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# The impact of the 2016 terrorist attacks on tourism in Brussels

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## Abstract

Scientists as well as the general public remember the recent attacks with a political motive that took place in Brussels in March 2016. This was not a stand alone event since previous to these, other places were hit. For sure, this re-models people's perception of places –in tourism terms, destinations- and may affect tourists' behavior.

In this paper, we explore the effects mainly from the demand side. In fact, the influence of such attacks on the supply side becomes very clear soon since the number of (international) arrivals, overnight stays and hotels' occupancy rates tend to respond very quickly, affected by tourists staying away. It is much more difficult to detect the feelings and changes of attitude among tourists.

In an attempt to measure how hard a destination is hit by such a terrorist attack we tackle two questions. The first question is related to the (dynamics of) numbers, based on available statistical data (comparison between 2015 and 2016 depending on availability). The second question which is harder to elaborate, is related to the feelings and attitudes of those tourists who do not cancel their plans and who do not want their lives and choices to be affected by such events but nevertheless might change their behavior. We explored the latter via a survey in Brussels and also in Antwerp and Bruges as a kind of benchmark.

The results represent bad and good news for the tourism industry in Brussels and Belgium and for Brussels/Belgium as a destination. The bad news is that terrorist attacks do not pass unnoticed, on the contrary. They have an effect on the visitors' behavior in terms of arrivals and overnight stays (with effects on e.g. hotel occupancy) for several months. We see that the effects are felt far beyond the place that suffered from the attack(s) and the more this place is a brand for the region or for the country. The good news is that tourists seem to feel safe again on a relatively short term.

Therefore, our results are in line with the international literature but our attention is drawn towards the fact that some do adapt their behavior by self-moderation and avoiding certain places from a safety perspective. This can effect the experience, making the visit or the holidays less satisfactory.

**Keywords:** tourism, terrorist attacks, Brussels, safety, tourist behavior

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