

UgoRound



Location Based Messaging for Tourist Safety and Communication

July 2017

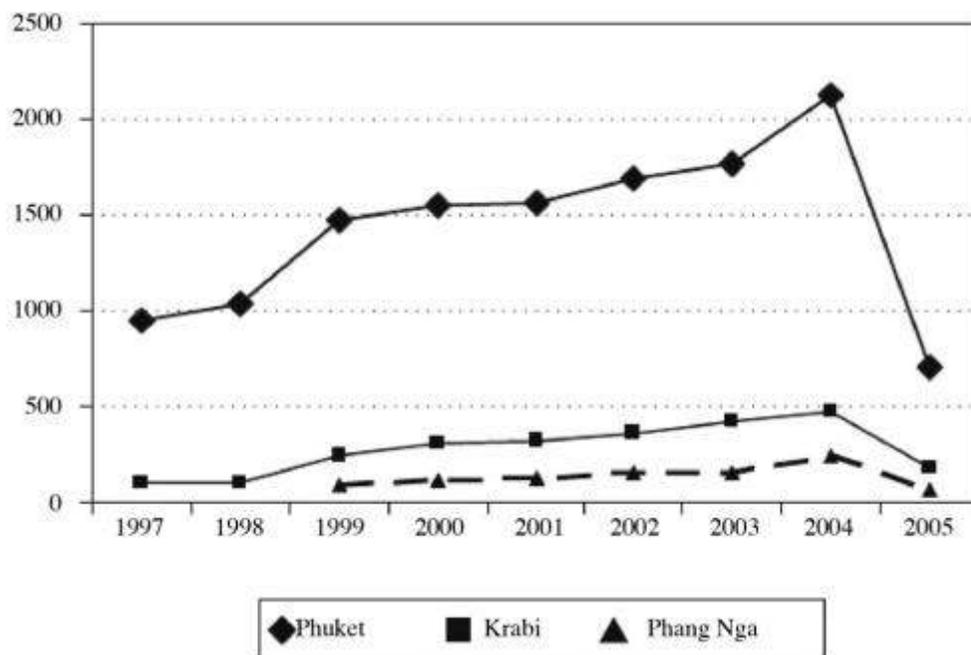
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A Tsunami

The Boxing Day Tsunami that occurred on 26 December 2004 has been defined as one of the most significant global disasters in recent times. The devastation, loss of life and the number of countries directly and indirectly affected is statistically sobering. Much has been achieved since then, both in research and analysis of what occurred and what needs to be done if such an event happens again.

The Tourism industry in many of the countries impacted represents a top-level earner in terms of GDP. The Tourism industry in Thailand contributes 5-6% to the GDP with a total loss over \$2.1 billion representing nearly 1.4% of the Thai GDP. The UNDP attributed 120 000 lost tourism jobs directly as a result.

The graph below depicts the decline in tourism revenue in the three most affected provinces.



Amount shown in millions

Tourist Safety and Security

There are a number of protocols activated when a tourist is impacted by a natural disaster or life-threatening situation. Listed below is from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia:

“The Indian Ocean tsunami presented an unprecedented challenge to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) consular service. From the early afternoon of 26 December 2004, the Department moved quickly to activate its crisis centre and emergency call unit. Both were fully operational by 6pm Canberra time.

The first Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) meeting, chaired by the Department, was held at 9pm that night and brought together senior representatives of all relevant agencies to coordinate whole of government policy and operational responses. The IDETF met 22 times between 26 December 2004 and 14 January 2005.

The consular complexities posed by the tsunami were unique in scale and geographic scope. The Department activated a consular response in six countries, including in remote locations.

In Canberra, more than 300 staff – 150 of whom voluntarily returned from leave – worked around the clock coordinating with teams on the ground to confirm the safety of Australians and identify those unaccounted for, and to support and inform next of kin of developments. The Department’s hotline took more than 85,000 calls, with over 15,000 Australians reported as unaccounted for.

In the immediate aftermath, the Department’s posts in Thailand, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka worked with local authorities, hospitals and hotels to account for, and provide assistance to, affected Australians. Temporary offices were established in Phuket and Krabi in Thailand, and in the Maldives. Consular officers and local staff worked tirelessly in the field locating and assisting Australians.

DFAT helped facilitate medical treatment and emergency shelter for Australians, replaced travel documents and facilitated departures from affected areas. The Department worked closely with Virgin Blue and Qantas to ensure relief flights were available to as many Australians as possible who wanted to leave. Staff worked closely with the Australian Federal Police to put victim identification and support arrangements in place and assisted the repatriation of the remains of Australians killed. Forty additional staff were deployed to the region to supplement consular staff on the ground.”

According to Oxfam the number of German and Swedish tourists killed were over 1000 who “lost more citizens than all but the four most affected countries”

When tourists arrive, the traditional method of recording this has been to check in at customs and list at least one place where they might stay. The internal movement of that tourist is largely unknown to authorities. It’s probably also true that most tourists arrive without knowing basic information that could be vital in a life-threatening situation.

Consider a tourist arriving who does not speak the local language and then finds themselves needing assistance either from law enforcement or emergency services personnel. Most tourists would not know that countries emergencies services phone number. If people were proactive when they arrive on vacation or business, they could for example record their consulate contacts or other information that could be of assistance. The fact is we simply don't know if that happens and its safer to assume it probably doesn't.

The average tourist and certainly business travellers would certainly have a smart phone and are therefore easily contactable. Most customs especially in the developing world are recording a mobile phone number albeit in a written form which may or may not be legible.

If tourists whereabouts were known and if people could be contacted via location based intelligence, any situation where useful information would assist would be beneficial – perhaps even save lives.

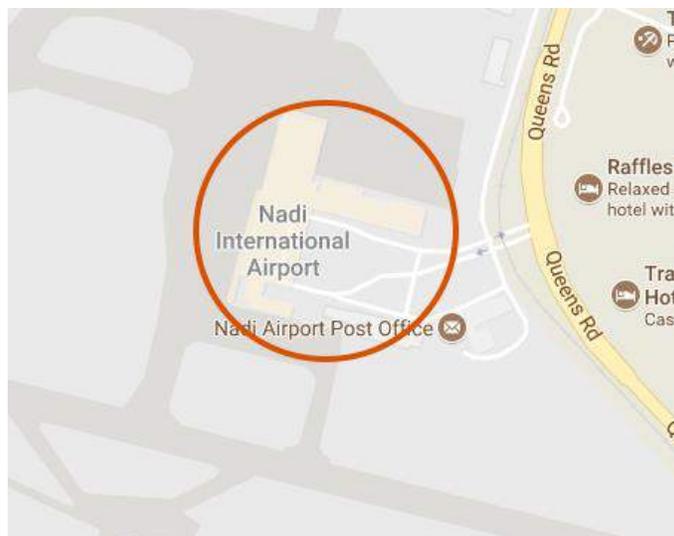
An Anonymous Tourist Register

Tourists could easily register that they are foreigners via a smart phone app. The app could collect just two vital facts – a) they are a foreigner and b) what country they come from. This would be enough to provide authorities a visible and anonymous dot point on a country map.

Further, as the person is moving around the city or country they could trigger informative messages based on their geo location. A tourist specific geo messaging platform could provide contextual information based on where they are. It's not necessary to know who they are.

A Geo-location messaging platform will provide Tourism stakeholders a smart way to inform tourists of warnings, incidents or notifications.

The obvious first point of contact would be the airport or other ports of entry. Here, a tourist can download the app and then instantly receive messages as they pass through to the city.



Here is an example of the messaging that could be sent to tourists who arrive at a popular tourist destination:

Message 1 – trigger: upon landing and dwelling in geofence +5minutes

Push Message (PM): Welcome to (Country Name). We value your safety so please note the following important contact details: (user swipes)

Detailed Message (DM): Emergency Services contact for Tourists: 123456. If you wish to contact your country representative click the following link for list of embassies and consulates general (Link)

Image: welcome image

Message 2 – trigger: upon exiting airport geofence

PM: Keep an eye on the weather reports. Currently it's the rainy season and some areas could be flooded.

DM: If you intend to travel out of the city and south towards XX territory – please be aware of flood watch warnings. You can check up to date information via this link: (Link)

Image: flooded area

Message 3 – trigger: upon entering an unsafe zone in the city

PM: Unsafe area. Please take care and ensure you have local guides with you.

DM: Tourists are targeted in this area. Take care of your belongings. Please contact (Phone #) if you are the victim of a crime.

Image: area map of unsafe zone

A Tourist Check in

If a security incident or natural disaster occurs, there are a number of useful messages that could be sent. A simple instruction (only to the location affected) for tourists to check in, may be enough to ensure someone is safe. This can be further improved by allowing tourists to connect via the app with authorities concerned with their wellbeing. This can be done to further mitigate the need to know phone numbers or even what to do in the case of an emergency.

If a tourist registered anonymously, this could be depicted via colour coded dot points on a map. The colour might correspond to the nationality selected. This can be expanded to include real time location based evidence of whereabouts and can be supplied to the relevant consulates as and when required.

A Tourist is worth it

Tourism in the developing world is growing. Some areas are doing well, however there are many ideal tourist locations that are yet to be discovered. Anything Tourism stakeholders can do to ensure safety of tourists would be a worthwhile investment. Often the perception of a countries security and safety for tourists don't match the facts. This often means that tourists are sticking to "tourist hot spots" and are too afraid to venture out. If they did, what support would they have if they got into trouble? It would be useful then to have a virtual "bodyguard" that sent you warnings, incidents or simply an informative notification about the area you have entered.

Here is interesting quote:

"I can't think of anything that excites a greater sense of childlike wonder than to be in country where you are ignorant of almost everything" Bill Bryson

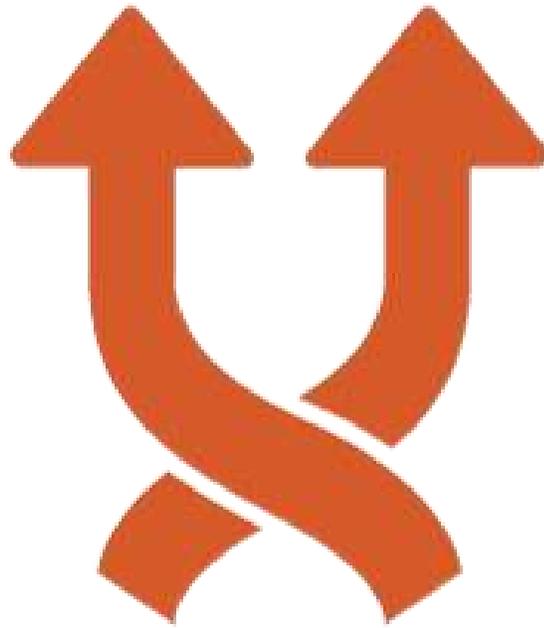
Wait – did Bill know of location based messaging for Tourists? Maybe not!

References:

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<http://www.neumann.edu/about/publications/NeumannBusinessReview/journal/Review2012/Rosa.pdf>

<http://dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/indian-ocean-tsunami.aspx>



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Wait...seriously?