

THE TOURISM-DISASTER-
CONFLICT NEXUS

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COMMUNITY, ENVIRONMENT AND DISASTER RISK
MANAGEMENT VOLUME 19

THE TOURISM–DISASTER– CONFLICT NEXUS

EDITED BY

ANDREAS NEEF

The University of Auckland, New Zealand

and

JESSE HESSION GRAYMAN

The University of Auckland, New Zealand



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India – Malaysia – China

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Andreas Neef is a Professor in Development Studies at The University of Auckland, New Zealand. His current research focuses on the ethics and politics of land grabbing, development-induced displacement, adaptation and resilience to climate change and post-disaster response and recovery in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. He has conducted research into the controversial role of tourism in disaster recovery processes in Thailand, Fiji and Vanuatu. Andreas Neef served two times as Scientific Advisor to the German Parliament, on issues of global food security and on international societal and political discourses around the commodification of biodiversity and ecosystem services. He has published widely on transnational land acquisitions, contestation of customary property rights and polycentric resource governance in Mainland Southeast Asia. Recent publications include 'Climate adaptation strategies in Fiji: The role of social norms and cultural values' (2018, *World Development*) and 'Land Rights Matter! Anchors to Reduce Land Grabbing, Dispossession and Displacement' (2016, *Policy Study for the German NGO Bread for the World*).

Jesse Hession Grayman is a Senior Lecturer in Development Studies at The University of Auckland. His research in Aceh, Indonesia, examines longer-term post-conflict and post-tsunami humanitarian recovery processes, particularly through international organisations and local NGOs. Jesse's other research looks at Southeast Asian communities' resilience to nature's hazards in Auckland, New Zealand and community-driven development policies in Indonesia's health sector. Recent publications include 'Topography and scale in a community-driven maternal and child health program in Eastern Indonesia' (2017, *Medicine Anthropology Theory*) and 'Official and unrecognised narratives of recovery in post conflict Aceh, Indonesia' (2016, *Critical Asian Studies*).

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kayt Bronnimann is a Master's student in Development Studies at The University of Auckland. Her research looks at the gender equality measures in the 2016 Community Government Act in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea and how this has affected political, social and family life for the women elected.

Alejandro Acosta Carrizosa holds an MA in Development Studies from The University of Auckland. He is currently working as Project Manager and Developer in a community-based tourism development project on the Northern Pacific coast of Colombia.

Monsinee Attavanich is a Lecturer of the Faculty of Architecture, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Thailand. Her research interests are in vernacular architecture, the impact of modernisation on architecture, and living conditions in post-disaster housing, particularly among indigenous sea-faring people with insecure land rights in southern Thailand.

Lucy Bengé holds a Master of Arts in Development Studies from The University of Auckland. Her research interests include linking development to disaster recovery, climate-induced displacement and adaptation to climate change. She currently works at Auckland Emergency Management.

Olivier Evrard is a Senior Researcher at the French Institute for Research for Sustainable Development. Olivier's work in social anthropology has examined agrarian transitions, the history of interethnic relationships, tourism mobilities and labour migration in Laos and Thailand.

Wardlow Friesen is an Associate Professor of Geography at The University of Auckland. His specialist interests include development, migration and tourism, with regional interests in New Zealand, the Pacific islands, especially Melanesia, and South and Southeast Asia.

Jesse Hession Grayman is a Senior Lecturer in Development Studies at The University of Auckland. His research in Aceh, Indonesia, examines post-conflict and post-tsunami humanitarian recovery, particularly through international organisations and local NGOs. Jesse currently studies Indonesia's community-driven development policies in the health sector.

Maitree Jongkraichak is the Chairman of a community bank in Ban Nam Khem, a Thai village severely affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. He has coordinated a network in four provinces dedicated to solving post-disaster land conflicts. He also has experience in disaster recovery in Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Preeda Kongpan serves as the Manager of Chumchonchai Foundation (Thailand). Her work is dedicated to defending the rights of Thailand's indigenous peoples, including formerly sea-faring people (*chao leh*) along southern Thailand's Andaman Coast. She has served in various committees relating to disaster recovery with particular focus on secure livelihoods.

Mary Mostafanezhad is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environment at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Her current work examines cross-border environmental politics, tourism development and agrarian transitions in southeast Asia.

Andreas Neef is a Professor in Development Studies at The University of Auckland. His current research focuses on transnational land grabbing, development-induced displacement, adaptation to climate change and the role of tourism in post-disaster response and recovery with a regional focus on Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

Grant Shirley completed a Master of Arts in Development Studies with Honours from The University of Auckland. His research interests include post-conflict/disaster development, the strategic dimension of aid in the Pacific Islands and intra-Pacific trade networks.

Marjorie van Strien holds a MSc in Leisure, Tourism and Environment and currently pursues a PhD in Natural Resources and Society. She has extensive experience working on sustainable tourism and livelihoods in South and Southeast Asia. She worked in Nepal for over six years where she experienced the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake.

Emma Wylie was recently awarded first-class honours in the Bachelor of Health Sciences from The University of Auckland with a dissertation on the New Zealand Aid Programme. She conducted health research with 'waste picker women' living in the slums of Mumbai, through the New Zealand Prime Minister's Scholarship to Asia.

PREFACE

The aim of this volume is to shed light on the complex linkages between tourism, disaster and conflict. In many countries, tourism crises have been precipitated by natural disasters, as exemplified by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami that devastated coastal tourist destinations in several South and southeast Asian countries and the Category 5 tropical cyclones Pam and Winston that ravaged small island countries in the South Pacific in 2015 and 2016. At the same time, the tourism industry has often been assigned a pivotal role in the reconstruction and recovery efforts. Prospective tourists have been lured into supporting post-disaster rehabilitation simply through visiting disaster-affected areas. Yet, prioritising the tourism sector in the recovery process may have unintended consequences: less touristic areas that have been severely affected by the disaster may receive less humanitarian relief support. Disaster recovery processes in the tourism industry can also be highly uneven, as multinational hotel chains tend to recover much more swiftly and increase both their market share and their control over important resources. Politically well-connected tourist operators, wealthy local elites and external investors tend to exploit distorted recovery governance mechanisms and take advantage of the legal and institutional uncertainties triggered by disasters to pursue their own economic interests. Insecure, customary land rights of ethnic minority groups and indigenous people may be particularly prone to exploitation by opportunistic tourist operators in the aftermath of a disaster.

Another dimension of the tourism–conflict–disaster nexus exists when disasters occur in war-torn countries and post-conflict states or regions. Disasters may exacerbate pre-existing conflict situations by increasing competition over scarce natural resources and relief funds, or they may catalyse conflict resolution following an intolerable excess of additional suffering among fighting parties. Tourism ventures may offer post-conflict livelihood opportunities, but potentially trigger new conflicts if former combatants take their spoils of peace before ordinary survivors of war and other disasters have their chance to participate in new tourism economies. In both formal and informal economic sectors, disasters may instigate a morbid ‘dark tourism’ industry that invites visitors to enter spaces of death and suffering at memorials, graves, museums and sites of atrocity.

These are some of the issues that the chapters will address in this volume’s exploration of the tourism–conflict–disaster nexus. The ideas for this volume were born out of an 18-month research project led by the first editor and funded by The University of Auckland’s Faculty of Arts Early Staff Research Development Fund. We also organised a special session at the Biennial Aotearoa – New Zealand Development Studies Conference in Wellington, New Zealand, on ‘The Tourism–Disaster–Conflict Nexus’ which helped to shape our conceptual ideas about this new field of studies. Several chapters emerged from preliminary

findings presented in the conference session. We express our gratitude to the conference organisers, John Overton and Lorena de la Torre, for allowing us to convene the session and to all session participants for the constructive discussions.

A summer scholar, Emma Wylie, helped us in gathering the extensive social science literature for the introductory chapter in which we present the conceptual underpinnings of the tourism–disaster nexus. Emma also contributed to the writing of one of the chapters. A second summer scholar, Kayt Bronnimann, contributed to the writing of another chapter. These summer scholarships were funded by The University of Auckland.

We are particularly indebted to the scholars who made invaluable contributions to this volume by reviewing the various chapters, namely David Sanders, Wiendu Nuryanti, Stroma Cole, Wardlow Friesen, Mary Mostafanezhad, William Lee Waugh, Jr and Annaclaudia Martini.

We hope that this volume will stimulate further research and debate among human geographers, anthropologists and other critical social scientists in this emerging field of critical tourism studies. Some of the chapters may also inform policy making for improved humanitarian interventions in post-disaster and post-conflict tourism areas.

Andreas Neef
Jesse Hession Grayman
Editors

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUALISING THE TOURISM–DISASTER–CONFLICT NEXUS

Andreas Neef and Jesse Hession Grayman

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the tourism–disaster–conflict nexus through a comprehensive review of the contemporary social science literature. After reviewing conceptual definitions of tourism, disaster and conflict, the chapter explores various axes that link through this nexus. The linkages between tourism and disaster include tourism as a trigger or amplifier of disasters, the impacts of disasters on the tourism industry, tourism as a driver of disaster recovery and disaster risk reduction strategies in the tourism sector. Linkages between tourism and conflict include the idea that tourism can be a force for peace and stability, the niche status of danger zone or dark heritage tourism, the concept of phoenix tourism in post-conflict destination rebranding, tourism and cultural conflicts, and tourism’s conflicts over land and resources. Linkages between disaster and conflict include disasters as triggers or intensifiers of civil conflict, disaster diplomacy and conflict resolution, disaster capitalism, and gender-based violence and intra-household conflict in the wake of disasters. These are some of the conversations that organise this volume, and this introductory chapter ends with a summary of the chapters that follow.

Keywords: Conflict; disaster; hazard; nexus; peace; recovery; tourism

INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING TOURISM, DISASTER AND CONFLICT

Tourism has arguably become one of the most important economic sectors globally. According to the World Tourism Organization, the tourism sector in 2016 accounted for about 10 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), seven per cent of world trade and one in 10 jobs worldwide (UNWTO, 2017). Although tourism has been described as a resilient sector with sustained global growth rates over the last 60 years, it is also susceptible to crises and shocks that can be a result of natural hazards and manmade disasters as well as wars and other forms of armed conflict (Becken & Carmignani, 2016; Ritchie, 2008; Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999). It has been argued that tourists are particularly vulnerable to disasters and conflicts because they travel in unfamiliar environments, face language barriers and are difficult to account for, as they have insufficient connectedness with local communities and information channels (Becken & Hughey, 2013). Tourism crises triggered by disasters and conflicts can also have significant spillover effects into other sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries, handicraft manufacturing and the transportation sector. Despite the susceptibility of the tourism sector to external shocks, there is relatively little academic scholarship on the nexus between tourism, disaster and conflict.

Tourism is often depicted as an innocuous and intrinsically benign activity that provides huge benefits to host countries and communities in the form of employment, foreign currency, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and intercultural exchange. The World Tourism Organization asserts that tourism contributes to several sustainable development goals (SDGs), agreed upon by United Nations Member States in 2015, including responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), life below water (SDG 14) and peace, security and strong institutions (SDG 16) (UNWTO, 2017). The sector has even been dubbed as the world's 'peace industry' (D'Amore, 2009; World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2016).

This idealised view of tourism glosses over the fact that the sector – particularly, but not exclusively in its most common form of mass tourism – has also contributed to dispossession and displacement of indigenous communities and ethnic minorities, environmental pollution, conflicts over the use of natural resources, as well as political and socioeconomic inequality in many host countries, particularly in the so-called 'developing world' (e.g. Farmaki, 2017; Gurtner, 2016). Some scholars have traced back tourism practices to colonialism and imperialism, while others looked at tourism's controversial entanglements with class, race and even war and militarism (Lisle, 2016; Weaver, 2011). Only very recently, tourism scholars have started to acknowledge the fact that tourism can also be used as a strategy to incentivise citizens' behaviour, influence their preferences and render them more governable (Lisle, 2016; Walters, 2010).

For much of the twentieth century, the field of tourism studies has been characterised by predominantly positivist, reductionist and apolitical approaches. The lack of substantial theoretical underpinnings to tourism research has also been criticised (e.g. Hall, 2000). Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004, p. 277) have

called for a reconceptualisation of tourism studies, identifying as the central problem that

tourism researchers schooled in a tradition of linear, specialized, predictable, deterministic, cause-and-effect science, are working in an area of study that is largely nonlinear, integrative, generally unpredictable, qualitative, and characterized by causes giving rise to multiple outcomes [...].

In a similar vein, [Faulkner and Russell \(2001, p. 329\)](#) state,

tourism researchers have traditionally focused on aspects of tourism behaviour and tourism development patterns that exhibit order, linearity and equilibrium, while eschewing situations where disorder, non-linearity and disequilibrium are more apparent.

While Farrell and Twining's argument is grounded in a philosophy of science perspective, [Russell and Faulkner \(1999\)](#) argue from a more conceptual and methodological viewpoint, pointing to 'large gaps in the understanding of turbulent phases in tourism development and the underlying dynamics of change' (p. 414). They encourage their peers to embrace chaos and complexity perspectives to provide a better understanding of disasters, crises and change.

Both calls are of relevance for studies within the tourism–disaster–conflict nexus. While recent years have seen a resurgence of studies on the interface between tourism and conflict from various disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, tourism studies have paid very little attention to the linkages between tourism and disaster ([Cohen, 2011](#)). Prior to turning to the various intersections within the nexus, we briefly discuss some of the definitions and different understandings of its three key components.

Tourism is a complex, multilayered and somewhat amorphous human phenomenon, being regarded as an industry sector by some and a composite of organisations by others ([Ritchie, 2009](#)). It is also an industry that has deep social, cultural and political implications. For an individual to be considered a 'tourist', at least one overnight stay at a site is usually required ([Weaver & Oppermann, 2000](#)). International travellers are generally considered 'tourists' as long as they do not stay in the destination country for more than 12 months. Most classifications of tourists based on motivations and visiting purpose do not only include leisure travellers, but also business travellers, medical tourists and student travellers ([Ritchie, 2009](#)). A more recent category is 'voluntourists' who combine leisure or adventure travel with volunteering for a humanitarian cause, such as providing 'assistance' following a major disaster.

'Disaster' has become a ubiquitous term in our everyday language. We would speak about a 'disaster' when our local football team loses the cup final and refer to 'fashion disasters' on the red carpet of film festivals. The visit of the US president Donald Trump to disaster-stricken Puerto Rico in October 2017 was deemed a 'political disaster' ([The Atlantic](#), 3 October 2017) when he told Puerto Ricans that they could be very proud that they had not endured a 'real catastrophe' like Hurricane Katrina that hit the US Gulf Coast in 2005. A few days after his controversial visit, he tweeted that Puerto Rico's '[e]lectric and all infrastructure was [a] disaster' even before Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit the island nation ([The Independent](#), 12 October 2017).

The academic literature on ‘natural’ and human-made disasters does not agree on a common definition or classification of disasters. [Carter \(1991, p. xxiii\)](#) defines a disaster as ‘an event, natural or man-made, sudden or progressive, which impacts with such severity that the affected community has to respond by taking exceptional measures’. [Prideaux, Laws, & Faulkner \(2003, p. 478\)](#) define disasters as ‘unpredictable catastrophic change that can normally only be responded to after the event, either by deploying contingency plans already in place or through reactive response’. While [Prideaux et al.’s](#) definition seems to be confined to rapid-onset disasters, [Carter’s](#) definition encompasses both rapid-onset (‘sudden’) disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tsunamis, landslides) and slow-onset (‘progressive’) disasters, such as droughts and sea-level rise.

[Bhati, Upadhayaya, and Sharma \(2016\)](#) classify disasters into five major categories: (1) political events, (2) natural disasters, (3) epidemics, (4) financial events and (5) manmade disasters, yet there seem to be considerable overlaps in this categorisation between manmade disasters on the one hand and political and financial events on the other, as the latter two are arguably manmade too. [Faulkner’s \(2001, p. 136\)](#) distinction between a ‘crisis’ and a ‘disaster’ is also somewhat problematic, as he describes the former as an event that is primarily self-inflicted and the latter as a situation where a business entity or a geographically delineated area ‘is confronted with sudden unpredictable catastrophic changes over which it has little control’. Yet, more recently, it has been argued that natural hazards turn into a catastrophic event because of a lack of preparedness or inept management, as exemplified by 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf of Mexico where levees were insufficient to protect New Orleans from flooding, and the 2011 East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami which caused an enormous loss of human life, destroyed infrastructure on a massive scale and triggered a long-term nuclear crisis. Most pandemics (e.g. SARS and avian flu) or regional epidemics, such as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, are characterised both by a natural hazard and human failure or incapacity to contain its catastrophic impacts. Hence, the boundaries between natural and manmade (i.e. self-inflicted) disasters or crises are fuzzy at best. There is an increasing agreement among scholars that there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ disaster and that most disasters/crises result from a combination of a hazard – natural or manmade – and a vulnerable human population ([Walch, 2014; Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 2004](#)).

There have been attempts to develop quantitative measures and arbitrary statistical thresholds to define disasters ([Faulkner, 2001](#)). The Emergency Events Database that has served as data source for a number of quantitative longitudinal studies applies the following criteria for a natural disaster: (1) at least 10 people have been killed; (2) 100 or more people have reportedly been affected; (3) a state of emergency has been declared; (4) a call for international assistance has been issued ([Xu, Wang, Shen, Ouyang, & Tu, 2016](#)). If at least one of the above criteria is met, the disaster will be entered into the database. Other thresholds that have been proposed by [Keller and Al-Madhari \(1996\)](#) include the damage costs (at least US\$ 1 million) and number of people evacuated (at least 50). While such criteria and thresholds may be useful for global comparative studies, they bear little relevance for qualitative case studies.

The question whether terrorist attacks should be classified as a disaster has been somewhat contentious. In its online instructions on how to prepare for a disaster, the United States Department of Homeland Security (<https://www.dhs.gov/national-preparedness-goal>) mentions ‘natural disasters, disease pandemics, chemical spills and other manmade hazards, terrorist attacks and cyber attacks’, hence clearly assigns terrorism to the disaster space. In a similar vein, [Vaugh \(2007, p. 388\)](#) contends that ‘[t]he shift to mass casualty and mass destruction attacks by some terrorist organizations has increased the potential for disaster and fundamentally changed the nature of the hazard’.

Definitions of conflict have been similarly contentious as disaster definitions. [Cosser \(1956, p. 7\)](#) defines conflict as ‘a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate rivals’ (cited in [Farmaki, 2017, p. 529](#)). Another definition of social conflict is offered by [Xu et al. \(2016, p. 39\)](#) who describe it as ‘a controversial interaction among social actors to realize scarce or incompatible aims and prevent the opponent from attaining them’. Both definitions have in common that they consider the parties to a conflict as adversaries that are trying to inflict harm on each other, which suggests that conflicts are inherently negative phenomena that should be avoided. Less normative definitions of conflict focus on the interdependence of the conflicting parties, instead of a state of immutable opposition. [Donohue and Kolt \(1992, p. 3\)](#), for instance, define conflict as ‘a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals’.

LINKAGES BETWEEN TOURISM AND DISASTER

Over the past 30 years, tourism has become an important development strategy for the Global South – more commonly known as the ‘developing world’. The attractiveness of exotic destinations combined with the relative ease and affordability of air travel has led to a proliferation of tourism facilities in many countries that were once out of reach for the common traveller. The rising middle and upper class in emerging economies, such as China, Brazil, India, Russia and Thailand – to name but a few, has also contributed to a rapid increase of global tourism activity. While there have been mixed assessments of the overall benefits and costs of the tourism industry for various stakeholder groups, there is no doubt that the sector has faced ever greater levels of disaster risks, affecting tourism businesses, tourists and communities in the host countries ([Drabek, 1995](#); [Faulkner, 2001](#); [Ghaderi, Som, & Henderson, 2015](#); [Murphy & Bayley, 1989](#)).

The literature on the linkages between tourism and disaster can be broadly categorised according to the themes that are addressed by the authors: first, tourism as a trigger and amplifier of disasters; second, impacts of disaster on the tourism industry; third, the role of tourism as a driver of the recovery process; and, fourth, disaster risk reduction strategies in the tourism sector.

Tourism as a Trigger and Amplifier of Disasters

Much of the literature at the interface of tourism and disaster has focused on tourism as a victim and manager of disasters (Glaesser, 2006; Ritchie, 2008). The fact that the tourist industry can trigger or amplify 'natural' disasters has received much less attention. Yet, the uncontrolled development of tourism in coastal areas of many tropical destinations has often gone along with the clearing of coastal vegetation, such as mangrove forests, that had provided a natural buffer against various disaster risks, most notably sea surges, tidal waves, tsunamis and hazardous storms (e.g. Beekhuis, 1981; Hall, 2001). The loss of green-belt buffers in coastal areas of Southern Thailand and Sri Lanka was a major factor contributing to the deaths of thousands of locals and tourists in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (Dahdouh-Guebas et al., 2005; Neef, Panyakotkaew, & Elstner, 2015).

Tourism development projects can also lead to the displacement of local communities from their homeland into unfamiliar and ecologically more fragile areas, where they face higher disaster risks and/or where their new livelihood activities, such as clearing forest in erosion-prone hillside, may trigger landslides and flash floods that affect other communities. A Chinese tourism megaproject in south-western Cambodia, for instance, relocated thousands of families from their customary coastal lands into the hinterlands of a national park, turning rice and cashew nut farmers and fisherfolks into forest dwellers who are forced to rely on logging in landslide-prone hillsides for much of their cash income, due to the lack of alternative livelihood activities (Neef & Touch, 2016).

It has also been suggested that tourism has been a major factor in the radicalisation of some local residents in such popular destinations as Bali or Egypt. Terrorist groups are increasingly seeing tourists as easy 'soft' targets with high symbolic and international news value, triggering such disasters as the 1997 Luxor Massacre and the 2002 and 2005 Bali Bombings (e.g. Gurtner, 2016; Litvin, 1998; Sönmez et al., 1999).

Impacts of Disasters on the Tourism Industry

A major strand of the tourism-disaster literature has looked into the destructive impacts of disasters (and crises) on the tourism sector, often with the aim of quantifying damage and losses. Disaster-induced loss and damage to the tourism sector have been calculated for such diverse disasters as the 1999 Earthquake in Taiwan (Huang & Min, 2002), the 1999 hurricanes in North Carolina (Chandler, 2004), the 2003 wildfires in Australia (Armstrong & Ritchie, 2008) and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in the Maldives (Carlsen, 2006), mostly in terms of direct economic impact. Other studies have gone further and also included long-term disaster impacts on the tourism industry. Fitchett, Hoogendoorn, and Swemmer (2016), for instance, quantified the economic costs of the 2012 floods on tourism in the Mopani District Municipality of South Africa. They not only calculated the direct and short-term economic damages and medium-term losses to tourist businesses, but also estimated the long-term costs, resulting from increased insurance premiums and infrastructure enhancement and adaptation.

Some studies have also considered broader impacts or investigated to what extent disasters have contributed to a shift of tourism activity from affected areas to other tourist destinations that were deemed safer. [Bonham, Edmonds, and Mak \(2006\)](#) explored the impacts of the 9/11 attacks in New York on tourism in the United States and Hawaii and found that an increase of domestic visitors to Hawaii offset the decline of foreign visitors to the island state. The Asian Development Bank (2015) found that tourism shifted from Vanuatu to Fiji following the 2015 Cyclone Pam, while a reverse trend was observed in the aftermath of 2016 Cyclone Winston that devastated parts of the Fiji Islands. Researchers have also tried to predict the impact of disasters on the tourism sector. A study by [Granvorka and Strobl \(2013\)](#) attempted to quantify the impact of hurricane strikes on the tourism industry in the Caribbean, by first developing a ‘hurricane destruction index’ which they employed to estimate how an average hurricane strike would affect country-level tourist numbers.

There is a considerable lack of systematic and in-depth qualitative research into the impacts of disasters on local people and foreign workers employed in the tourism sector. A few studies have generated or quoted crude estimates of how many people have been affected, such as number of employees laid off by the hotel industry and related tourism subsectors in the aftermath of a disaster (e.g. [Nanda & Hargreaves, 2013](#); for the impacts of the Bali Bombings), and how long it would take on average to secure a new job in the tourism business or elsewhere (e.g. [Government of Vanuatu, 2015](#); for the impacts of 2015 Cyclone Pam). Even less is known about the indirect impacts of the tourism fallouts, for example, the other domestic sectors that are at least partially connected with the tourism industry, such as the agriculture and food industry, fisheries, small manufacturing and the textile industry.

Tourism as a Driver of the Recovery Process

The tourism industry has often been assigned a pivotal role in the reconstruction and recovery efforts. With catchphrases such as ‘your holiday can help’ (*The Guardian*, 13 August 2015), prospective tourists have been asked to support post-disaster rehabilitation simply through visiting disaster-affected areas, such as earthquake-stricken Nepal and cyclone-ravaged Vanuatu in 2015. Yet, prioritising the tourism sector in the recovery process may have unintended consequences: less touristic areas that have been severely affected by the disaster may receive less humanitarian relief support. This was the case in southern Thailand, where post-disaster reconstruction and recovery in Phang Nga province – which had suffered by far the highest number of casualties from the 2004 tsunami – started with a significant delay, as priority was given to the prime tourist destinations on Phuket Island ([Calgaro & Lloyd, 2008](#); [Neef et al., 2015](#); [Wong, 2012](#)).

Surprisingly, little is known on the nature of ‘disaster tourism’ and the motivations of tourists to visit a destination in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Some may simply be motivated by a sense of voyeurism (e.g., [Robinson & Jarvie, 2008](#); for the case of post-tsunami Sri Lanka), while others have the genuine urge to help affected communities. Some scholars have pointed out the tensions

between amateur volunteer humanitarians on the one hand, who act upon their own need to help others or their urge for adventurous travel, and professional humanitarians on the other, who have the training and skills to deliver aid efficiently in an emergency (Fernando & Hilhorst, 2006; Hanna, 2018; Malkki, 2015). An important and emerging subfield of critical tourism studies has focused on volunteer-tourism, or ‘voluntourism’, a problematic category that typically features visitors from the Global North volunteering for social or environmental causes while on holiday. In the context of recovery efforts following The Great Eastern Japan Disasters of 11 March 2011, McMorran (2017) argues that apart from the haphazard and uncoordinated introduction of amateur humanitarians into the otherwise coordinated and professional response, the packaging and marketing of disaster recovery efforts to voluntourists risks trapping disaster settings in a permanent state of post-disaster recovery.

Few tourism researchers have explored how various stakeholders linked to the tourism industry collaborate to improve their capacity to respond to and recover from a disaster. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of collaborative disaster management following the 2015 Cyclone Marcia in Queensland (Australia), Jiang and Ritchie (2017) identified particular motivations for collaboration among tourism providers and other stakeholders in the post-disaster response and recovery process. They found that motivations for collaboration building were primarily resource and relationship related and that pre-existing collaborative experience and partnerships were major determinants for successful networking among the various stakeholders. In Chapter 5 of this volume, van Strien (2018) argues that one factor supporting the Nepal tourism sector’s resilience after the Gorkha Earthquake of 2015 was the collaboration among tourism operators during the immediate and medium-term recovery phases.

Several studies on tourism recovery following the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Thailand found that tourism planners, industry stakeholders, government officials and donors missed the opportunity of ‘making a fresh start’, for example, through focusing on the promotion of more pro-poor forms of tourism or through reassessing the environmental damages and disaster vulnerabilities that uncontrolled tourism development had generated prior to the tsunami. Instead, government agencies, businesses and donors colluded in a scramble for quick rebuilding of tourism facilities and infrastructure and ignored calls for more inclusive tourism development that maximises benefits for local people and minimises social and environmental costs (Hitchcock, King, & Parnwell, 2008; see also Neef, Attavanich, Kongpan, & Jongkraichak, 2018, in this volume).

A tourism crisis in the aftermath of a major disaster can be compounded by negative media coverage, which can have a damaging impact on the image of a tourist destination. Sönmez et al. (1999) hold that ‘natural’ disasters tend to invoke greater public understanding, empathy and tolerance among potential tourists, while terrorist attacks may have a more intimidating effect. However, these authors may underestimate the fact that such disasters as a hurricane, an earthquake or – most seriously – a nuclear accident or epidemic may have severe impacts on the environment and public health, which may scare even the most empathetic tourists away for an extended period of time.