

The
Sri Lanka
Tourism Alliance

Crisis Response Plan

Project 1.2 from the
Love Sri Lanka Resilience Plan
“ONE VOICE”



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This Crisis Response Plan was facilitated by crisis management expert James MacGregor.

1 Why does the tourism industry need a crisis response plan?



“Crisis events are inevitable.”

The potentially devastating impact of a national crisis on the tourism industry cannot be underestimated; millions in revenue are lost, employees are laid off, businesses may temporarily close or some

may even go bankrupt. Many associated businesses across the economy (fisheries, arts and crafts, agriculture, transportation, etc.) can also be adversely affected because of the scope of the tourism value chain.

Crisis events are inevitable. While most industries and businesses will be subjected to the adverse impacts of any major crisis, the negative impacts on the tourism industry can be particularly severe and the recovery more complicated than with other industry sectors. This is for the following reasons:

1

In most destinations the tourism industry suppliers are numerous and diverse in terms of product type, include small and large businesses, formal and informal and are widely dispersed throughout the country.

2

Clients are differentiated [by age, education, knowledge of the country, niche activity preferences, etc.] and are widely distributed throughout many international source markets and represent different cultures.

3

Virtually all of the various crisis types (e.g. natural/environmental, human, geopolitical/civil conflicts, health/epidemic, product deficiencies and technology) can have an instant effect on arrivals and can result in immediate cancellations and an abrupt loss of credibility and interest in the destination.

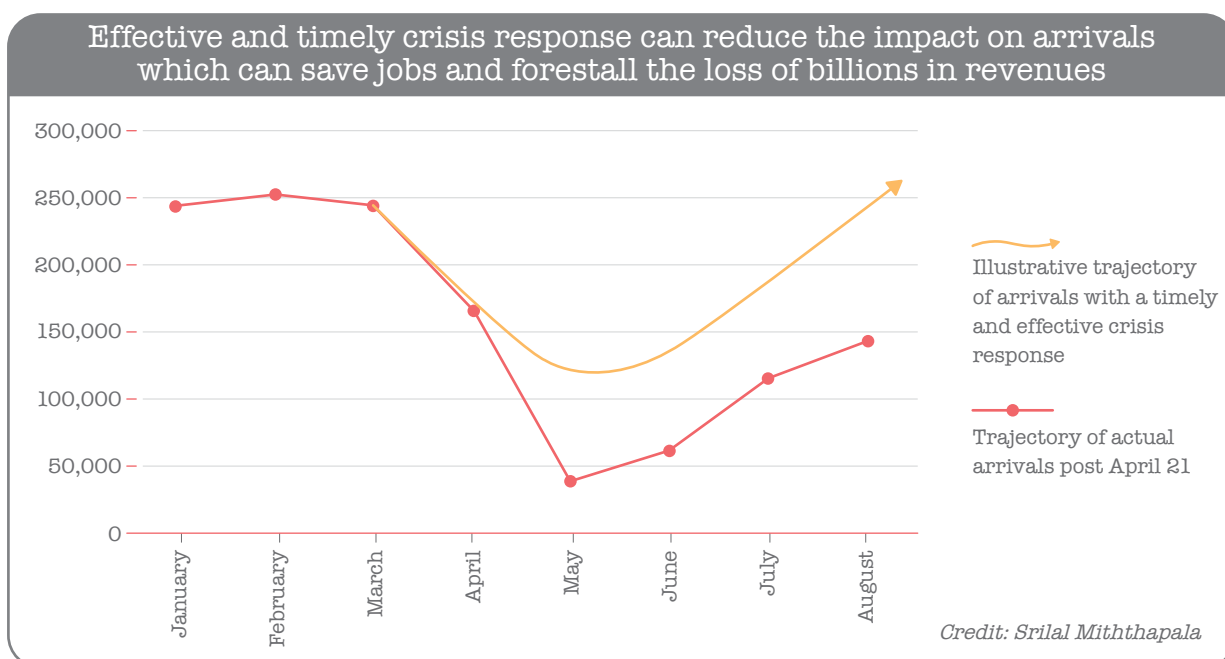
Even if the crisis only affects one small area of the country, the impact can quickly spread. This effect is often more significant in smaller countries where distances between regions are short, at least in the minds of potential visitors. So a local incident such as a flood or public demonstration can immediately be perceived as a national crisis.

The media can also play a role in presenting a false narrative of the crisis. While there may not be a malicious effort to present the crisis event as more negative than actual, there is often a tendency to sensationalize or overstate the impacts. This can be particularly damaging if there is no balanced characterization of the crisis and

a steady flow of responsible content from reliable sources such as informed travel professionals and appropriate government agencies.

Finally, the very nature of crises makes them hard to predict. The lack of a Crisis Response Team (CRT) with an actionable plan makes it far more likely that the response will degenerate into chaos, confusion and a lack of direction or leadership. This, in turn, fails to build confidence with news outlets, international travelers and foreign governments. This can amplify the negative impacts (such as through more travel advisories or more strongly worded ones) and extend the recovery period.

The Crisis: Arrivals



These diverse types of potential crises mean that a one-size-fits-all approach is not credible, yet it is critical to have a rapid, and managed reaction to any crisis. In response to these conditions the Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance (SLTA) has prepared this Crisis Response Plan with a well-defined team structure and identified activities in order to contain and reduce the negative impacts from any future crisis events.

Given that some type of crisis or disaster will eventually occur, as private sector operators we must ensure that we are prepared with a Crisis Readiness, Response (communication) and Recovery Plan in place to minimize impacts and set the stage for a rapid return to pre-crisis conditions.

Crisis response and planning as we define it in this document includes:

Pre-Crisis Activities (reduction and readiness)

Readiness for potential crises or risk events; assessing and preparing for the likelihood of occurrence; awareness and crafting a strategy to eliminate or minimize the risk; and,

Crisis/Post-Crisis Plan (response and recovery)

Identification of all available Response and Recovery Communication mechanisms and initiatives. Our plan will be managed by an authorized team leader and spokesperson(s) with problem-solving/ decision-making skills and direct relationships with all participants in the travel trade.

Under these conditions our document:

1. Proposes a Crisis Response Team structure and responsibilities to prepare for and respond to any crisis event affecting the travel industry in Sri Lanka.
2. Indicates the types of risks and vulnerabilities that can threaten the industry and identifies mitigating activities, and proactive measures.
3. Identifies the requirements of a comprehensive stakeholder and media database and provides training for maximum response capabilities.
4. Defines the individual response activities and responsibilities instantly following the crisis as well as post crisis recovery activities.
5. Provides technical tools and templates to assist rapid response from public and private sector stakeholders.

Crisis Planning includes two basic functions PREPAREDNESS and RESPONSE which will be delivered by the Crisis Response Team (CRT).

2

Who will respond?

The CRT will be structured as a small, effective force that will have the necessary capabilities to both prepare for as well as immediately assess and respond to any crisis affecting the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

Crisis response planning and crisis response will be delivered through One Voice: the Team Leader. The Team Leader will be supported by designated, trained spokesperson(s) and an industry professional knowledgeable about how Sri Lanka's agencies for safety, security and health function. Initially, we will require training and practice emergency drills to assure smooth and effective operation. Regular simulations will be important because of the need for efficient and cooperative interaction between national and regional private

sector tourism participants and all other stakeholders concerned with the management of the crisis.

SLTA will focus on creating a small, agile, private sector CRT. This does not preclude, at a later date, the creation of a combined private sector/public sector response team (see Annex II). Given our financial limitations however, we propose to first establish an operational CRT within the next few months as a dedicated private sector initiative.

CRT STRUCTURE AND MEMBERS

(to be selected by SLTA in coordination with SLAITO and THASL)



The CRT will be structured as a small, effective force that will have the necessary capabilities to both prepare for as well as immediately assess and respond to any crisis affecting the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

The CRT will be responsible for providing the overall leadership and day-to-day governance of the individual activities identified within the crisis response action plan.

The CRT's Team Leader or Crisis Manager will be the first individual to respond to a crisis. Either one is empowered to immediately contact and assemble the responsible members of the team in a predetermined location which will serve as the crisis response center. CRT members will mobilize at the center within hours of the onset of a crisis to:

- Assess the situation and understand the nature of the crisis
- Quickly establish priorities and respond according to their mandate as a CRT
- Review the Crisis Response Plan and begin immediate implementation
- Ensure that all victims are cared for and where possible, family members are contacted
- Ensure that all directly affected employees are cared for
- Immediately provide the media with honest and frequently updated information as it becomes available
- Establish our team as an authoritative source of information, controlling the message, responding to the crisis and containing it where possible

In advance of any crisis, however select team members will maintain constant

contact with appropriate government agencies to ensure that potential emergencies are identified, prevented (e.g. civil unrest) and/or contained (e.g. hurricanes and flooding) using available security means. Our team will also inform our private sector members of any impending follow-on effects such as potential riots and civil disturbances.

Team member commitments

Being a member of the CRT is not a full-time job. Initially a member may spend approximately 35-45 hours/year on those relevant activities associated with being part of the team with a focus of understanding crisis response and preparing them for diverse types of crises. All members must intimately understand the importance of their role and ensure there is adequate coverage in the event they are unable to respond immediately or are out of country. The institutions they represent must authorize their participation and commit to releasing them for their crisis response role in the event of an emergency.

Ongoing commitments before a crisis include but are not limited to the following types of activities:

- 1) Scheduled team meetings to discuss on-going security issues, security measures and response techniques and evaluation of procedures in other countries.
- 2) Participation in training programs associated with the crisis response for different types of crises, introduction to other Crisis Response Teams, 'new communication techniques, SOPs, crisis-based research in other destinations, etc.
- 3) Quarterly emergency drills [at least in the first year] simulating the activities of the response and communication teams in a variety of crisis situations.

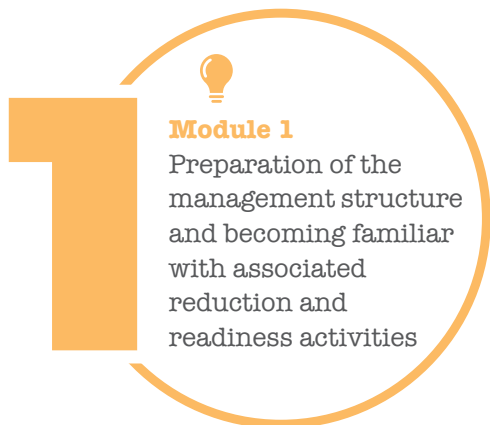


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How will we respond?

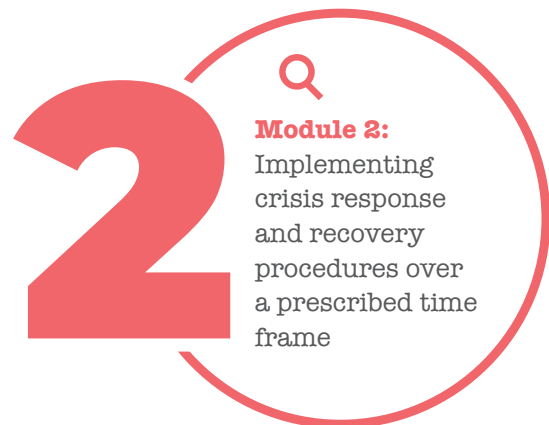
Our Crisis Response Team will initially identify and confirm the activities and team member responsibilities associated with preparing for and responding to a crisis.

Crisis Response Planning consists of two modules;



Module 1
Preparation of the management structure and becoming familiar with associated reduction and readiness activities

No two crises are the same. Therefore, each response and recovery process will have its own distinct activities, problems and require a range of knowledge and



Module 2:
Implementing crisis response and recovery procedures over a prescribed time frame

skills. We will however, be prepared to deal with all the various types of crises. Furthermore, once the crisis is over, cancellations reduced, occupancy rates back to normal and

tourist arrivals increasing it may still take time to return all operations back to pre-crisis levels. Consequently, we are prepared to provide additional support and technical assistance to government agencies, the regional hotel and other travel related associations, regional governments and communities.

Also, if there are victims resulting from the crisis, we will be amongst the first to ensure that the appropriate response and support mechanisms are in place to manage for their care and communicate with family members. Other agencies may also have this responsibility but it is our responsibility to monitor and report the impacts and the status of visitors and affected travel industry employees during the crisis.

For the purpose of this proposal, our action plan will outline the pre-crisis planning, but emphasize those response activities that

need to take place in the first few weeks. It will cover the time frame from planning; to the moment of the gathering of our CRT at the crisis center; to the point when visitor levels have returned to or exceeded pre-crisis levels. At that time the CRT will focus on supporting and contributing to the national and regional marketing plans to rebuild confidence and awareness in source markets. The CRT will then revert back to the original mandate of assessing performance during the previous crisis [debriefing and reporting] and preparing for the next.

The following Crisis Response Plan identifies the individual activities of the team members, over a circumscribed timeframe, to ensure that crisis impacts are kept to a minimum.



>>> **Ongoing** >>>

PRE CRISIS

- Select and recruit crisis response team
- Prepare tourism industry communications policies and procedures
- Establish links and coordination protocols with agencies most likely to respond in a crisis—police, military, health authorities, etc.
- Train CRT members and hold periodic scenario drills.
- Coordinate with travel trade to create a database of priority contacts to reach out to in the event of a crisis.
- Review and clarify roles of the CRT.
- Identify a host for the crisis management center.
- Share plans with Tourism Ministry, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Authority (SLTPB) and establish links for communications and industry positioning.
- Establish a network of industry first responders in each province/district.
- Develop and distribute crisis response plan templates and encourage individual tourism companies to prepare their own plans.
- Give one-day trainings for hotel and travel companies in security, crisis response and messaging.

See Annex I for more details



Crisis response team implements plan



>>> **06 months** >>>

POST CRISIS

- Review of the cause of the crisis
- Review of each of the response activities undertaken following the crisis
- Evaluation of the various activities associated with responding to the crisis to determine what was effective and what was not.
- Identify how the response, in the next crisis, can be improved including;
 - Changes to the Crisis Response Plan and review of the risk management assessment. Consider consumer survey to assess effectiveness of response
 - Additional training for CRT members
 - Improved liaison with government departments and regional associations
 - Assessment of the media management campaign including the most effective communication mechanisms
 - Assessing the impacts of the communication on the various visitor market

Crisis Response



Identify the needs and conditions of any tourism industry employees who may have been affected and take appropriate actions



Assemble the Team and all available information to determine the nature of the crisis. Reach out to security and emergency services



Launch the crisis response plan, contact tourism agencies to inform them of the launch

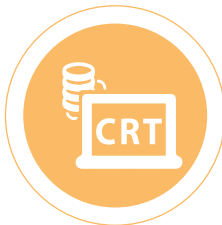


Assess the needs of the victims and determine what the industry can do to ensure they are properly cared for and families contacted



Establish links and coordination protocols with agencies most likely to respond in a crisis - police, military, health authorities, etc.

First Two Days



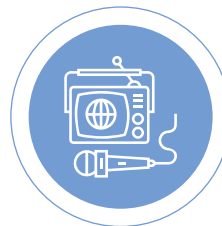
Prepare and distribute a statement to all media outlets in the CRT database and encourage them to contact the designated team member with inquiries



Prepare a statement for travel influencers and the trade



Continue to keep the industry informed on the current security/safety situation (Ongoing)



Set up a media monitoring system to track and assess media coverage

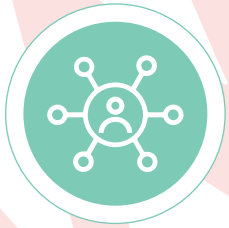


Continue to liaise with emergency and security services to remain current on the situation (Ongoing)



Media monitoring throughout crisis; institute google ad purchasing to counteract any false narratives (Ongoing)

See Annex I for more details



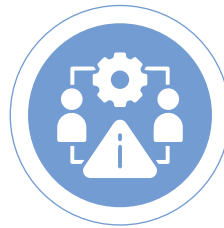
Coordinate and share info with lovesrilanka.org and the SLTA industry website (Ongoing)



Prepare talking points for the travel trade and public media as well as CRT national and regional spokespersons



Prepare a brief for the Sri Lankan tourism trade and encourage them to suspend advertising and promotions



Prepare a statement with key messages that outlines SLTA's position within the context of the crisis and includes a brief update as well as actions taken to mitigate the situation (intermittent)



Prepare and distribute a formal press release



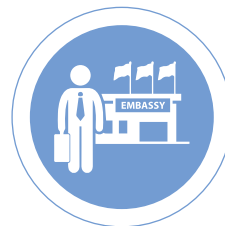
Initiate a text messaging service to send out regular updates to all available contacts



Next Three Weeks



Distribute pre-crisis prepared fact sheet about the tourism in Sri Lanka and a Q&A/FAQ addressing the main questions to be sent to the travel trade and public media.



Reach out to embassies to inform and advocate for removing/reducing travel advisories



Prepare and hold a press conference/media briefing as well as one-on-one interviews with most widely used media outlets.



Assess the impacts of the current campaigns and approaches and revise to maximize positive impact



Contact any media outlet distributing inaccurate information immediately and provide with better info



Communications



Operations



Coordination

4

Where do we go from here?

We are committed and can move quickly to both learn the skills and meet the challenge of any crisis.

Responding to any crisis requires two well-structured components:

1. A competent Crisis Response Team; and,
2. A clear outline of the individual responsibilities and critical tasks to be undertaken, especially during the first hours and weeks of the crisis.

SLTA is capable of undertaking both requirements. We are committed and can move quickly to both learn the skills and meet the challenge of any crisis. With the help of our members, we have the skills to both ensure the proper response communication practices are used to minimize the negative impact of the crisis as well as manage the recovery process.

We accept the responsibility to develop

an integrated proactive response team with direct contribution from the regions in establishing a national crisis response and recovery network. We ask only the help of the industry to share information and support the important efforts of the CRT. We ask the Sri Lankan government to work with us in coordinating any response to future crises as they also tackle any immediate emergency services or rebuilding that may be necessary.

For further information and annexes please refer to

<http://www.youlead.lk/tourism/crp>



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