Swine Flu, drug wars, and riots: Media and tourism in Oaxaca, Mexico

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Abstract
This thesis examines how travelers evaluate and process mass media news stories about local events. Thanks to its colonial architecture, white sand beaches, and indigenous history, the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca receives millions of foreign and domestic visitors each year. Between 2006 and through 2009 Oaxaca has received a great deal of negative international media coverage, including stories of street riots, drug violence, and the fall out of the H1N1 flu virus. The overall impact of these unfavorable reports, and the resulting decline in the local tourism industry, has been predictable and severe. This thesis is based on anthropological research that I conducted in Oaxaca during June and July, 2009. I interviewed 26 American tourists about issues related to mass-media, personal travel experiences, and the interplay between international news coverage of local events and trip destination selection and planning. My research suggests that interviewees generally approach these media stories unfavorably and with a hefty sense of skepticism. Their reactions may reflect a wider trend in American society whereby mainstream and commercial mass media sources are viewed as increasingly untrustworthy or inaccurate

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The outbreak of the swine flu in Mexico has caused panic in the medical world. But what is the swine flu and how dangerous is it? The swine flu is a disease of the respiratory system. It is very common among pigs. There are many different kinds of swine flu and the illness can spread throughout the year. Normally the swine flu does not infect humans, but there have been cases in the past in which people who were in close contact with pigs got the illness. The new outbreak of the swine flu, however, is passed on from person to person through coughing and sneezing. The World Health Organization says that the current flu is an unknown strain of the H1N1 virus, which causes normal flu in people. Flu viruses can exchange genes with each other and can mutate. No cases of flu. Tourist arrivals have reduced greatly and therefore it is much quieter in the hotels and restaurants. People should remember that Mexico City is a vast city and the rest of Mexico is fine. Scott Bailey, London, on holiday in Mexico. I am currently ‘trapped’ with my family in a luxury hotel in Cancun. I am living in Oaxaca state where reportedly the first death occurred from swine flu. The town here is known for its great surf and relaxed atmosphere, but even here the fear is beginning to enter people’s daily conversation. After wrong reports of drug related violence, military presence etc. in Cancun, which hurt the industry tremendously, now people think that all of Mexico is affected by a virus that is mostly present in the capital. After all, Mexican authorities, already reeling from a sharp drop in tourism, have a strong financial incentive to downplay the size of this problem. For instance, there’s this from Antonio Chavez, a doctor working in Mexico City: I’m a specialist doctor in respiratory diseases and intensive care at the Mexican National Institute of Health. and talk about the growing problem of drug smuggling and border violence. Ms Allan said WHO had confirmed 40 cases of swine flu in the Americas, 26 in Mexico, six in Canada, two in Spain, two in Britain and three in New Zealand. Ms Allan said it was difficult to measure how fast the virus was spreading.