



Joint WTO and Visa International Asia Pacific information - for immediate release

INFORMATION IS THE KEY IN TSUNAMI RECOVERY, REPORT SAYS

BERLIN, GERMANY, 10 March 2005 – The majority of travelers planning to visit Asia said that they would like more information about the affected areas, mainly relating to health and sanitation, followed by progress on the clean-up and the impact the tsunami has had on infrastructure and tourist facilities.

These are some of the findings from the *Post-Tsunami Global Travel Intentions Research* conducted by Visa Asia Pacific for the World Tourism Organization (WTO) Emergency Task Force that was specially convened in January to assist the tourism industries of countries ravaged by the tsunami. The main findings were released today at the Task Force's second meeting at the International Tourism Exchange (ITB) in Berlin.

According to Visa Asia Pacific Executive Vice President, Southeast Asia, James Murray, "Since the tsunami disaster, there has been a significant drop in international travel to affected tourist destinations such as Phuket in Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, severely damaging the livelihood of many local communities dependent on tourism revenues. This has happened in spite of the significant success the various countries have had in restoring facilities and infrastructure.

Given the scale of the tsunami and the extensive media coverage of its aftermath, international travelers are understandably concerned about the state of destinations in Asia. Tourism industries and authorities across South and Southeast Asia are therefore faced not only with the task of reconstruction, but also the formidable challenge of enhancing tourist confidence around the world regarding the affected destinations.

Visa conducted the *Post-Tsunami Global Travel Intentions Research* for the WTO Emergency Task Force, as we feel the urgent need for better understanding of travel intentions to Asia among travelers from key markets, and of the barriers that may be keeping them away.

Equipped with this information, we hope that national tourism organizations, policy makers, tourism operators and merchants in the tsunami-affected countries will be better able to address the most salient issues and concerns among global travelers, restore tourist confidence and stimulate travel back to their countries more effectively," added Murray.

For WTO Secretary General, Mr Frangiali, "this report contains essential information about consumers' perceptions in the main generating markets regarding the affected areas and will constitute a valuable contribution to the design and implementation of communication and marketing recovery plans".

Tsunami's impact on travel to Asia varies by source market

According to the research findings, among travelers who are planning to visit Asia, a majority of 65 percent said the tsunami had no impact on their travel plans to the region as a whole. 52 percent also felt the tsunami had not impacted their travel plans

specifically to the affected areas, however 30 percent said the tsunami's aftermath is deterring them from visiting these destinations.

The tsunami's impact is most severe on Japanese and Korean travelers compared with all other visitors, dampening their travel intentions not only to tsunami-affected countries, but to the rest of Asia. Forty-nine percent of Japanese and 60 percent of Korean travelers said that they are less likely to travel in the Asian region because of the tsunami, while 54 percent of Japanese and 63 percent of Korean travelers will be less likely to visit the tsunami-affected countries in 2005.

On the other hand, the tsunami has the least impact on the travel plans to affected countries among Canadian travelers (69 percent claimed it had no impact), followed by the French (65 percent), Germans (60 percent) and Australians (60 percent).

In some countries, the tsunami actually had a positive impact on travel to Asia. Around one-fifth of travelers said the tsunami has made it more likely for them to visit affected countries, especially those from China (20 percent), UK (19 percent), Canada (18 percent) and Sweden (18 percent). This is a reflection of altruistic sentiments and a show of support for the local communities, especially among Canadian, British, Swedish and Australian travelers. They expressed strong belief that taking a holiday in the affected countries is an excellent way to help the communities and economies recover from the disaster. However, this is also tempered to some extent by feelings that they found it inappropriate to holiday while the local people are having a tough time.

Murray said, "The Visa research clearly shows that the tsunami's impact on travel to Asia varies considerably by source market. Travelers from some countries have higher levels of apprehension and resistance to visiting tsunami-affected countries, while others seem much more impervious and supportive. Tourism industries across Asia may need to adopt a varied approach in communicating and marketing to different traveler source markets to address their main concerns.

Information needs: Health and sanitation are top of mind

The majority of those planning to travel to Asia said that they would like more information about the affected areas, mainly relating to health and sanitation, followed by progress on the clean-up and on the impact the tsunami has had on infrastructure and tourist facilities.

Most of the barriers to travel seem to be based on inadequate perceptions about the infrastructural readiness and safety of the destinations. These are issues that can be addressed with a targeted information and communications strategy which highlights the recovery of the tourism destinations. Increased awareness of the health of the Asian tourism industry, in terms of infrastructure, service and ambience is critical to speed up the recovery and minimize further risks of slowdown.

Note: The Visa research was designed and conducted by AC Nielsen in February 2005 covering 10 key markets around the world - USA, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, UK, Australia, China, Japan and Republic of Korea. The research looked into salient issues such as the impact of the tsunami on travel plans to Asia in 2005, choice of destination, travelers' understanding of the extent of the tsunami's impact on different countries, prospective travelers' key concerns and their information needs and sources.

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WTO

The World Tourism Organization is the leading international organization in the field of tourism. With its headquarters in Madrid, Spain, WTO is an intergovernmental organization and since 23 December 2003 a specialized agency of the United Nations with a central and decisive role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. In 2005, WTO membership is comprised of 145 countries, seven territories and more than 300 Affiliate Members representing the private sector, educational institutions, tourism associations and local tourism authorities.

Visa International

Visa is the world's leading payment brand generating more than US\$3 trillion in annual card sales volume. Visa has unsurpassed acceptance in more than 150 countries. The Visa organization plays a pivotal role in developing innovative payment products and technologies to benefit its 21,000 member financial institutions and their cardholders. Visa is a leader in Internet based payments and is pioneering the creation of u-commerce, or universal commerce--the ability to conduct commerce anywhere, anytime, and any way. For more information, visit www.corporate.visa.com.

Visa in Asia Pacific

In Asia Pacific, Visa has a greater market share than all other payment card brands combined with 62 percent of all card purchases at the point of sale being made using Visa cards. There are currently more than 229 million Visa-branded cards in the region. Through September 2004, US\$339 billion was spent at point of sale or withdrawn from ATMs in Asia Pacific using Visa cards. Visa Asia Pacific's Internet address is www.visa-asia.com.