

*Hurricane Harvey Makes Waves for Tourism In Texas: A Case Study***Summary**

Stinson Suites is an extended stay property, in coastal Texas that was impacted by Hurricane Harvey. The hotel was fortunate in that it had not lost power. Ms. Juliet Young, the operations manager, was interviewed regarding her experience during Hurricane Harvey along with its aftereffects.

During Hurricane Harvey, Ms. Young was forced to lead and operate the Stinson Suites hotel. This turned out to be a solo endeavor that lasted five days straight. She had four other staff members to assist her in operating this property – two housekeepers, one food and beverage attendant, and one night auditor. Young worked sixteen-hour shifts and switched off with the night auditor in an attempt to relieve some pressure off herself.

In the event of a natural disaster, prevention and response procedures must be in place to ensure the safety of both guests and employees. The guests will inherently look to the staff for guidance and peace when natural disasters are imminent and after a disaster strikes, so providing the staff with the tools to succeed is vital for future success and repeat business after a catastrophe. The Stinson Suites requires its employees to take a hurricane preparedness class that teaches them how identify necessary supplies, and to where and how to stock those supplies. In addition, the class provides that staff with a booklet of information regarding staff scheduling including the amount of staff needed to operate the property during the hurricane and the number and type of staff needed to relieve the disaster staff once it was over.

Because the Stinson Suites did not experience the same magnitude of damage as many other properties did, it allowed the hotel and its staff to provide relief for their community. Towards the fifth day, they began running out of food as they had people coming in who had not eaten in over twenty-four hours; however, she was able to get to the grocery store on the fifth day. Because “there was no bread, no milk, but plenty of people,” Young and her staff stocked up on frozen food as that was the only food left.

When discussing how natural disasters affect travel and tourism, she stated, “After the hurricane in Houston, there were less travelers to the city.” However, this did not impact the occupancy of the hotel as they were full with FEMA guests (those who lost their homes to flooding). While it might be expected that the hotel would lose an extraordinary amount of travel and tourism business due to natural disaster, for hotels providing relief to the hurricane’s victims and aids, the rate of business may be comparable or even greater to than before the disaster.

This case study highlights four topics that emerge in times of

natural disaster: disaster preparedness, human resources management in times of crises, corporate social responsibility, and marketing techniques for a city recovering from disaster. The way in which a hospitality company manages their organization in times of natural disaster is discussed.

**Target Audience**

The case may be taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels, though the analysis and readings are more suitable for graduate level discussion and analysis. While the tenor of this teaching note is tailored to graduate level study, undergraduate instructors are not precluded from adapting this information to create meaningful discussion of disaster preparedness, human resources management in times of crises, corporate social responsibility, and marketing techniques for a city recovering from disaster. Textbook chapters may be used in place of recommended readings. While the emergent themes of the case study are complex, they are not uncommon topics in lower level hospitality courses.

**Learning Outcomes**

This case study identifies a tangible example of the impact that natural disasters have on hospitality and tourism employees and organizations. Several key concepts emerged: disaster preparedness, human resources management in times of crises, corporate social responsibility, and marketing techniques for a city recovering from disaster. All learning outcomes are applicable for undergraduate and graduate level students. By the end of this lesson, the student should be able to:

1. Identify several appropriate ways to prepare a hospitality organization for an impending natural disaster.
2. Evaluate how best to disseminate responsibilities within a hospitality environment once a disaster is going to strike or has struck.
3. Examine types of CSR in which a company might engage that is beneficial to the organization and others after a disaster.
4. Create a marketing plan for a company to use after a disaster has created an image of a town that is no longer applicable. The marketing plan should include the following sections and subsections: 1. Business Summary (Company Name; Mission Statement; Vision statement; SWOT Analysis); 2. Business Initiatives (Overarching initiatives; Marketing initiatives, goals, metrics); 3. Target Market (Industry Name; Buyer Persona(s); Competitive Analysis); 4. Market Strategy (Product; Price; Promotion; People; Process; Physical Evidence); 5. Budget; and 6. Marketing Channels.

## Lesson Plan

Prior to the lesson, students will be asked to read this case study along with additional readings on disaster preparedness, human resources management in times of crises, corporate social responsibility, and marketing techniques for a city recovering from disaster. Students will also be asked to have a general understanding and be able to discuss the following topics:

1. Natural Disasters and Hospitality & Tourism
2. Scheduling in times of crises
3. Operating after a disaster
4. Corporate Social Responsibility
5. Documentation of incidences and injury
6. Common corporate policies for preparation and response
7. Marketing after a disaster
8. Stress management

## Discussion Topics & Questions

### *Disaster Preparedness*

- How does a hotel/restaurant operate when there is no power, and no way to check-in or pay without credit cards?
- How do you manage previous reservations that are due to arrive?
- How do you handle cancellations?

### *Human resources management*

- How should a manager go about scheduling staff? Who should work during times of crisis and why?
- How should food sources be controlled/allocated?
- How should a leader manage a property without power?

### *Corporate social responsibility*

- What steps can be taken to ensure that the community that suffered the disaster is being aided by your organization? In what ways can offering assistance benefit the bottom line?
- If this organization had experienced damage, how could it work with the community to help rebuild?
- How do you manage a property that also has people using the facilities for shelter/food?

### *Marketing techniques for a city recovering*

- How do you advertise your business to locals without appearing greedy? How do you set rates?
- In what ways do you attract guests and does it differ depending on the target market? (e.g. do you use a different strategy if your target market is leisure or business travelers?)
- How do you re-attract guests to your business after people associate your business or area as devastated?

## Analysis & Teaching Objectives

### *Disaster Preparedness*

Disaster preparedness is essential to industry operations, and may include action plans, training, and supply stocking. Properties often forget about disaster plans due to outdated plans or a change in management. Researchers have encouraged companies to update plans yearly and to train employees accordingly (Arlotta, 2017). Some preparation recommendations include assessing each facet of the operation to identify vulnerable areas, and have an underwriter help with the task. Identify loose trees and limbs, outdoor furniture, fencing, shutters, awnings and gutters. Devise an action plan, not just one, but for each department. A coastal property should strap down boats and remove headsails. Tasks should be explicitly delineated and assigned to employees of the property and plans should be practiced regularly. Insure your property even if it's hard to obtain and expensive to do so, and understand your coverage. And lastly, build to code and even exceed it, both before and after a natural disaster strikes. Properties that emphasize plans and practice and improve upon them are more likely to limit the negative outcomes after a storm hits (Chollet, 2000). This case allows students to visualize what this looks like for an operation, and discuss what strategies they feel were effective, or what they may have done differently.

### *Human resources management*

Human resources decisions are vital during times of crisis. Determining how to properly staff a hospitality organization during a natural disaster has implications for internal customers. Having a clear plan for how many and what types of individuals are needed to staff the property to ensure guest and property safety is pivotal for the well-being of the clientele, the staff and the physical property. This case offers an opportunity for students to think about what kind of decisions must be made, and explore how they might be approached.

### *Corporate social responsibility*

There is always a delicate line to tow when partaking in measures of corporate social responsibility. While efforts to help citizens or the environment may come from a place of altruism, they may also be viewed as advantageous to the organization. One such trend of which hotels that experience natural disasters must be aware is 'disaster capitalism', or the propensity of organizations to find ways to profit from the misfortune of others during times of need (Black, 2005). This case presents an opportunity to discuss the ways in which the company assisted those in need and how this may or may not be viewed as capitalizing on victims of tragedies.

### *Marketing techniques for a city recovering*

Sometimes we are able to safeguard against disasters and sometimes the unexpected catches us flatfooted. While this case study

presents the outcome of the storm to have minimal impact, research has shown that as little as 3% of hospitality organizations actually experience a positive outcome from unexpected issues and disasters (Kwortnik, 2005). The reintroduction of an impacted destination plays a huge role in the survival of a property post-disaster, and this can take several years. This case presents an opportunity for students to see how this was done for one property, and discuss how they might have done things the same or differently.

## Instruction

There are various ways in which the case study may be analyzed in class. One way to dissect the material is to devote four separate class periods to discussing each of the topics: disaster preparedness, human resources management in times of crises, corporate social responsibility, and marketing techniques for a city recovering from disaster. If time does not permit, then the class may be broken into four groups and each group may analyze one of the aforementioned topics. Each topic should be given at least an hour of attention to explore, discuss, and check for understanding. While a minimum of an hour is recommended, the lesson may be expanded upon given the amount of time the class is able to devote and the interest in any particular aspect of the case. It is suggested that the case be provided as homework prior to the class discussion so that the entire class may be devoted to fleshing out the major topics and the appropriate actions to take.

## Small Group Discussion

The students should break into groups ranging from 4-6 individuals (60 seconds). Each group will be responsible for highlighting the main points of the study using the lens they have been provided and answering specific questions from one of the four topics provided (24 minutes).

## Class Discussion

Each group will present their findings to the class and answer any questions that classmate or the professor may pose (20 minutes). Additional readings should be used to create additional questions.

## Check for Understanding

With the time remaining (15 minutes) the instructor will ask the students to write their opinions on and reactions to the three other topics that they did not discuss in their immediate group. They should also be asked if the larger group discussion altered their opinion on their own topic in any way and how.

## Assessment

Students will be given an assignment to write a report on one of the main topic areas, which defends their respective views on the case study. Students must include three to five references other than those provided by the instructor.

## Additional Readings

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