

Editor's comment from *Travel Markets* Issue No. 22

Rebuilding tourism – a critical element of the post-tsunami recovery effort ...

The devastating tsunami that swept through the Indian Ocean after the Indonesian earthquake of 26 December has clearly had a major impact on tourism in all the affected areas. Yet recovery and rebuilding efforts are already underway.

A large number of resorts have already reopened for business, or will do so shortly. Thanks to pressure from international government and industry organisations and associations, such as the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), governments have lifted – or are lifting – travel advisories. And tour operators from key source markets in Asia and Europe have re-introduced their charter flights to Phuket and the Maldives. The speed of the recovery may yet surprise industry observers.

Adding urgency to the fight back is the widespread recognition that tourism is the mainstay of many of the region's local economies. As reflected in the efforts of PATA, WTO and other bodies, wooing back visitors is not simply a matter of opportunistic commerce – it is an issue of survival.

This message is also clearly reflected in the first responses to the Disaster Relief Survey, conducted by the International Council of Tourism Partners (ICTP) – a worldwide group of socially responsible travel and tourism professionals, supported by WTO, PATA and other industry groups, including the World Travel & Tourism Council, Green Globe and the International Hotel & Restaurant Association. Getting aid to where it is most needed, and helping local communities and the tourism industry rebuild sustainable and productive businesses, were two of the main suggestions proposed by respondents to the ICTP survey as to immediate action that should be taken by the world tourism community.

... but this needs a spirit of collaboration and non- competitiveness

Also high up the list of suggestions was for international and regional tourism organisations and associations to work together to find solutions, from a common platform, in a spirit of collaboration and non-competitiveness. There is some concern that different organisations are trying to outdo each other's efforts, and that this could lead to less effective measures in the longer term.

The initial results of the survey, which is now being more widely distributed across the world, confirm that the world tourism community is determined to be part of the reconstruction and revival effort. The full results of the survey will be released at ITB Berlin in March.

Meanwhile, industry forecasts point to another good year for travel and tourism, although growth rates are unlikely to match those achieved in 2004. WTO is currently projecting a 5% increase in international arrivals worldwide in 2005 – down from 10% last year. And Asia Pacific could again be the star performer.