

WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO THINK IN A MOMENT OF CRISIS?

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION AFTER A DISASTER

How Can We Be Helpful?

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A handbook powered by Weeva

The first 24 hours after a crisis is a time of shock

As many of us experienced after the September 2023 earthquake in Morocco - it's hard to immediately know how best to respond. As an individual and as people who work in the travel industry, how can we best respond as to offer support to communities, the worst-affected victims, and consider what's sensible for the sake of wider wellbeing when we are thrown into an unexpected emergency?

Every crisis has its own set of challenges and sensitivities. We don't claim to have all the answers, and of course all advice is subjective. But we hope by sharing some of our insights, learnings, observations and expert advice — and not all will be universal or relevant — this handbook of sorts can share our experience of what might be helpful in a moment of need.

We wanted to share our learnings from our experience as many who had gathered for PURE in Marrakech, or who were on the way, to try and help travel industry colleagues, not if, but when this situation arises in the future so we can try and be most considerate of those on the ground and those most deeply affected.

In the immediate aftermath, it's hard to have perspective, especially if the destination affected has wiped out communications, or is in a remote area. Whether it's a natural disaster, extreme weather events such as wildfires, floods, a hurricane, there are short term, medium term and long term factors to reflect on.

We are sharing our learnings here from our experiences, as many who had gathered for PURE in Marrakech, and from input from those who were on their way, to try and help our travel industry colleagues, when this situation arises in the future how can we be most considerate of those on the ground, and those concerned from afar.

Day one: it is really hard to gain perspective, especially if the destination affected has wiped out communications, or is in a remote area. In the first moments of the aftermath of a sudden emergency. Whether it's a natural disaster, extreme weather events such as wildfires, floods, a hurricane, allow yourself to pause for a moment before you make any big decisions. As a business, you may have a crisis plan set up — if not: you need to have one ready. Speak to the professionals, and remember most situations require a tailored response. We hope you find the information helpful.

These guidelines and thought-starters, are for those who:

- Find themselves caught up in an incident
- Have interests in a destination hit by a crisis
- Have a connection to the destination — family, friends, property
- Want to help

Starter questions to consider:

- Are you safe? What is safest for you or your team?
- Is the situation stable? Are fires still raging? Is a hurricane still raging? Will there be aftershocks?
- What is driving your decision-making? Is it emotional or financial?
- What is your involvement in the situation? Are you due to be there for a holiday or for work?
- How will your involvement impact the crisis? Will you help or hinder?

*Travel should benefit the visitor,
and the visited,
and be a force for good.*

Four considerations to help you answer those questions:

1. SAFETY FIRST

Is the situation stable? In a crisis, governments usually advise all citizens to get out of harm's way and get home. Unless you're a trained medic, engineer, aid worker or you speak the language, you need to think carefully about your role. Giving aid by way of a donation to a dedicated appeal from a charity there on the ground may well be a more helpful response than trying to help.

Can you get out? How do you get out? What are the insurance implications of the position you are in? If you have travel insurance, the advice may be to get out as quickly as possible.

2. ASK: CAN YOU REALLY HELP?

Are you trained with a helpful skill? Are you a medic, a chef, a rescue worker? Do you have an organisation you can work with? In most cases, being on the ground won't help unless you are a qualified, emergency responder AND have means/outlet to provide your services. You do not want to put pressure on infrastructure — airport, roads, hospitals. If you choose to stay in a disaster zone, and it's considered safe, show deep humility, concern and compassion to those that you can, and give your time to a local operation or project if they're actively asking for volunteer support and you will be of genuine assistance and not just get in the way of search and rescue.

Keep in mind that best intentions, while understandable, may not help. At worst, depending on the situation, they risk virtue signalling — be sensitive to how you express yourself on social media. A stronger option than 'thoughts and prayers' and heart emojis, is the mention a reputable charity that people can donate to and share a trustworthy news source with reliable information about the event. Be careful not about the most inflammatory headlines because they may not be accurate.

FCO advice will vary depending entirely on each context. When it came to Maui, Hawaii's authorities discouraged inbound tourism during the crisis. As Paul Charles, CEO & Founder of The PC Agency, says "communication of accurate and up-to-date information is key," and in the case of Morocco, their economy is dependent on its thriving tourism industry and "it's incredibly important for visitors to be aware that travel to the destination is still safe and very possible. Foreign Office travel advice has not been changed. Despite this tragedy, Morocco will still offer as vibrant and exciting an experience as always".

The sooner you get some sort of message out, the better.

3. BUSINESS OWNERS - COMMUNICATE QUICKLY

In any crisis, we need facts first and foremost. Hotel and travel business stakeholders should appoint a spokesperson. You may want it to be you but stop and think about whether you are the best person to be talking about this situation: the messenger can be as important as the message.

The longer you wait, the worse it is. Even if you don't have full information, say something. "As of right now, we don't have any reported casualties. We will keep you informed as we know more."

Always focus on the facts. A crisis is not the time for guessing and rumours — but to anyone looking to your business for direction or comfort, you need to have a voice. Remember that every word counts, and everything is "on the record".

Read the room and get the tone right. Separate 'me' from the situation — and try and understand the situation as 'we'. It's good to let your nearest and dearest you're OK, but if broadcasting on a public platform try and show empathy and compassion for the wider community who may be affected.

4. CONSIDER SHORT-TERM HELP, MID-TERM SUPPORT AND LONG-TERM RECOVERY

Giving money is often the most helpful thing you can do

Be sensitive to what people on the ground want and always defer to and listen to them — they are the most impacted. Take the lead from a community about when they are ready — when visits won't take away from resources that should be diverted toward a crisis. Listen to the community and what they want. However, this assumes consensus, which there may not be.

Don't forget to spread good news

Encourage visits and for visitors not to cancel their holidays if appropriate and to focus on recovery and positive aspects of destination. It may not be in the week after, it may be months after. Too often, places are forgotten.

Promote tourism - if it's appropriate

After the Turkey and the Morocco earthquakes, the message from Intrepid was loud and clear — if you have a holiday booked to visit soon, think before you cancel. Postpone your trip, or check the lay of the land and whether it's affected — it may still be OK to go to the region you were planning to visit. Travel and its associated experiences are a huge privilege, and we have a responsibility to contribute positively to the destinations and lives of the people we meet. Tourism has the immense power to connect us to destinations and communities around the world, who share their home and their culture with us in what should be a mutual exchange.

What's *not* so helpful in times of a crisis?

Acting without thinking

When you are in or near an incident, you are not thinking straight. You are shocked, you are in trauma. It's hard to make a totally considered decision. It's better to make decisions when you are in a position to make them.

Speaking without advancing relief efforts

"Thoughts and prayers" if posted without action. Find good charities and highlight people who are being helpful. With the advance of social media, people feel like they have to say something. Unless you have something helpful to say, maybe you shouldn't say anything. Your heartfelt reactions are natural and warm, but they are often better shared with your friends and loved ones, not the whole world.

Spreading misinformation

Rather than sharing false information or fanning flames by reposting extreme headlines, instead direct people toward reliable news and trustworthy sources of information. Crises are moments when misinformation and disinformation gets out there. Be very careful about using unbiased, real-time news sources. Just because something seems interesting, doesn't mean it's true.

Sense-check you're turning to trusted news sources

Which media channels are most reliable can feel subjective — but the news sources regularly hailed as most independent and unbiased, with no agenda other than to provide factually-accurate politically-neutral information are the Associated Press and Reuters.

Criticising and judging

Engage in a conversation and be honest about what's clear-cut: There is not a cookie-cutter approach. There will be tough decisions, and things will inevitably be messy. Be forgiving of the decisions people make in moments of crisis.

Sharing unsolicited critiques or negative commentary in a time of tragedy and worry is not helpful — especially when public. If you feel your perspective is genuinely helpful, be sensitive to how you express yourself to those who might be doing their best. It is not a time to compete to be on higher levels of moral high ground. Message in private, and couch your advice with sensitive kind comforting words at a time which might be stressful for the recipient.

Our emotional response can drive us to say things which may be well meaning but can have devastating impacts. Don't jump into emotional responses, think of the desired long-term impact you want and then decide what to say and how to say it.

Wise words — how can we be helpful?

Today's news cycle is short, and in a year of unprecedented natural disasters, it is easy to forget about who's suffered what. Within a week of the earthquake in Morocco there had been another in Indonesia and thousands had died from the flooding in the fourth-largest country in Africa, Libya, which will not have had nearly the same amount of engagement from the international travel community. So, make a commitment as a traveller to support projects in the places you visit to aid in their long-term future.

“I have had the good fortune to work for the governments of Sri Lanka, Saint Lucia, Antigua & Barbuda and Haiti, but unfortunate to have had to communicate through the Haiti Earthquake, the Asian tsunami when I was in Sri Lanka, hurricanes, aerial bombings, suicide bombers, and cruiseship passengers held at gunpoint.”

You have this window when the whole world is looking, and everybody wants to give money, which is great but we also need people to book their travel to that destination - and soon no one will be listening.”

— Jean-Marc Flambert, Your Tourism Partner

“Outside of direct disaster relief funding and supplies, both requiring raising large sums of money, this is what we as a collective can and should do.”

Shortening the recovery curve involves countering the often very negative - and incorrect - story positioning by the international media, especially global news outlets, and establishing confidence in travellers by using our collectively local intelligence, knowledge and experience to provide solid advice on the continuation of travel plans or future bookings.”

— Joss Kent, CEO of & Beyond

And finally....

What is also clear is that these natural disasters are made worse by man-made problems and part of the unpredictable weather patterns from the climate emergency — so promoting responsible tourism is part of the same conversation.

Travel should benefit the visitor, and the visited, and be a force for good.

It is critical — and indeed a responsibility — for us as an industry,

to assist countries that have experienced any kind of significant crisis to get stable inbound tourism back on its feet in as short a recovery timeframe — or ‘recovery curve’ — as we can. The loss of trickle-down economics into the poorest communities, has a long-term devastating effect.

What is also clear is that natural disasters are made worse by human-made problems.

Promoting responsible tourism is part of the same conversation as recognising the symptoms and solutions of unpredictable weather patterns.

Keep raising awareness around the causes, context to climate emergency and help communities and destinations become more resilient and adaptable in response to future disasters.

Which charities to recommend?

Support companies and organisations that are actually in a position to help.

Often relevant and able to mobilise:

1. [DEC](#) – Disasters Emergency Committee is an umbrella group that pools money and resources. Big charities can get support out more quickly because they are mobilised and have the infrastructure and distribution. (They can hire the planes, the trucks, they can organise necessary resources more quickly.) Then when you know of verified grass-roots charities or initiatives on the ground, you may want to support them in getting finance for direct aid.
2. [Humanity & Inclusion](#) is an NGO working hard to ensure that people with disabilities and new injuries receive the specific care they need: “We expect a huge need for rehabilitation. There are thousands of injured people, and many of these injuries may worsen or turn into permanent disabilities if they do not receive appropriate rehabilitation services. In addition, people have suffered significant trauma and will need psychosocial support.
3. [Doctors Without Borders](#) – also known as Médecins Sans Frontières — is responding to this disaster through their teams working in northwestern Syria and are working with local partners on the ground.
4. [Save the Children](#) is one of the international charities mobilising support in the areas in need and helping children and families in the regions hit by this disaster where a crisis has hit an area already experiencing an existing crisis.

Recommended charities you know and trust, but if you’d like to do your due diligence, you can always turn to [Charity Navigator](#) for more information.

FOR MORE HELPFUL INFORMATION AND IDEAS...

Weeva is a sustainability management platform, which aims to provide the tech tools but also amplify messages that help make travel a stronger force for good. Listen to Juliet Kinsman’s climate podcast, Funny Old World, at [Weeva.Earth](#).

The PC Agency team specialises in travel and tourism crisis planning and management; they ensure you are prepared for the day you hope will never happen. Contact them via: hello@pc.agency

The Conscious Travel Foundation is a non-profit membership community that provides support for meaningful, positive impact travel; they have just published their Philanthropy Without Borders framework; theconscioustravelfoundation.com