and the Gold Coast in Australia. Family Values destinations marketed family vacations that consisted of activities for all age groups. An example of this type was the Sunshine Coast in Australia. The study revealed that the destinations marketed as Hedonistic destinations experienced more crime than the destinations marketed as Family Values destinations.

In 1993, as crime committed against tourist were hyped and sensationalized by the media creating the perception that this crime against tourist was out of control, there grew a need for more reliable data about crimes committed against tourists. Schiebler, Crotts, and Hollinger conducted a study that examined the prevalence of crimes against tourists in the most popular destinations in Florida in 1993. They examined serious crime incidents committed against short term visitors who did not maintain part time residences in Florida since that fit the closest definition of tourists. The authors also attempted to identify some of the correlation between criminal victimization of tourists and social and environmental factors. The authors used the “Routine Activities” and “Hot Spots” theories to examine causation.
Pelfrey (1998) used the Uniformed Crime Reports (UCR) of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to evaluate the relationship between the number of tourists visiting Honolulu and Las Vegas and the types and patterns of crimes over time. The research findings failed to adequately explain the variation in violent crimes from 1982 to 1993. The study failed to reveal any significant correlation among violent crimes in Las Vegas, while Honolulu showed an inverse relationship between the number of visitors and violent crimes. The study by Pelfrey (1998) suggests that factors other than the number of tourists may explain the variations in the relationship between crime and tourism in Honolulu and Las Vegas. It may prove useful to explore social, economic, and demographic factors present at these destinations.

These studies show that when tourists visit destinations where there is a high crime rate there is likelihood that tourists will become victims; however, the probability is different based on location. Deployment of law enforcement personnel may help ease the fears of tourists; however, their presence alone does not necessarily yield a reduction in offenses against tourists. As a result, in order to reduce crime against tourist, law enforcement must find ways to arrest and remove offenders and potential offenders from the equations.

Methods

The New Orleans Police Department does not collect information on crimes committed against tourists. Thus, an alternate method of data collection was chosen. The Uniformed Crime Reports (UCR) of the Federal Bureau of Investigation will be analyzed to evaluate the relationship between the number of tourists visiting New Orleans the types and patterns of crimes. UCR crimes include murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny or theft, motor vehicle theft, crimes against persons (Total of all crimes of homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.), crimes against property (Total of all crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson), and TOTAL PART I : Total of ALL crimes listed above. Crimes will be analyzed by police districts. The New Orleans Police
Department is divided into eight police districts. Each district is responsible for patrolling designated areas of the city as follows: 1st District: Treme and Mid-City; 2nd District: Uptown and Audubon; 3rd District: Gentilly, Lakeview, and Westend; 4th District: Algiers and English Turn; 5th District: 9th Ward and Bywater; 6th District: Irish Channel, Central City, and Garden District; 7th District: New Orleans East; and 8th District: French Quarter, Central Business District (CBD), and Warehouse District. The 8th District comprises the main tourism thoroughfares. Crime statistics will be obtained from crime maps on the www.nopd.com website by police district from January 1 - December 31, 2008 and 2009. A comparison of the total UCR and crime against property will be analyzed and compared for 2008 and 2009. These dates were chosen due to the high tourist concentrations and high profile events that occurred during this time period. The types of crimes, locations, times of occurrence, and number of incidents will then be downloaded into the Excel files and analyzed further in SPSS 15.0.

Findings

It is expected that even with the temporary increase in tourist population, person’s crime or violent crimes will be lower in the 8th Police District than in other police districts. This may be attributed to the increased police presence in tourist concentrated areas. Contrarily, property crimes may be higher in the tourist districts due to the general belief that tourists are lucrative targets, carry large sums of money and valuables, and tend to be more relaxed and off guard and sometimes careless while on vacation (Glensor and Peak, 2004).

Application of Results

Previous studies have shown that when tourists visit destinations where there is a high crime rate there is likelihood that tourists will become victims; however, the probability is different based on location. Deployment of law enforcement personnel may help ease the fears
of tourists; however, their presence alone does not necessarily yield a reduction in offenses
against tourists. Ensuring tourists that they are safe is essential for tourism to thrive in New
Orleans.

Conclusions

New Orleans’ brand, based on tourism’s economic impact, was estimated at almost $18
billion pre-Katrina (Marketing Plan, 2006). Further, the brand and its value were said to be
tarnished by the negative media publicity totaling tens of millions of dollars in paid advertising
equivalency. Countering the negative perceptions are costly, require time, and strategic
marketing. Combating crime is essential to recapturing the brand value of the city (Marketing
Plan, 2006).

In the wake of limited budgets and advertising dollars, effective crime prevention in
tourism requires the efforts of all stakeholders. Tourists must help prevent crime by displaying
behaviors that make them less of a target for criminals. Law enforcement can help to prevent
crime in tourist destinations by providing tourists with strategies and tips that decrease their
vulnerability to crime, and by being creative when deploying manpower to tourist areas. Each
destination must conduct an analysis of the strategies and responses that are ideal for their
respective location. Future research should focus on specific strategies employed by law
enforcement agencies in major tourism destinations.

References

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