Descriptive analysis of international deportations caused by irresponsible traveller behaviour
Ryan M Mangan1,2, Gerard T Flaherty1,3

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic focused public attention on the importance of responsible tourism. The purpose of this study was to characterise irresponsible tourist behaviour leading to deportation from the destination country.

Methods: A web-based search of media reports relating to deportations of tourists was conducted.

Results: The most common reasons for deportation were related to indecent exposure or physical damage to sacred monuments and violations of COVID-19-related national public health rules. Other incidents resulted from social media posts and breach of environmental regulations.

Conclusions: The results of this study may inform future research efforts and targeted public awareness campaigns.

Keywords: responsible travel; deportation; COVID-19; cultural sensitivity; sustainable travel

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused public attention on the importance of responsible tourism, whereby international travellers endeavour to minimise their impact on a destination country's heritage, its communities, biodiversity, and environmental resources. The importance of this subject is underscored by the existence of an active responsible travel interest group within the International Society of Travel Medicine (ISTM). Departures from the principles of responsible tourism demonstrate disrespect towards host countries, threaten fragile ecosystems, and undermine efforts to cultivate harmonious international relationships.

There has been minimal coverage of this subject in the travel and international health literature. Lim et al. (2018) drew attention to the risks of harm associated with environmental damage, voluntourism, and sex tourism and proposed a checklist of responsible tourist behaviours. The purpose of this study was to characterise high-profile examples of irresponsible tourist behaviour, which led to deportation from the destination country.

Methods

A web-based search of written media reports published in the English language, relating to deportations of tourists from any country, was conducted on the Google® search engine, using combinations of search terms, including “deportation”, “deport”, “deport tourist” and “deported”. Duplicate reports were removed from the analysis. For each search term used, the first 25 pages of website matches were examined. The following variables were extracted from each report and entered in a Google Drive database: host country, nationality of deportee(s), number of people involved, date of event, incident category, gender of deportees, age of deportees, alcohol or drug involvement, whether detention or incarceration occurred, and any recorded reaction from locals. Information regarding deportations that occurred due to visa issues, identity fraud, illegal immigration status, or a crime committed by a long-term resident of a foreign country were excluded from the analysis, as well as official government web pages providing information on travel to various countries. All data were validated by both researchers and analysed descriptively using frequencies, proportions (percentages), and means.

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Results

Of 780 print media articles retrieved, 22 met the inclusion criteria for our study. Table I summarises the characteristics of each deportation occurrence. Incidents leading to deportation occurred between 2012 and 2022. The most common reasons for deportation in this series were related to indecent exposure or physical damage to sacred monuments (n=6) and violations of COVID-19-related public health rules (n=6). Other incidents resulted from social media posts (n=3) and breach of environmental regulations (n=2). The region with the highest number of reported deportations was South-East Asia (68.2%, n=15), with the largest proportion of incidents reported from the island of Bali, Indonesia (45.5%, n=10). Deported tourists were residents of 18 countries. The gender of the deportees was provided in 20 cases, with males alone being involved in 35% (n=7), females alone in 20% (n=4), and both male and female tourists in 45% of incidents (n=9). Where age was specified (n=9), the mean age of deported tourists was 35.7 years.

Two media reports mentioned tourist intoxication with alcohol or recreational drugs (‘magic mushrooms’). Two incidents, one in Malaysia and the other in the United Arab Emirates, led to tourists receiving monetary fines in addition to facing deportation. In three of the Bali-based deportations, the media reported negative local reactions to the deportees’ actions. In the case of the American LGBTQIA+ female deported from Bali in January 2021 for posting tweets that caused offense to her hosts, there was significant outrage registered by Indonesian people online who expressed concerns that the woman’s tweets would encourage an influx of “Westerners” into the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second incident involving two Russian tourists who took nude photographs of themselves at a sacred tree in Bali in May 2022, some local people were reported as saying that foreign visitors should be more informed about Balinese customs.

Discussion

Healthcare professionals should play an active role in promoting responsible travel behaviour, which minimises adverse impacts on the host country, its people, and their environment. While occasionally the subject of discussions at international travel medicine conferences, there is hardly any literature in this area in medical journals. A previous reflective commentary called for research to develop a better understanding of the attitudes of travellers, their travel healthcare providers, and the travel industry towards responsible tourism.1 We have previously discussed issues in this journal around the transportation by travellers of therapeutic or controlled drugs across international borders.2

Ours is the first study to examine the issue of deportation of tourists as a result of irresponsible tourist behaviour. The media reports cited give an insight into the range of offenses that can precipitate deportation. Personal indiscretions at significant sites in more conservative destinations, physical damage to monuments, breaches of COVID-19 control measures, and posting of offensive images or comments on social media accounted for the majority of circumstances leading to deportation. A study from two decades ago found that approximately 5% of travellers arrested abroad were subsequently deported, the majority of whom were male.3 Reasons for detention were
analysed in that study but no specific information on the events leading to deportation were provided.

While most of the reports in the present study made no reference to the use of alcohol or recreational drugs, a study of air rage incidents aboard commercial flights identified alcohol as a precipitating factor in over half of cases. The preponderance of COVID-19-related transgressions highlights the challenges faced by national authorities in the implementation of effective public health control measures during the pandemic. A perspective from India during an intense wave of COVID-19 disease called for tourists not to travel to pilgrimage sites to avoid the risks associated with super-spreading events at mass gatherings.

Our study was subject to the limitations of web-based search strategies, including website optimisation restrictions. We restricted our internet search to a single search engine with a comprehensive global index. Additional reports may have been available in other search engines such as Bing. Relevant reports in languages other than English were not retrieved. Essential details that may have afforded useful insights into irresponsible tourist behaviour may not have been reported by the journalists concerned. This report focused on deportations, representing the extremity of sanctions applied to travellers who engage in irresponsible and offensive behaviour. We acknowledge that the threshold for deportation varies between jurisdictions and that many irresponsible acts attract penalties other than deportation, including fines and periods of incarceration.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that this study of extreme irresponsible behaviour in tourists should inspire the travel medicine community to intensify its efforts to promote responsible travel. The ISTM responsible travel interest group should take a lead in publishing appropriate guidelines for international travellers. Wall posters in travel clinics, written information leaflets, social media posts and podcasts may be useful practical approaches to achieving this objective. We reiterate our call for future qualitative research in this neglected area.

Conclusions

Travel health professionals and the travel industry have an important role to play in promoting responsible tourist behaviour. This is the first study to describe deportations in travellers as the result of deviations from the principles of responsible tourism. The results may inform future research efforts and targeted public awareness campaigns.

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Ethical approval : This study did not involve human or animal subjects and was therefore exempt from ethics committee review.

Data availability: The data underlying this article are available and were derived from sources in the public domain.
REFERENCES


Table I: Summary of specific irresponsible travel incidents leading to deportation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>MEDIA ARTICLE SOURCE</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>INCIDENT CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2019</td>
<td><a href="https://www.nzherald.co.nz/exclusive-unruly-tourists-speak-out-as-deportation-looms/">https://www.nzherald.co.nz/exclusive-unruly-tourists-speak-out-as-deportation-looms/</a> JTPLHYXKSSNRLEDXPOYKGZFLOQ/</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Public disorder and environmental damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td><a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/15/tourists-to-be-deported-over-alleged-damage-defecation-at-machu-picchu">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/15/tourists-to-be-deported-over-alleged-damage-defecation-at-machu-picchu</a></td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Environmental damage at national monument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Violation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2022</td>
<td><a href="https://balidiscovery.com/bali-deport-5-moldavians-1-russian/">https://balidiscovery.com/bali-deport-5-moldavians-1-russian/</a></td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Illegal occupation of building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2022</td>
<td><a href="https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/08/12/scottish-tourist-goes-to-court-against-decision-to-deport-her-from-sri-lanka/">https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/08/12/scottish-tourist-goes-to-court-against-decision-to-deport-her-from-sri-lanka/</a></td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Posting of protest footage on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2022</td>
<td><a href="https://www.ttrweekly.com/site/2022/08/tourist-deported-for-not-paying-his-bill/">https://www.ttrweekly.com/site/2022/08/tourist-deported-for-not-paying-his-bill/</a></td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Failure to pay accommodation bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2022</td>
<td><a href="https://indonesiaexpat.id/featured/russian-deported-from-suspected-magic-mushroom-effects/">https://indonesiaexpat.id/featured/russian-deported-from-suspected-magic-mushroom-effects/</a></td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Recreational drug intoxication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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