



# TRAVEL SAFE

Anthony Tucker-Jones reports on the growing pressures on the hotel industry to keep its customers safe

**I**t has certainly been an uncertain decade for the hospitality industry. A series of high-profile terror attacks means that many hoteliers and restaurateurs have to face the fact that crime is not the only threat to their business and clients. Mitigating against the risk of terror attack is a challenge, especially as Islamist militants vary their *modus operandi* greatly. Transport encompassing rail and air, transport hubs, public spaces (such as beaches, hotels, museums, markets shopping malls and theatres) and public buildings have all been attacked often resulting in a horrific death toll.

The insidious erosion of the Western way of life is unfortunately all pervasive. Tragically, attacks in European countries have become so common that people tend to take them for granted. There is an almost fatalistic attitude that life has to go on regardless of the ever-present threat. The architectural design

advice offered by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) shows that this threat has even permeated into how we build our towns and cities. Essentially they have to be terrorist proof – the UK has come a long way since the days of the IRA mainland campaign and in many ways not for the better. There is a sense that in the decade and a half since 9/11 many major Western cities are effectively under a perpetual state of siege. It is a case of plan for the worst and hope for the best. The situation facing the hospitality industry is no different.

Only last year Mike Lord of security specialist Harlow International told *intersec* that he predicted: “An increase in interest in security in the travel and tourist industry”. This was an accurate forecast in light of the growing number of attacks on holiday makers. He added: “It will centre around customer confidence during travel and at people’s destinations”.

The British Government rightly continues to take

**A policeman is seen patrolling the beach ahead of a memorial service for the victims of the 2015 Sousse Beach terrorist attack**

the threat very seriously. The hospitality industry has been deluged in counter-terror advice by the National Counter Terrorism Security Office or NaCTSO, which is reassuring for customers but presents an issue of balance and cost for businesses. The Government first took notice following the attacks in Haymarket, London and Glasgow airport in 2007.

The following year NaCTSO produced guidance for the hospitality industry with its Counter Terrorism Protective Security Advice for Hotels and Restaurants. This could not have been more timely as that very year there was the terrorist attack on the Taj Hotel in Mumbai. At the same time NaCTSO also issued advice for visitor attractions; not long after guidance was also drawn up for pubs, clubs and bars as well as cinemas and theatres.

## MANAGING THE RISK

This guidance places emphasis on managing the risk and includes a bomb threat check list. Essentially there are four steps: identifying the threat, prioritising who and what needs to be protected, identify the measures to reduce the risk and review and implement these measures. Guest safety is always considered paramount.

The weak points in a hotel are obviously the public spaces, principally the lobby, reception, dining rooms and function suites. Most hotels are reluctant to have controlled access for the lobby; typically controlled access is only conducted at guest room level with electronic door keys. The code is simply changed every time the guest occupying the room changes. CCTV is also usually present, acting as a deterrent to both crime and acts of terrorism.

Guests rightly expect a secure environment within a hotel. However, with the larger international hotels and resorts it is very easy to wander in off the street or beach and disappear into the corridors or staff areas. The only deterrent is CCTV and it may be that hotels will increasingly need to consider physical barriers only accessible by authorised guests and visitors.

In the UK, the Institute of Hotel Security Management fosters best practice among its members.

## IN THE EIGHT YEARS AFTER 9/11 THERE HAVE BEEN 62 ATTACKS ON HOTELS IN 20 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

One of its partners is the CCTV National Standards Forum, which offers expert advice in both the private and public domains. Similarly RIBA has produced advice on designing counter terrorism features to be incorporated in the built-up environment. Introducing counter terror measures is, of course, always easier from the ground up. The challenge comes if it is a consideration halfway through a development project or an old urban environment that requires mitigation measures. RIBA’s advice is backed by NaCTSO’s Protecting Crowded Places: Design and Technical Issues.

NaCTSO had developed what it calls its menu of tactical options. This identifies six main methods of attack used by terrorists; a non-penetrative vehicle attack (ie parked vehicle bomb); penetrative vehicle

attack (ie ramming); improvised explosive device carried by an individual; placed IED; marauding terrorist with firearm and finally postal device attack.

Options for dealing with these include having a lock down procedure and increased security presence, staff vigilance, visitor control, parking restrictions and adequate CCTV coverage. The most common threat to the hospitality industry is by an individual or individuals carrying weapons intent on murder. Vehicle attack cannot be ruled out either.

While implementing such measures is relatively easy in the UK, Europe and North America, elsewhere in the world it is not so simple. Hotels provide attractive soft targets because they are fixed locations that attract large numbers of people, who are quite often Westerners. Such attacks have escalated around the world, for example in the eight years after 9/11 there were 62 attacks on hotels in 20 countries. Last year the Hilton hotel chain appointed a security director for its Europe, Middle East and African operations to develop and implement a security strategy answerable to the Vice President Global Safety and Security.

The recent inquest into the Tunisian terror attack on the holiday resort of Sousse has highlighted this issue of a standardised approach and proportionality (ie what is appropriate to the level of risk). NaCTSO and the Foreign Office do provide security advice for British businesses operating outside the UK, including hotels, restaurants, bars, shopping centres, tourist attractions and transport. Nevertheless, cooperating with foreign companies and dovetailing such measures is not necessarily straight forward.

The inquest into the terror attack in Tunisia carried out on 26 June 2015 has focused attention on the challenges faced by operators and holiday makers. The Foreign Office’s Middle East and North Africa director, Jane Marriott, told the inquest’s opening hearing that the UK was powerless to force the Tunisians to improve their security, but “What we can and we do say is that we want to see an improvement in your security”. This is far from reassuring and is reliant on the host nation’s cooperation.

The earlier attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis on 19 March 2015 should have flagged up Tunisia as a country of concern for the tourist industry. Three Tunisian militants killed 22 people at the museum most of whom were European tourists. Daesh took responsibility though the Tunisians blamed it on al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. It was obvious that whoever was responsible had deliberately targeted the museum because of the large concentration of foreigners.

## TOUR OPERATOR RESPONSIBILITY

Indeed discussions did take place between the tour operators and the authorities a month before the Sousse attack, but the operators were reluctant to increase security for fear of alarming their guests. As a result, Seifeddine Regui was able to kill 30 Britons in and around the five-star Rui Imperial Marhaba Hotel with impunity.

The inquest criticised the poor response time of the Tunisian security forces and the Foreign Office for not increasing the threat level following the Bardo killings. Tellingly, the Foreign Office’s Middle East

and North Africa director, Jane Marriott also told the inquest that the level of the terror alert relating to Tunisia had not been raised because: "We should not discourage tourism to Tunisia". This begs the question: even if it means endangering the lives of British nationals?

What has emerged is that the resort seemed to have no contingency measures or drills in place to cope with a terror attack in a swift manner. This delay undoubtedly cost lives and the Tunisian security forces have been lambasted for "wasting

## HOTELS ARE ATTRACTIVE SOFT TARGETS BECAUSE THEY ATTRACT LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE

time". At the point of going to press the coroner, Judge Nicholas Loraine-Smith, had yet to conclude his investigations being conducted at the Royal Courts of Justice in London or publish his findings. Clearly, though, there are numerous lessons to be learned from the attack.

Looking to the future, it is likely that the hospitality industry will make greater use of

biometric web services that will enable clients to access biometric sensors deployed to enhance security. The use of tokens or ID passes is likely to become a thing of the past. Hotel lobby and room access could be controlled by biometric security measures. There may come a time when access to hospitality locations, public buildings and even public spaces will have to be permanently monitored if not actively controlled to ensure public safety. Iris recognition could become a fact of life in some areas.

### BOWING TO CUSTOMER PRESSURE

NacTSO advises that visitors should be confirmed by photo ID, only admitted by pre-booked appointment and that they be escorted at all times. The latter two, of course, are not practical measures for most hotels and restaurants. Mike Lord of Harlow International thinks the industry will have to bow to customer pressure at some stage. Increasingly customers need reassuring that they are entering a protected environment where they can relax without the worry of a terrorist running amok with a gun, bomb or vehicle. Inevitably this could lead to a security rating system. "I can imagine a security seal of approval being next to the hotel star rating," says Mike Lord. Ultimately, guests will want guarantees that they and their families are not at risk and that they can travel safely ●

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**A police forensics officer examines a car suspected of carrying a bomb in Haymarket on June 29, 2007**

