Cruising with terrorists: Qualitative study of consumer perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study on cruise ship security was to understand cruise ship passenger's security perception; what level of security they expect as consumers and what minimum level of security they would be willing to accept. There were a total ten participants in this qualitative study using an interpretivist approach. Tourism is a major revenue generator for New Zealand and protecting this industry is of paramount importance. Once the industry understands their consumers' security expectations, they can perhaps 'manage' any unexpected events accordingly and ensure minimal disruption to business. Terrorists are constantly searching for easier, more accessible, low-investment/high-return targets. They want new, fresh, high-yield targets. Terrorism is not necessarily about killing a huge number of people all at once; it is about creating fear and uncertainty amongst the audience and witnesses, and disrupting everyday life and commerce. Terrorism is about causing chaos, fear and uncertainty. Understanding the expectations of terrorists and also understanding the security needs of the cruise consumers will help the industry to provide the right balance of security without impinging on consumer's enjoyment and hospitality experience. Hospitality security, unlike security in many other industries, is delicate, in that while it is imperative, it should be invisible. Hospitality needs to appear inviting and welcoming, while at the same time implicitly promising safety and security.

Findings: 1) Participants have a laissez-faire attitudes towards security. 2) Passengers believed that security screenings at seaports were less stringent than at airports.

Keywords*: terrorism, hospitality, tourism, cruise, maritime, soft targets

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Introduction

"If ignorant both of your enemy and yourself, you are certain to be in peril"

Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Background

The earth's surface is basically made up of 71% water and 29% land (Williams, 2014). So it is only natural to expect that sea voyagers are becoming more popular. The 71% is made up of five oceans; the biggest being the Pacific Ocean at 155 million square kilometres. Land masses found in this part of the world include Australia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea and also New Zealand (University of Delaware, 2008). With over 7 billion people 'cramped' in 29% of the earth's surface, the open seas must surely be inviting.

SN	Ship	Cruise liner	Weight	Length	Passengers	Crew	Reference
1	Allure of the Seas	Royal Caribbean International	225,280 GT	360m	6300	1650	(Chanev, 2015a)
2	Oasis of the Seas	Royal Caribbean International	225,280 GT	361m	6300	1650	(Chanev, 2015b)
3	Quantum of the Seas	Royal Caribbean International	167,800 GT	348m	4900	760	(Chanev, 2015c)
4	Anthem of the Seas	Royal Caribbean International	167,800 GT	348m	4900	760	(Chanev, 2015d)
5	Norwegian Epic	Norwegian Cruise Line	155,873 GT	329m	4100	1738	(Norwegian Cruise Line, 2015)

Table 1: Top 5 cruise ship data

Currently the largest cruise ships in operation are the 'Allure of the Seas' and 'Oasis of the Seas'; both owned and operated by Royal Caribbean International (Table 1). They both have a maximum capacity of 6,300 passengers and 1,650 crew which means that at its peak they can carry a total of 7,950 people each. There are a few more cruise ships being built (estimated to be ready by 2020) that will have a larger passenger and crew capacity.

Cruise ships are *mobile destinations,* making them harder to secure and protect. It does not mean that just because there have not been any major terrorist incidents involving cruise ships, that it will not happen in future. Terrorists are continually exploring newer, softer targets. In many ways, cruise ships are floating icons, carrying 'rich, valuable' passengers - an assortment of nationalities. The attraction for terrorists is two-fold; soft-target and a variety of nationalities. Cruise ships and their 'rich' passengers represent an ostentatious way of life, which terrorists tend to target. Terrorism is about instilling fear, disrupting normal live and spreading a particular message. If terrorists are successful in attacking a cruise ship, that particular sector of the hospitality/tourism industry will suffer immensely.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Number of international	2,501,264	2,501,303	2,635,726	2,636,896	2,786,826

visitor arrivals					

Table 2: NZ visitor arrivals 2010 to 2014

Table 2 shows a healthy, steady growth in terms of New Zealand visitor arrival numbers. These numbers account for the huge New Zealand tourism income. The 2014 figures (table 3) states that international tourism expenditure was $10.3 billion. That year the tourism industry which employs approximately 94,000 people, contributed $8.3 billion or 4% towards the New Zealand GDP. This, valuable contribution should be protected.

Key results 2010 to 2014 (NZ$b)					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total tourism expenditure	22.4	23	23.4	23.9	23.8
International tourism expenditure	9.5	9.7	9.6	9.8	10.3
Domestic tourism expenditure	12.9	13.2	13.8	14.2	13.4
Direct contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	6.5	6.9	6.2	7.3	8.3
Fulltime equivalent (FTE) tourism employees	92,900	91,900	119,800	110,800	94,100

Table 3: Tourism statistics 2010 to 2014

There have not been many major incidents specifically targeting cruise ships. The one that has often been mentioned is the *MS Achille Lauro* incident, where the cruise ship was hijacked by the Palestine Liberation Front in 1985 (Holmes, 1997). That incident ended with the death of one disabled passenger who was murdered and thrown overboard. The other significant incident took place in March 2015, where 12 cruise ship passengers were killed while visiting Bardo museum in Tunis, Tunisia (Paris, 2015). Cruise ship passengers had disembarked and were on a day tour when the incident took place.

Possible modes of attacking a cruise ship include, but is not limited to 1) ramming the ship from sea (using a sea-going vessel), 2) planting an incendiary device on board the vessel, 3) food terrorism (compromising the food supply), 4) flying into the cruise ship (air attack), 5) suicide bomber on board, 6) hostage taking and 7) staff working with terrorists to target cruise passengers.

Literature review

Cruise industry

It was not until 1840, when Samuel Cunard took 63 passengers across the Atlantic on the Britania when technically cruising first began (Gulliksen, 2008). Today the industry is worth several billion dollars and is now considered a holiday destination in its own right. Arbitrarily, one would not need to leave the ship to be fed, watered or entertained; almost everything one desires or requires is available on board. However, most passengers disembark at every port for sightseeing. According to Machan (2014), the cruise industry is valued at US$117 billion with approximately 21 million passengers (Machan, 2014). This industry is growing at a tremendous pace including in Australia and New Zealand (Dowling, 2011). A report by Worley & Akehurst (2014), estimated that there will be about 120 sea

voyages to New Zealand ports with approximately 650 stopover days in the 2015-2016 cruising season. There is an expectation that New Zealand will host about 250,000 tourists arriving on cruise ships during that same period (Worley & Akehurst, 2014). This is a very valuable and lucrative industry to New Zealand in terms of tourist expenditures and also because of the direct and indirect employment the cruise industry has created over the years.

Tourism valued

According to a recent newspaper report by Bradley (2015), New Zealand tourism is on the verge of overtaking the dairy industry in terms of revenue generation. The dairy industry has been New Zealand's main income earner for a long time. New Zealand short-term visitor (tourists) arrivals recently surpassed the three million mark according to Metherell (2015). Cruise ship tourists, even on a day's stopover at any port will spend on food, beverage, local tours, gifts and souvenirs at the very least. Douglas and Douglas (2004), argue that cruise ships have a huge positive financial impact on tourism related income as each ship has expenditures relating to passengers, crew, the ship and other miscellaneous support activities every time they reach a port.

Philosophy behind terrorism

Terrorism has existed for a long time and instances of terrorism have been well documented throughout history. Yet, maritime terrorism, according to Bowen, Fidgeon & Page (2014), is under-researched. It is important enough that 44% of participants of a particular study on terrorism believe that a cruise ship attack is very likely (Bowen, Fidgeon, & Page, 2014). Terrorism is a way for the 'oppressed' to be heard; a way to be taken seriously (Payne, 2008). The way terrorists groups have operated may have changed over the years but the underlying principles remain constant. According to Intriligator (2010), terrorist acts are perpetrated by the marginalised, disgruntled individuals in our midst, who deeply believe that their plight and pleas are being ignored. Their voices silenced, they take to unorthodox methods to highlight their problems. Harrald (2005) states that terrorists are smart and will always try to identify 'soft' targets. Intiligator (2010), states that terrorists exist not only amongst Muslims but in every religion and culture. He also claims that an individual's financial status or educational background had no bearing on whether one decides to take up arms. Rich, poor, educated or uneducated; made no difference. Given the difficulties of identifying terrorists, Intriligator (2010) states that we must continue to research and study terrorists and their motivations. Cohn (2002), attempts to explain the reasons behind terrorism and the meaning/purpose.

Generally we hear more about cases of piracy than terrorism at sea, but Hong & Ng (2010) claim that many terrorists organisations are using piracy as their modus operandi. On the surface they appear to be merely pirates disrupting sea traffic and robbing, but they could be terrorists, complete with ideology, will, purpose and stamina.

Rt Hon. John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, in a 2014 speech at Victoria University of Wellington clearly stated that New Zealand's security environment is changing and that it cannot simply rely on its geographic location to keep it safe. The Prime Minister went on to say that there are individuals who are interested in domestic terrorism, just like in Australia

and Canada. He claimed that those who have been prevented from participating or contributing to overseas terrorist efforts may decide instead to do so in New Zealand (New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 2015). This is a dangerous and slippery path to even contemplate. One major incident is all it will take to negatively affect our tourism industry – our big earner.

Dangers at sea

Aside from accidents and natural disasters, cruise ships and the maritime industry as a whole have to contend with pirates and terrorists when they are out at sea, with minimal or no protection. Generally, piracy and maritime terrorism are similar in many ways but their objectives differ (Diaz & Dubner, 2004). One of the modes of attack employed by such groups is the use of small vessels/speedboats. Such sea crafts are easy to conceal and have a higher chance of succeeding in their mission (Buky, 2009). According to Intriligator (2010), terrorists will use the easiest, simplest methods to achieve their aims to create chaos and fatalities. He also states that terrorists will look for other critical points to attack since airport security had increased markedly since the 11th September 2001 attacks in the United States of America by al-Qaeda. One of his suggestions is that terrorists will perhaps substitute airports for seaports.

Cruise ship passengers must not only be protected while out at sea but also when they come into port and disembark for the day. Paris (2015) describes how 12 cruise passengers lost their lives while on a visit to Bardo museum in Tunis, Tunisia in March 2015. These passengers disembarked for a day visit in Tunis. The author goes on to state that the affected liners have decided to opt for other ports instead of Tunisia for safety reasons.

While this is not directly related to cruise ships, 38 people were killed while on a beach in Sousse, Tunisia in June 2015 (Smith-Spark, Walsh, & Black, 2015). Sousse is approximately 145 kilometres south of Tunis, where the cruise passenger attack took place three months prior. Therefore, due to these two widely publicised incidents, it is not unexpected that cruise ships and other tourists are avoiding Tunisia. The recovery of their tourism industry is set to take a long time. Tourists will naturally opt for safer destinations and activities.

Walker (2012) suggests that cruise ships 'are attractive targets for terrorists'. Walker (2012) quoting a 2008 RAND corporation report states that 'sea-based terrorism constitutes a viable means of inflicting mass coercive punishment on enemy audiences' (Walker, 2012). Currently, any focus on maritime security is reserved to the ports and commercial container vessels only, and not passenger cruise ship (AM Best Companyt Inc, 2007). Greenberg, Chalk, Wilis, Khilko and Ortiz (2006) also state that cruise ships are attractive largely due to the fact that they represent a successful western icon, western success/affluence and western way of living. Greenberg et al., (2006), argue that:

i.   cruise passengers are generally Christians which means that any cruise ship attack will be unlikely to affect Muslims

ii.   a large population will be all in one location, making an attack much easier with a high success rate

iii. sea port security checks are not as strict as airports

iv. cruise liners only conduct security vetting for their own employees but they do not have any control over the contractors, at the various ports they call at, working on the docks. Some of these people have access to the ship.

Bateman (2015) describes in his study on risk assessment on maritime terrorism in the Asian region that a significant and/or major risk exists and he states that the increasing number of cruise ships in the region could perhaps be an attraction. His methodology describes 'significant' as that there could be some disruption to trade which will be limited or restricted to the conflict or attack zone; and 'major' is described as the possibility of a far greater disruption of trade.

Methodology

Given the purpose and intent of this research, interpretivism, a qualitative methodology was used to elicit the best possible result. Fay (1996) states that interpretivism is about searching for a meaning or an explanation of a particular subject or topic. Fay explains that it is important to understand how people function and why they function in a particular manner or fashion. These will include their responses and reactions to their surroundings. Williams (2003) states that interpretivisim is about the researcher constructing a story from the collated data. Unlike many other methodologies, it is not rigid.

For this study we had to explore and find out what level of security cruise ship passengers expected and were willing to accept. Data was collected from ten participants using the semi-structured interview method along with direct observation. Some of these ten participants came from the researcher's own network and also included *snowball sampling*, where participants introduced other possible candidates from their own networks for the study. All participants had to have been on at least one cruise before participating in the study.

Semi-structured as the name implies is not rigid and has a built in flexibility. It allowed the researcher to probe further if a particular response was found to be interesting or significant.

Results, Analysis and Discussion

Security awareness

When asked what level of security was provided on board their cruise ship, participants claimed that they did not see any visible security. They did not see any armed personnel on board. They did not notice any security guards patrolling the ship. Of the uniformed staff present on board, they were not able to identify whom, if any, of them were security personnel.

> *Not on the ship [security]. But going on and off I saw security. They are very strict. Going on, they x-rayed everything; day-pack, you, each time. Walked through a*
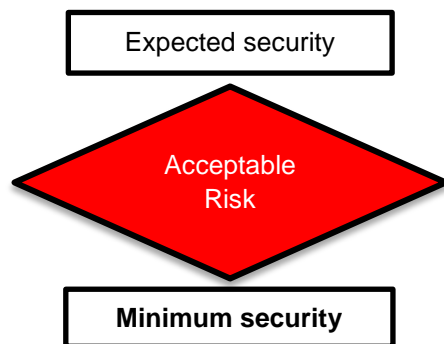
scanner. They check your ID card. You have to carry that all the time. (P3)

There weren't any armed guards but there were a lot of staff around. They may have been security. I am not a 100% sure. They were all uniformed staff so you knew that they were part of the ship. (P4)

They processed us, checked our passports and gave us swipe cards. No photo on the swipe card/ID card. Luckily no photo. Security is one thing but I don't like security pushed in my face. People walking around with weapons etc; I would find it very unpleasant. (P7)

Only saw ship personnel. Never knew whether they were security or just ordinary staff. They were all uniformed. No weapons. Definitely not. (P9)

The fact that the participants did not see any visible security and coupled with the fact that many of the participants went on other cruises since and are planning more cruises in the coming years, seems to indicate that security is not a major issue for them. They may have psychologically transferred that responsibility to the cruise liners to address.

They expect that the supplier (cruise liner) would have considered security before offering the service. It was observed that participants did not seem to mind that there wasn't any visible security provided and to some extent they did not want that level of 'invasive' security (e.g. armed personnel and photographs on their identification cards).

Figure 1: Security risk perception

It is possible that cruise operators understand this phenomenon quite well and are deliberately providing the minimum level of security the passengers will accept. Providing security is expensive and suppliers tend to shy away from increasing their expenses. Figure 1, explains how we have expected or desired levels of security but yet we will accept a lower level without any argument. This is the same with any other decisions we are faced with (e.g. school results, restaurant service). The difference between our expected standards and the minimum standard we will accept is flexible, depending on the situation and service provided. It is dependent on how much we want that particular item, service or experience. The greater the desirability/importance is, the greater the flexibility. We are more forgiving and willing to overlook some of the important facts and advice we get if we want something badly.

Thoughts about safety and security

The participants claimed that they were not briefed about security issues throughout the process of purchasing the tickets to the actual cruise itself. The only briefings they received were about safety and evacuation procedures. Some said they had drills with regards to where they were to meet (assembly points) in times of an emergency. No mention was made about terrorism or piracy.

The security being that you must always have your [identification] card with you.

Need the card to embark and disembark [all the time]. Passengers were divided into groups. They were told the security and safety regulations [what to do in an emergency e.g. evacuation, lifeboats]. (P1)

Only just the evacuation of the boat. No mention of terrorism and piracy. (P2)

Nothing about terrorism. Only insurance mentioned that they do not cover acts of terrorism. (P3)

I don't remember any warnings. The only warnings we got was typically about pick pockets. Crime, not safety. (P5)

Not terrorism. They reminded us about taking our ID cards [everywhere] but nothing about terrorism. Didn't even occur to me actually. Too naïve. (P6)

These excerpts above indicate that neither the travel agents nor the cruise liners discussed such dangers or issues (terrorism, piracy) with the passengers. When facts are purposely omitted, potential customers cannot make proper informed decisions.

It is also worrying that the participants themselves did not consider security a major issue as indicated in the following excerpts. When asked whether they considered possible security issues (terrorism), most of the participants said they did not.

No really. No more than I would on any other holiday. (P3)

No more [dangerous] being a cruise than anything else. (P6)

No. Not at all. We take our own travel insurance. (P8)

To be quite honest, I never even thought of it [laughs]. I just went with complete trust. We pray before we go. (P10)

Fear of publicised events

Participants did not seem perturbed by well publicised events like piracy off Somalia, Tunisian museum incident and the Costa Concardia incident. These three events were specifically mentioned to the participants. Participants claimed that they were cautious and would avoid known troubled regions and countries.

I don't think about them. I was just forgetting the world. (P1)

I think it [publicity] does to a degree but then if you took every incident [into account], you wouldn't go anywhere [laughs]. You wouldn't drive a car because you hear of someone crashing. You wouldn't go to a certain country, if they are more known to be attacked. I think it's kind of getting everywhere now. (P4)

There is a possibility that because we are continuously being bombarded by terrorist events through the media on a daily basis, people might have become more desensitised and blasé about the entire topic.

Seaport security screening

When asked to compare airport and seaport security screening process, most felt that the airports were more stringent; with more checks, more often.

> *Seaport has lower screening standards. (P1)*
>
> *Airports checked you far more and checked you more often and they are looking for things you might use to hurt other people with. (P2)*
>
> *Airport is a more controlled environment. (P5)*
>
> *Airport is far more stringent. More checks. More stages to it [security checks]. (P9)*

The comments above are not surprising and it confirms the reasons why terrorist have used cruise ships as a means of transport. It is harder to get through airports undetected post 9/11. Seaports are considered to be easier entry points. An article by Schapiro (2014) supports this argument. He claimed that terrorists were using cruise ships to get to or closer to conflict zones (Schapiro, 2014).

Limitations and opportunities for further research

While this study is too small to generalise the findings, the participant's response shows that a further, more in depth study is warranted. The new study should preferably be a quantitative study for comparison purposes.

Conclusion and implications

This exploratory study is quite clear in that it demonstrates that cruise consumers are not very concerned about security when planning a cruise holiday. They may have certain security expectations, but they are willing to accept a far lower standard when it comes to the actual cruise. Some participants were aware of the lack of security and yet there were others that were not concerned by the lack of security. It can be argued that this is due to the fact that they expect any responsible supplier to already haven taken security into consideration. It could also be that continuous media coverage of terrorism has made the consumer more desensitised and blasé. They do not see a cruise ship, floating in the middle of the ocean as an easy, soft target.

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