

Tourism Recovery after the 2009 Tsunami in Samoa.

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Abstract

On September 29th 2009, the 8.3 magnitude earthquake off of the southern coast of Samoa in the Pacific Ocean generated massive tsunami waves resulting in severe devastation for many villages and contamination of their coastal areas. The disaster greatly impacted the tourism infrastructure, economy, environment, water quality and psychological aspect of the residents in the affected areas. The aim of this thesis was to examine the recovery of tourism after the September 2009 tsunami. The objectives were to: 1) explore the immediate impacts tourism businesses suffered from the tsunami; 2) identify the emergency responses that occurred in the aftermath; 3) explain the issues and challenges arising from the recovery process and; 4) examine the strategies and opportunities that tourism operators and relevant organisations are using to recover tourism in the district. This involves examining the preparedness programs for future disasters.

A qualitative approach was used to accomplish the objectives of the study. Four tourism businesses that were affected in the Safata district were selected for this research. Experiences and views of the affected tourism businesses were presented and analysed through media reports and document review, semi-structured interviews and site observations. Interviews were also carried out with key informants from relevant tourism organisations that were involved in the tsunami response and recovery efforts.

This author believes that this is the first tourism study carried out on tourism recovery after the 2009 tsunami and specifically a study which presents a tourism case study from the Safata district. It intends to provide insight on the issues facing the tourism businesses hoping to recover, as well as finding out their preparedness programs and disaster plans for future disasters.

Results show that there was no disaster plan for the tourism industry before the tsunami. The tsunami has caused severe damage to tourism businesses such as premises being demolished, equipment destruction, psychological effects and environmental damage. Results also show the rapid response of the local communities, government and overseas agencies. It was also clear that although the affected tourism businesses did not have any disaster plans before the tsunami, they showed willingness to develop and become proactive in implementing a disaster plan as a means of preparing for future disasters. This research will help tourism businesses and relevant organisations set strategic actions or procedures towards developing a disaster plan to prepare for and mitigate future disasters.