

# The Boston Globe

ANALYSIS

## Travel fears can override cold statistics



KEITH BEDFORD/GLOBE STAFF A woman waited at Logan International Airport on Wednesday.

By Christopher Muther | GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 17, 2015

As footage from the November terrorist attacks in Paris was recapitulated on 24-hour cable news networks, fearful travelers hastily canceled flights and hotel rooms, or changed their holiday travel plans to avoid Paris.

In the days following the San Bernardino, Calif., shootings, a study showed that one in four people canceled or changed travel plans, fearing terrorism.

But the reality is, there is a much greater chance of being struck by lightning than being killed in a terrorist attack. High school sports kill more Americans every year than terrorist attacks, and the same goes for pedestrian and bike accidents. According to the State Department, the number of civilians killed overseas as a result of terrorism between 2001 and 2013 was 350.

"Rational people see the statistics and they know that, 'Yes, I'm more likely to die from a shark attack or a selfie stick accident as compared to terrorism,' but I think when people are traveling and not somewhere familiar, the calculations skew in a way that no longer makes them rational," said Juliette Kayyem, a Harvard lecturer and the former assistant secretary for intergovernmental affairs in the Department of Homeland Security.

The paranoia and misinformation around travel was well-reflected in a study released last week by the CMO Council, a network of more than 10,000 senior corporate marketers. A quarter of those surveyed said they've changed travel plans in the past year, and fear of terrorism or personal safety was the top reason the 2,000 respondents gave for canceling, followed closely by worries of disease.

Tourists shouldn't ignore every State Department travel warning, or break out their credit cards when Kuwait Airways offers discounted fares. Common sense and awareness is the rule. But an irrational fear of travel is bruising the world economy.

Air France announced last week that it will lose \$54 million as a result of cancellations and a decline in reservations. France's economy minister, Emmanuel Macron, said Paris hotels suffered a 15 percent to 20 percent slump in the number of guests in the week after the attacks, and the number of people dining in restaurants dropped 10 percent. That's on top of the 21 percent of tourists who have canceled trips to Paris during the normally lucrative holiday season. Overall, the French government estimated the country has suffered a \$1.5 billion loss in tourism revenue since the attacks.

France is a prominent example. Countries such as Turkey, Thailand, and Egypt have been economically battered by attacks over the past year, as well.

Even calm, khaki-loving travel guru Rick Steves had strong words for those considering scrapping their travel plans.

"I'm sure that many Americans will cancel their trips to Paris (a city of 2 million people) or the rest of Europe (a continent of 500 million people), because of an event that killed about 150," Steves wrote in his blog. "As a result, ironically, they'll be staying home in a country of 320 million people that loses over 30,000 people a year (close to 100 people a day) to gun violence."

The State Department, which regularly issues travel advisories when health or safety is at risk, took the unprecedented step of issuing a worldwide travel alert last month about terrorist activity. You read that correctly — worldwide. The alert is a helpful reminder to be vigilant while traveling, but the geographically vague warning also has the potential to feed into already growing xenophobia.

"With no guidance attached to it, I would say the State Department warning has

fallen short with respect to telling people what they should be vigilant about," said Dan Richards, chief executive of Boston-based Global Rescue, an emergency services agency for travelers. "You're putting travel to some very unstable and difficult countries in the Middle East in the same category as Norway."

Richards said there is a much higher danger of US travelers contracting infectious diseases such as schistosomiasis, chikungunya, or malaria than encountering terrorism, but there is no State Department warning about those risks.

Liz Miller, senior vice president of marketing at CMO, which released last week's study, said many of those surveyed were North American and European leisure tourists whose definition of adventure travel may be leaving their resort in Cancun for an afternoon.

"At no point can you really call the North American leisure traveler the ultimate adventure seeker," Miller said. "For the most part, they're not canceling their trips to Hawaii. What I was surprised by was kind of the blanket answers of, 'Nope, nope. I read a bad headline about somewhere, therefore I can never travel there.' Because they heard something negative, it clearly must be off the bucket list forever."

She said the more a country is making headlines, the better the chance travelers will steer clear.

"I hate to say this, but I was surprised at how many people were maybe a little overdramatic," Miller said. "Some of the answers were 'No place is safe.' Or 'I can't leave my hometown.' There were some sweeping generalizations."

But within those answers, Miller saw glimmers of hope, particularly from European travelers who said they will continue traveling to some parts of the Mideast, or they'll still board a Malaysia Airlines plane, or go to Turkey.

Locally, Andrew Compaine of Weston said he and his family are going forward with holiday plans to visit Paris. Lynn Blake, chairwoman of the fashion department at Lasell College in Newton, is making no changes to her student trip to Paris, and Keith Orr went ahead with his trip to Thailand.

"I never once considered changing plans," Orr said in an e-mail from Bangkok. "But I will admit to being much more aware of security procedures in the airports and welcome some slight delays as a trade-off to feeling safer."

Fear of terrorism may be costing countries billions in tourism dollars, but the greatest immeasurable loss comes from memories that will never be realized. This may sound like the gooey chorus of a Celine Dion song, but the experiential act of travel is what makes it special. We dream of foreign shores and love filling our phones with pictures of beaches and historic buildings so we can look back when we tire of our workaday existence. If not for vacation photos, Facebook and Instagram would be wastelands of selfies.

Gina Ciampa of the North End said she always dreamed of getting married in Paris, but while watching news of the terrorist attacks on CNN, briefly considered canceling her planned May nuptials there. After some thought, Ciampa, who ran the Boston Marathon the year of the bombings, decided to move forward with her plans.

"This is what I've always wanted," she said. "I've waited 38 years to get married. No one is taking that away from me. When I look back at my wedding in 10 or 20 years, I want to remember that it was beautiful. I don't want to look back and remember that it was changed at the last minute because I was afraid."