

Egypt tourism, already down, faces another blow



Egypt's tourism industry has already been decimated in recent years by political turmoil and terrorist attacks.

The latest catastrophic event—the crash of EgyptAir Flight MS804 into the Mediterranean Thursday en route from Paris to Cairo—could be a devastating blow to the country's hopes to resuscitate that industry.

French President François Hollande says that it is too early to determine the cause of the crash.

But Egyptian Civil Aviation Minister Sherif Fathi says that it is likely the plane carrying 66 people was downed by an act of terrorism vs. a mechanical error, according to Egypt's state-run newspaper Al-Ahram.

“Should the investigation into the loss of MS804 conclusively link the crash to terrorism, business and leisure travel from Europe to Egypt would likely decrease significantly, further harming Egypt’s already-struggling economy,” says Max Leitschuh, transportation analyst at travel risk management company iJET International.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the number of visitors to Egypt has already dropped from 14.7 million in 2010 to 9.9 million in 2014.

Political unrest after the 2011 Arab Spring uprising already deterred travelers from visiting the country's ancient wonders, including the Pyramids and the Nile River.

Then last October, Russian Metrojet Flight 9268 was determined to have been destroyed by a bomb shortly after taking off from the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all 224 people aboard. Many carriers suspended flights to the resort town after that incident.

In March, a domestic EgyptAir flight was hijacked, but no one was killed.

“Terrorist activity in Egypt is well documented and has been a problem for the country for an extended period of time,” says Dan Richards, CEO and founder of Global Rescue, a crisis and risk management firm. “Travelers to Egypt should be aware of these risks and make a decision regarding their level of tolerance.”

Travel agents are seeing a drop in interest for a destination that was once on the top of people's bucket lists.

“Egypt has diminished considerably and this will probably hurt them more,” says Olga Ramudo, CEO of Express Travel in Coral Gables, Fla. “Particularly for tourists, you can

choose one destination over the other. You try to go to the ones that are considered more secure.”

Travelers should expect airports to step up their security around the world. The possible intentional downing of the EgyptAir jet comes on the heels of deadly attacks on Paris and Belgium.

“While there has been no cause attributed to the disappearance of MS804, recent attacks in Paris, Brussels, and the October 2015 downing of Metrojet Flight 9268 have heightened concerns for security services, government agencies, and the general traveling population,” Leitschuh says. “Increased waits in security lines and increased security presence at international airports is likely as investigators seek to understand the cause of the incident.”

Richards recommends that travelers account for longer wait times at airports and train stations and only pack enough luggage that can be comfortably carried or rolled or stowed in the overhead compartments on planes.

And he encourages travelers to conduct research before heading to their destination.

“Most governments offer up-to-date travel alerts and restrictions on their foreign office’s website or Twitter feed,” he says. “Many offer an email alert subscription as well. Register your travel with your embassy’s travel notification program so you will be kept informed of any alerts.”

