

International tourists' perceptions of safety and security issues in Madang Province, PNG

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Abstract

This paper investigates international tourists' perceptions of safety and security issues in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG). The study employs qualitative research within an interpretive research paradigm. Face to face interviews were conducted with a sample of 29 participants recruited from Madang Resort Hotel. The data collected were analysed through thematic analysis. The findings show that international tourists consider Madang as unsafe for tourism.

Key words: Safety and security, destination, tourism, business travel, tourists

Introduction

The tourism industry is dependent on safety and security (TARLOW and SANTANA 2002). Violence against international tourists has resulted in drops in tourists' numbers to Brazil, PNG and the Republic of South Africa (PIZAM, TARLOW and BLOOM 1997). Tourists make their decisions about when to travel partly or even largely based on safety and security issues (DOWLING and STAELIN 1994). If tourists have read or heard about violent crime in a tourist destination, they may cancel their travel itinerary and select another destination. PIZAM, TARLOW and BLOOM (1997), point out that PNG is high in violent crime, rape and armed robbery. Consequently, most Australian and New Zealand tourists travel to Fiji or Bali (SUMB 2017).

The paper will discuss safety and security issues in Madang and its effects on the tourism. The main aim of this paper is to understand tourists' perceptions and real experience. Tourists have different perceptions about Madang based on media publicity on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and other main-stream media (SUMB 2017).

Background

Madang is one of the 22 provinces in PNG. Each province in PNG has one or more districts, and each district has one or more Local Level Government (LLG) areas. Madang has six districts which are Bogia, Madang Urban, Middle Ramu, Rai Coast, Usino Bundi, and Sumkar. The province is on the northern coast of mainland PNG and has several of the country's highest mountains, active volcanoes and diversity of languages (PNG TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY 2017, NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE 2010).

Madang Province is a huge province nearly 300 kilometers long and 160 kilometers wide with four sizable islands and several small offshore islands. The total area of the province is approximately 28886 square kilometers and has a total population of 493,906 (in 2011 CENSUS) (PNG TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY 2017, NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE 2010). It shares borders with East Sepik to the west, Enga, Western Highlands, and Jiwaka to the southwest, Chimbu and Eastern Highlands to the south, and Morobe to the southeast. To the south stopes the Bismarck Range with the heights reaching over 4,000 metres. Mt. Wilhelm PNG's highest mountain at 4509 metres, is located in those mountain ranges (DESTINATION PNG 2016, NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE 2010).

Also, in the south, the Ramu Valley splits the Bismarck Range from the Finisterri Range to the southeast of the province. The mountains are abundant in trees, whilst the coastal plain of the valley is open and covered with palm trees (DESTINATION PNG

2016).

The Bismarck Sea spreads the northern coast of the region is nourished by the mighty Ramu, Sogeram, Gogol and Malas Rivers (DESTINATION PNG 2016). The offshore islands have an active volcano. These are Karkar and Manam Islands, in 2004 and 2005 some people of Manam Island were relocated to care centers in the mainland due to volcano eruption. It erupted again in 2018 twice and recent one in November. This active volcanic region is located in the Pacific Ring of Fire and has created crater lakes, smoking volcanic cones and black sandy beaches (DESTINATION PNG 2016).

Madang was discovered by Europeans in 1871 when the Russian biologist, MIKLOUHO-MACLAY, N. explored the Rai coast area. He introduced pineapples, mangoes, beans, pumpkins and other foods. The Germans followed and built tobacco, cotton and coffee plantations. In 1887 JOHANNES, F. established the first Lutheran mission station in Madang. Today, majority of people are Lutherans and Roman Catholics (DESTINATION PNG 2016).

PNG has over 800 languages, of this Madang has 173 languages and some parts of Madang culture is still practice today with little influence from western culture (Destination PNG 2016). Madang Province is PNG's third-leading producer of cocoa and copra and second producer of cattle. Ramu Sugar, Ramu Nickel Limited, Coconut Oil Production, Madang Ltd and RD Tuna are amongst PNG's biggest employers (DESTINATION PNG 2016).

Literature Review

Safety and security issues

Five common safety and security issues are linked with tourism: terrorism (RICHTER 2003), war and political instability (SONMEZ, APOSTOLOPOULOS and TARLOW 1999), health (RICHTER 2003), criminal activities (DIMANCHE and LEPETIC 1999), and cultural and language difficulties (BASALA and KLENOSKY 2001).

Terrorism poses an extreme risk to global tourism (NORTON 1994) and has a much bigger negative impact on the tourism business than any other human factor (e.g., crime, regional tensions, international conflicts) or natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes, floods) or catastrophe (CAVLEK 2002). The danger of being killed or captured alive in a terrorist attack has become a major concern for some tourists. Recent years have seen a growth in terrorist activities, their occurrence, and brutality. Terrorist attacks have been extensive in several places globally; since September 11, 2001, numerous attacks have been carried out in Tunisia, Yemen, Morocco, Colombia, Indonesia and Philippines (REISINGER and MAVONDO 2006, SONMEZ and GRAEFE 1998).

The next issue is conflict and political instability which can prevent or deter tourists from travelling (PIZAM, TARLOW and BLOOM 1997, REISINGER and MAVONDO 2006). For instance, the mass murder in Tiananmen Square in China made 11,500 tourists cancel their trips to Beijing in 1989 (GARTNER and SHEN 1992). The Persian

Gulf War in 1991 instigated a huge rerouting of tourists away from the Middle East (HONEY 1999). Even countries such as Kenya and Tanzania that are far away from the Middle East were badly affected (HONEY 1999). The conflict in Afghanistan has caused a 54 percent drop in tourist trips to Nepal (THAPA 2004).

Health issues also create enormous fear amongst foreign tourists, for instance, a risk of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and human immunodeficiency virus, (HIV) cases prevent or deter tourists from travelling to some countries in Africa (MORGAN 2003). Similarly, the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) had a more devastating effect on the air transport industry than the September 11th attacks (MORGAN 2003).

Cultural and language challenges signify another issue of concern to tourists. Diversities in cultures, religions and languages signify travel influences themselves, but they are frequently seen as problematic and produce hindrances for tourists. For instance, Chinese tourists find it difficult to communicate in English with host communities who provide tourism products and services (BASALA and KLENOSKY 2001).

A major travel constraint for tourists is safety and security issues related to criminal activities such as robbery, armed hold-up, rape and murder. According to DOWLING and STAELIN (1994), certain groups of individuals feel that safety and security are vital factors that determine the choice of travel destination. Most research findings state that safety and security of tourists is a requirement for a flourishing tourist destination (SONMEZ and GRAEFE 1998, TARLOW and SANTANA 2002). SONMEZ and GRAEFE (1998) claim that if the destination choice is restricted down to two options which promise similar benefits, the less costly one or the one that is free from threat, the likely choice to be selected is the destination free from safety and security issues. PEARCE (1988) indicates that concern with tourist security is a huge issue in the decision-making process through which tourists make their travel decisions. Furthermore, safety and security is a big issue in some destinations that have high security risks which is a world-wide concern for tourists (REISINGER and MACONDO 2006). This is mainly important in the present political and socio-economic setting when tourists are encountering a growing risk when they travel abroad (REISINGER and MACONDO 2006).

These safety and security issues are of increasing importance in the international tourism industry and present fears not only to tourists but also to host communities and the tourists' home countries (RICHTER 2003, DOWLING and STAELIN 1994). The safety and security issues committed in Madang and PNG are not high-security issues such as terrorism, war and political instability but internal law and order issues (BHANUGOPAN 2001, SUMB 2017, 2018, MILNE 1990).

Perceptions of safety and security in Madang

Madang town was once called the Pearl of the Pacific by Lonely Planet and

tourism hub of PNG (PNG TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY 2017) because it has world-renowned dive sites just off the coast and nearby Astrolabe Bay. The coast to the north is also becoming an increasingly popular surfing destination. Madang has modern tourism facilities such as hotels, department stores, a fresh food market, historical artifact shops and a cultural centre (PNG TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY 2017). Also, Madang has major tertiary institutions such as Divine Word University, Lutheran School of Nursing, Madang Teachers College, Madang Technical College and PNG Maritime College (MANOLAKIS 2002). However, Madang has changed dramatically over the past few years due to continuous law and order issues in the province. This has affected local people, businesses and international visitor arrivals (SUMB 2018).

Law and order issues started to increase in 2009, there were reports of stealing, break- and enter, armed robbery, rape and murder and still continuing to this date (GAWI 2014, WAGAMBIE 2009, WAIDE 2018). This is a very serious issue that is affecting the daily lives of ordinary people. The general feeling of fear is felt by most people when they move around in town doing their activities. Women and girls are harassed in the public and bystanders too afraid to rescue in fear of their own safety (WAIDE 2018). There is a general perception that police will not act on the petty crimes if reported because every day there is a break in. Every week there is an armed robbery in full view of the public. Armed criminals were acting with relative impunity (GAWI 2014, WAIDE 2018).

This has gone from bad to worse in 2017 when almost all the businesses in Madang suffered extensive loss with armed robberies include Rookes Marine Transport, Madang Club, Farmset, Agmark, National Development Bank, J and Z Trading, Madang Resort Hotel, Coastwatcher's Hotel, Ela Emporium, Andersons Supermarket and others. There have been reports of at least four murders. Vehicles travelling to and from the airport were also being attacked (MURRAY 2017). Police have done very little to contain the rising criminal activities. This was echoed by the Madang Chamber of Commerce President:

“I am yet to hear of any successful prosecutions for any of these major crimes. I have also been reliably informed that from a total of 760 minor crime incidents during August, 2017 only 150 have been cleared by the police, a woeful success rate of 20%. This is partly because the police are undermanned” (MURRAY 2017).

Despite numerous awareness made about law and order by media and police, still criminal activities rise in Madang. In February, 2018 four criminals were short by police and one criminal died on the spot and three escaped after they tried to rob a business house in town (LOUISE 2018). Again in April, 2018, Madang experienced violent civil unrest. The unrest was related to the beheading of a school teacher from the highlands province teaching in Madang. The relatives of the late teacher demanded the return of the head for decent burial (SAFIHAO 2018, SUNDAY ISLES 2018). In retaliation, a series of roadblocks and holdups were carried out around the township, by Madang locals and Highlanders. This led to a civil unrest in Madang

resulted in youths and police exchanged gunfire and three youths killed and several sustained severe knife and gun wounds were hospitalized. A police vehicle was burnt on the highway connecting Madang and the highlands and water supply was shut down (SAFIHAO 2018).

Almost towards the end of 2018, in November, a failed armed robbery resulted in two people killed and a five-year-old girl chopped. The incident started when youths in the area tried to rob a family and when the family insisted during the confrontation, the five-year-old girl was chopped. Her relatives retaliated and killed two people and burned down ten houses (POST COURIER 2018). These are reported cases of law and order issues in the province, there could be more because some were not reported to police and not even getting the media attention. There are serious law and order problems in Madang (GAWI 2014, SUMB 2018, WAGAMBIE 2009, WAIDE 2018).

Furthermore, not only locals and businesses experience armed hold-up and rape but also tourists and international visitors within the last 10 years. There were incidents of tourists being raped and robbed. In November, 2010 rape of an Australian tourist who went surfing in Madang. This attracted wider criticisms by police, politicians and tourism stakeholders. The Australian woman was raped after five men hijacked a vehicle she, another woman and two male Australian youth ambassadors were travelling in on a surf holiday on the northwest coast of Madang (GRIDNEFF, 2010). The former Acting Director of PNG TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY condemned the actions of the youths and mentioned the following: “The authority is concerned that Madang is becoming a no-go zone for travelers” (BANDO 2010).

Also, another victim of rape was an academic from USA, she was conducting research into exotic birds in a remote forest in Karkar Island was gang-raped by nine men (FOX 2010). Again in October, 2014 an Australian media tycoon was held up in his luxury boat near Kranet Island and criminals took his properties (GAWI 2014).

The factors that contributed to increase in crime include drugs, alcohol, illegal settlements and lack of job opportunities (GAWI 2014, LOUISE 2018, SUMB 2018). These are major issues which cannot be addressed by police alone because they lack manpower, have limited funding and lack vehicles (GAWI 2014, LOUIS 2018, SUMB 201, WAGAMBIE 2009). These issues were identified and reported on EMTV, Post Courier, the National and Facebook but nothing or less has been done to address safety and security issues (GAWI 2014, LOUIS 2018, SUMB 2018, WAIDE 2018).

Methodology

The data discussed in this article were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. Qualitative interviews sought to obtain participant's opinions on crime in Madang, and then engage them in a discussion on Madang's safety and security issues as they relate to four key themes; 1. Crime in Madang 2. Crime and its links with tourism. 3. Different risk types. 4. Media and crime. Semi-

structured interviews were conducted at Madang Resort Hotel, PNG. The participants were all international tourists and selected through convenience sampling. Permission was gained from Madang Resort Hotel Management to conduct the research.

International tourists were informed during their check- in at the hotel that a Divine Word University staff member was conducting research at the hotel. The researcher spent two weeks during semester break from 19th June-2nd July, 2017 and from 18th November to 30th November, 2018 collecting data during lunch hour. A table was set-up in the restaurant and for those who volunteered for the interview. The data were collected at Madang Resort only because other hotels have received less or no international visitors to their establishment and management refuse to allow the researcher to do the study at their hotel premises.

Table 1. Summary of research participants.

No.	Pseudonym	Sex	Country of Origin	Purpose of Travel
1	Susan	Female	Australia	Business/Work
2	Dorothy	Female	Australia	Business/Work
3	Paul	Male	Australia	Business/Work
4	James	Male	Australia	Business/Work
5	Maxwell	Male	Italy	Work/Work
6	Jenny	Female	Italy	Work/Work
7	Jackson	Male	Australia	Business/Work
8	Samson	Male	New Zealand	Business/Work
9	Felix	Male	New Zealand	Business/Work
10	Aggie	Female	Australia	Business/Work
11	Stella	Female	New Zealand	Holiday
12	Max	Male	New Zealand	Holiday
13	Frank	Male	New Zealand	Business/Work
14	Andrew	Male	Australia	Business/Work
15	Magge	Female	Samoa	Visit Family and Friends
16	Joel	Male	USA	Business/Work
17	Finch Bus	Male	Germany	Holiday
18	Alex	Male	Germany	Holiday
19	Brian	Male	Germany	Holiday
20	Jackson	Male	USA	Holiday
21	Ryan	Male	Ireland	Holiday
22	James	Male	Australia	Holiday
23	Rosemary	Female	Australia	Holiday
24	Susan	Female	Australia	Holiday
25	Gorge	Male	New Zealand	Holiday
26	Rose	Female	New Zealand	Holiday
27	Roselyne	Female	New Zealand	Holiday
28	Robert	Male	New Zealand	Holiday
29	Jonson	Male	Australia	Holiday

The participants were told that their participation was voluntary and they have the right to refuse or participate in the interview. It was emphasised that their identity would not be revealed as required by the ethics approval form. A total of 7 semi-structured open-ended interview questions ranging from 10 to 30 minutes were conducted and recorded using an audio recording device.

The interview participants included 10 females and 19 males with ages that ranged from 27 to 67 years. Interviewees were highly educated and frequent international travellers. The profile of study participants reflects the generally well educated and disposable income travellers.

Findings and discussion

Tourists fear traveling around Madang

Participants were asked how they feel about safety and security when they were moving around in Madang or doing tours. All the participants mentioned that they either went with locals or with security escort because they heard of law and order problems in Madang. For instance, Aggie (Australia) said: "I don't feel safe to travel by myself to visit rural Madang. I went with locals and always take precautions". Similar concerns were expressed by Max (New Zealand): "We have to be careful when in the country and don't do stupid things such as taking mobile phones and large sums of money". Susan (Australia) said that she did not feel safe to walk by herself to the shops but she was prepared to travel with a group.

Joel from (USA) said that he had to take extra precaution when traveling in and around Madang. He mentioned that when he goes out shopping he makes sure that someone stays in the car or he does shopping where there are security guards at the car park. Also, he doesn't leave valuables in the car or expose cash. He further stated that communication is very important to seek help when in trouble with criminals. He considered himself lucky that he knows a little bit of Tok Pisin: "I take precaution when driving and also I can speak pidgin which is easy for me to communicate with locals to call for help when sensing danger and at risk of being robbed"

A number of participants indicated that they had been warned by Australia and New Zealand Government Authorities to be extra careful in Madang and other provinces in PNG due to reports of violent crimes such as rape, murder, and armed robbery: "We have seen a lot of negative media publicity about Madang back home in New Zealand and it is regarded as a dangerous place to visit" (Samson, New Zealand).

Just one or two participants had experienced crime directly. Jenny (Italy) was almost robbed at Madang Lodge Hotel: "We have experienced an armed robbery at Madang Lodge, we were having lunch and saw some youths came up from the sea and tried to hold up staff but luckily there was a policeman who was also having lunch and he threatened to shoot the criminals and they left. Most customers were very scared, it was like a Hollywood movie, all of us were on the floor."

A few holiday participants stated that they feel safe and experience the genuine friendliness of the local people. They have done tours to Bilbil village for viewing pottery making, Balek Wildlife Sanctuary, main market, harbour cruise, diving and snorkelling but some factors still make them feel uncomfortable such as houses with high security fences and barb wires and security in all the shops. For instance, this was shared by Finch from Germany: "I feel unsafe here because in Germany if you see barb wire fences then that is a bad place or only in prisons. Also, I have seen a lot of rubbish everywhere which makes me feel unsafe".

Similarly, Jackson from USA echoed the same sentiments: "I can go anywhere in Brisbane or Honolulu but here is different. For instance, after dinner at Eden Restaurant, I can't walk back to Madang Resort in the night but wait for the driver to pick me up because I was told that it was not safe to walk alone in the night".

These study findings support the literature which points out that Madang is unsafe for tourists and locals (GAWI 2014, SUMB 2018, WAIDE 2018). All the participants confirm that they did not feeling safe in Madang. They take every possible means to protect themselves from crime during their stay. The fear of traveling in and around Madang is due to certain factors. Firstly, most visitors to PNG come from Australia, New Zealand, Europe and the USA their experience of safety and security is different. They have less safety and security concerns. They can move around freely without experiencing crime. Once visitors arrive in Madang and they observe rubbish everywhere and houses with razor wire fences. They get the impression that Madang is not safe. The second factor is that visitors were advised by local people that Madang is not safe. Those are people who work in the hotels, tour companies, airlines, family members and relatives. Consequently, business and holiday visitors fear traveling around in Madang. This is not only to international visitors but also local people fear traveling in the evenings to town themselves.

Police visibility

Several of the study participants suggested that an increase of police visibility and regular patrols might help feel safer. This would give them confidence and a sense of security. Some participants suggested that Madang should have tourism police that takes care of tourists' issues. For instance, Paul (Australia) explained that countries such as Thailand have tourism police which works well for them. Tourism police would give confidence to tourists and encourage them to feel free to move around.

Other participants suggested that the Madang Provincial Government should provide employment opportunities for youths. When asked what can Madang Provincial Government do to address safety and security. Maggie (Samoa) expressed: "Madang Provincial Government must support police and create a free and safe environment for tourists and locals. I would suggest foot patrols would be ideal".

Jenny (Italy) expressed that lack of police presence in town makes her feel unsafe. Alex from Germany suggested the following: "I would suggest; a map would restrict people going to certain places that are considered to be high risk or police toll-free

number that we can call when in danger” This perspective paralleled previous studies such as. It was found that Madang & PNG lacks basic infrastructure, and a shortage of police to contain law and order (LOUISE 2018, SUMB 2018, Wade 2018).

It would seem that Madang needs police manpower to address and contain law and order problems in the province and make their presence felt in the community. Petty crimes could be committed due to lack of police presence. If tourists feel unsafe when doing their daily activities they may well not return again in the future or tell their friends and family members to come to the town. This would discourage visitors travel to Madang. The issue regarding lack of policeman power in Madang province was discussed for the last 10 years but no improvement has been made and Madang is still experiencing law and order problems.

Business tourists hire private security escort when in Madang due to criminal activities

Some research participants who were in Madang on business travel stated that they heavy private security was provided for them while they were on business travel. They were protected every time when they travel out for work or shopping because we were advised in Australia that PNG is not safe to travel alone. This was echoed by one of the participants: “We went with a security escort to some of the settlements and stayed there for 15 minutes because we heard that there are many rascals on the road” (Dorothy, Australia).

Similarly, Aggie (Australia) highlighted that security was provided to her when she went out for shopping or to the market. Andrew (Australia) expressed: “we went to the shops and market with Guard Dog Security escort”.

Those business visitors have no leisure time but here for work. They stay in hotels, go to work and have no time for tours and other tourism activities. When asked if any local tours were taken: “I really love to go out diving in the nearby islands but I don’t have the time to do tours. I am here for few days and busy with work. I will do that when I return to Madang for holiday” (Paul, Australia).

This finding is similar to PNG TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY (2017), which focus that the majority of travellers to PNG, including Madang, are either business or work and not as tourists who are able to visit local attraction sites, buy arts and crafts and enjoy Madang’s hospitality. They stay in hotels and go to work and have limited time for tours. When they take the risk to visit local villages, they go with ‘security escort’ because they fear that rascals might rob them. This makes private businesses expensive to operate in Madang due to extra security costs. For instance, Madang Resort Hotel has invested in security equipment, including camera and sensor lights, security guards and fence for the comfort and safety of its customers.

Conclusion

This paper examined the perceptions and experiences of international visitors about safety and security issues in Madang. It was found that visitors travelling within Madang feel unsafe and take extra precautions such as not exposing large sums of money, travel with local people to rural villages and fear taking rural tours or walk to the main market and shopping centres alone. Those visitors on business travel have security escort provided by Guard Dog security to pick-up and drop-off at the airport, tours and shopping.

Whereas others on holiday, they travel with locals who are familiar with the environment. Thus, there is evidence of fear among all the visitors both holiday and business participants and fear is created with two factors. Firstly, visitors come from developed countries and their perception of safety and security is different when in Madang they were told to take precaution when moving around. The second factor could be the general environment. For instance, rubbish and high fenced houses with barb wires. In their own country these are not seen and experienced, may be in prisons. However, some holiday tourists visited local people and experience positive aspect of Madang. They have interacted with the local people and realised that local people are friendly and welcoming. These tourists suggested to PNG Government to intervene and address safety and security issues so that visitors can feel free to move around in Madang and spend money in the local economy. Also, this will encourage more International Visitors to Madang. This is possible because none of the participants' experience crime while in Madang and there was no evidence of criminals targeting tourists. The law and order issues in Madang are totally internal issues which can be addressed but it has been prolonged and not addressed for some years. There are two obvious reasons, first lack of funding to combat criminal activities. The second issue could be lack of political will and support because funding is from the provincial government.

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