

How to assess and build resilience for tourism destinations?

5 practical steps to become resilient

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Tourism destinations at risk

Tourism is a major source of income for numerous communities worldwide, particularly in regions with difficult accessibility, remoteness from economic markets and limited industry. However, many tourism destinations face complex and interconnected risks such as climate change, pandemics, ecosystem degradation, loss of nature and biodiversity (UNDRR, 2022).



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These issues are particularly demanding in a cross-cutting industry such as tourism which is highly dependent on intact ecosystems, global business activity and socio-cultural experiences. In the face of growing uncertainty and occurrence of disasters in tourism destinations, resilience has evolved as a key concept for dealing with these challenges. This rise in popularity, however, has led to the use of resilience as a buzzword in a variety of contexts, often lacking conceptual clarification.

So, what does “being resilient” actually imply? This brochure introduces key terms and concepts about destination resilience and introduces a holistic destination resilience analysis guideline illustrated with practical advice for implementation. Before engaging with resilience building in a specific destination, a few terms closely related to this concept must be clarified.

Key concepts for destination resilience

Framing tourism destinations from a system’s perspective, supports a holistic understanding of complex risks and a differentiated categorization of various actors involved in tourism. Tourism destinations are subject to a variety of shocks (sudden events

like intense storms or terrorist attacks) and stressors (slow-onset events like loss of biodiversity or sea level rise) that have the potential to harm something of value in the tourism system.

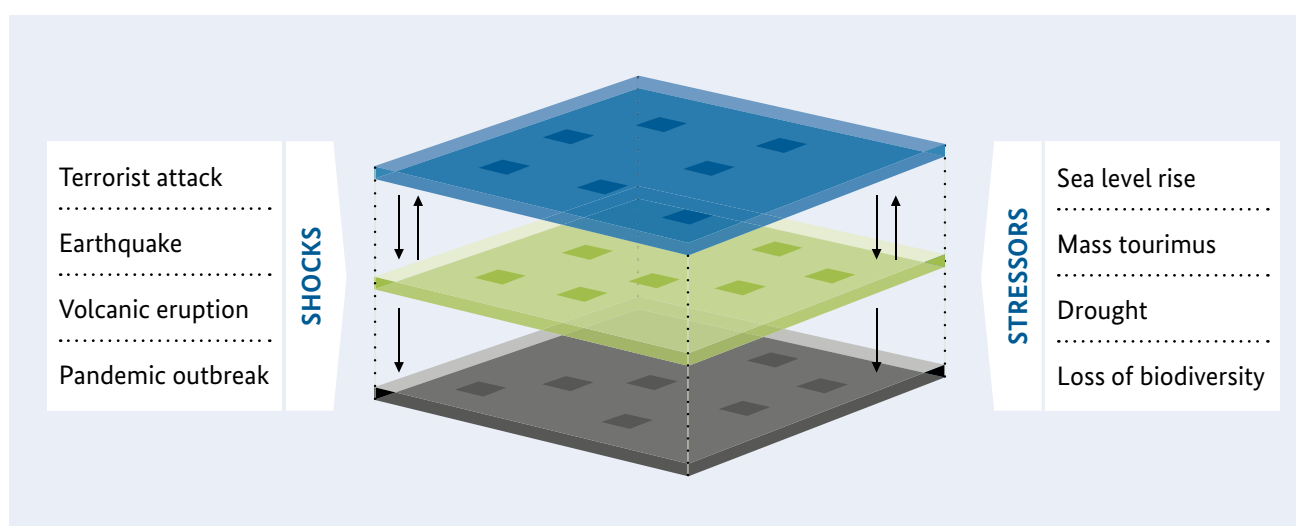


Figure 1: The tourism destination system



Figure 2: Linking sustainability, resilience principles and risk management

Destination resilience is the overall ability of people in a tourism destination (e.g., service providers, institutions, organisations) to deal with different risks while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning of the tourism system without compromising long-term prospects for sustainable development. Dealing with existing and emerging risks involves the ability to assess, plan and act in order to prepare for, prevent, adapt and respond to different sources of risks. (based on UN, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2018)

Research differentiates between generic and specified resilience. Generic resilience centres around general resilience principles that help to build resilience towards any type of novel, unforeseen and uncertain risks. Examples for these principles are Diversity and Redundancy (e.g., offering a variety of products, catering to different source markets), Social Networks (e.g., sharing knowledge and resources, pushing common interests) or Reflexivity and Awareness (e.g., lessons learned from past crises, sensitising community and visitors).

Specified resilience, however, is rooted in research on disaster risk. It aims at responding to a distinct risk (e.g., beach erosion, flood, pandemic) and can be strengthened through risk governance and risk management. Risk management entails preventing new risks (e.g., coastal reinforcement, trail marking) or reducing and managing existing risks (e.g., evacuation routes, water sources, emergency funds).

In the context of tourism, a risk is the potential for adverse impacts and consequences for something of value in the tourism system depending on the local context. This can affect tourism actors, tourists, residents, assets, properties, infrastructure, natural or cultural attractions.

The integration of both general and specified aspects of resilience is a fruitful addition to the discussion on destination resilience by immediately addressing known risks through risk management without losing sight of novel and unforeseen risks. Thus, resilience can only be achieved if both facets of the concept are integrated into planning and development processes. Figure 3 shows the five resilience principles and the stages of effective risk management. In line with a strong sustainability perspective, the focus should not (only) be on how the tourism structures themselves can be maintained, but to the extent in which tourism can contribute to the resilience of an entire destination and thus enable sustainable development.



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How can destinations assess and build resilience?

While destination resilience has evolved as a valuable concept to deal with risks and uncertainty, approaches and examples on how to put it to practice in a destination are scarce. In the following sections you will find a step-by-step guideline to analyse risks and resilience

in a tourism destination. The focus is on different sources of risks, underlying risk drivers, options for action, and resilience principles. The analysis involves the following five steps:

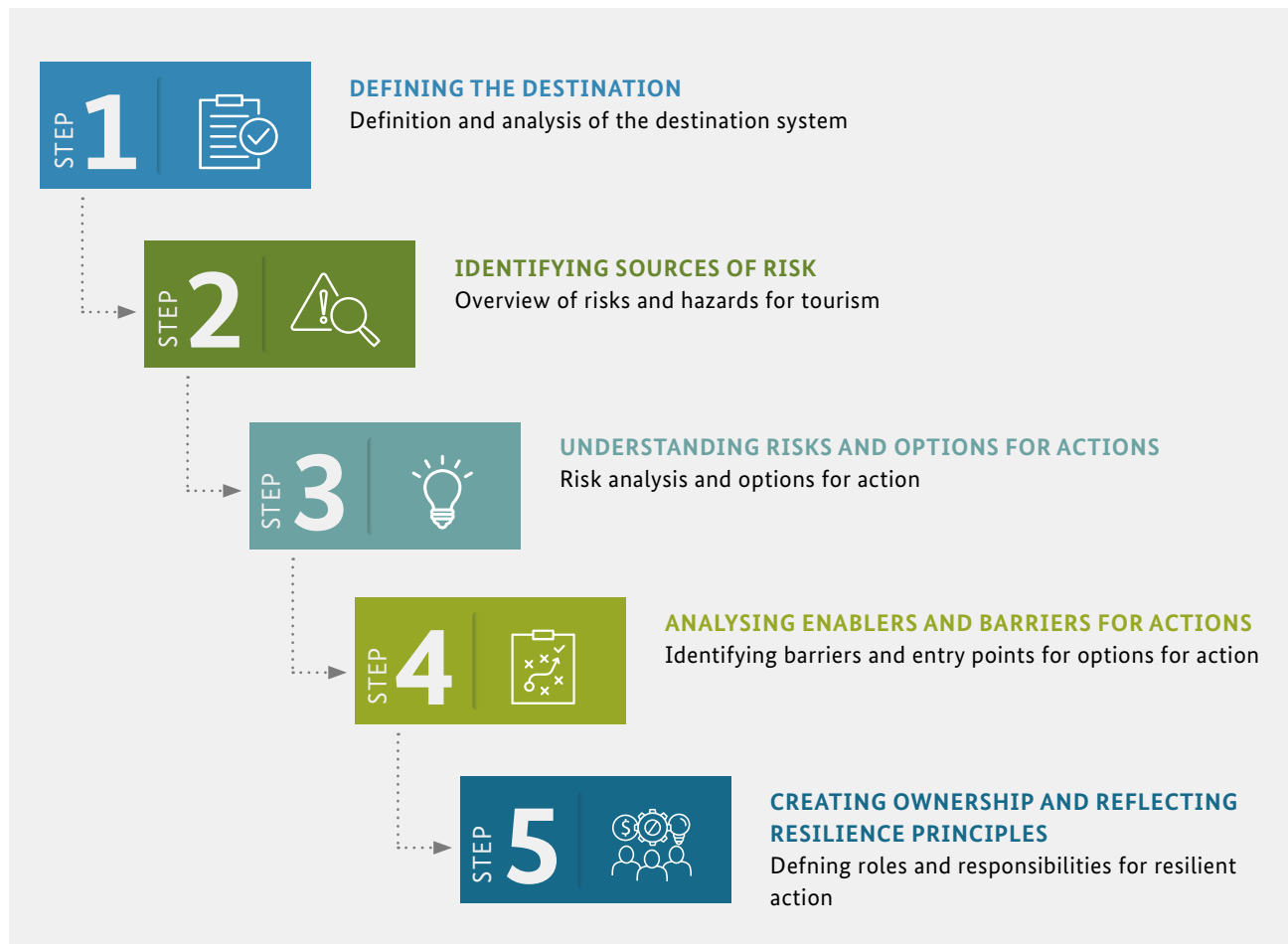


Figure 3: Overview of the 5-step approach to analyse destination resilience

DEFINING THE DESTINATION



OUTCOMES



Description of the tourism system in the chosen tourism destination, including

- ▶ Overview of the context
- ▶ Overview of main actor groups and stakeholders of the formal and informal tourism economy
- ▶ Overview of relevant assets, products, and services (destination inventory)

HOW TO GET THERE?

This step typically involves **desk research**. Moreover, actor groups and assets can be identified through **interviews or a survey** with key persons in the destination. An **actor mapping** can help you to cluster and categorize different actor groups. Relevant assets and products can be identified and sorted in a similar fashion.

IDENTIFYING SOURCES OF RISK FOR TOURISM IN THE DESTINATION



OUTCOMES



Risk registry, including

- ▶ Overview of different sources of risks (e.g., natural and human-made hazards)
- ▶ Overview of perceived risks
- ▶ Overview of observed impacts on tourism

HOW TO GET THERE?

Like step 1, this step is based on **literature review**. Information on different sources of risk can be supplemented by conducting **interviews or focus group** discussions with selected representatives of the destination as well as local experts.

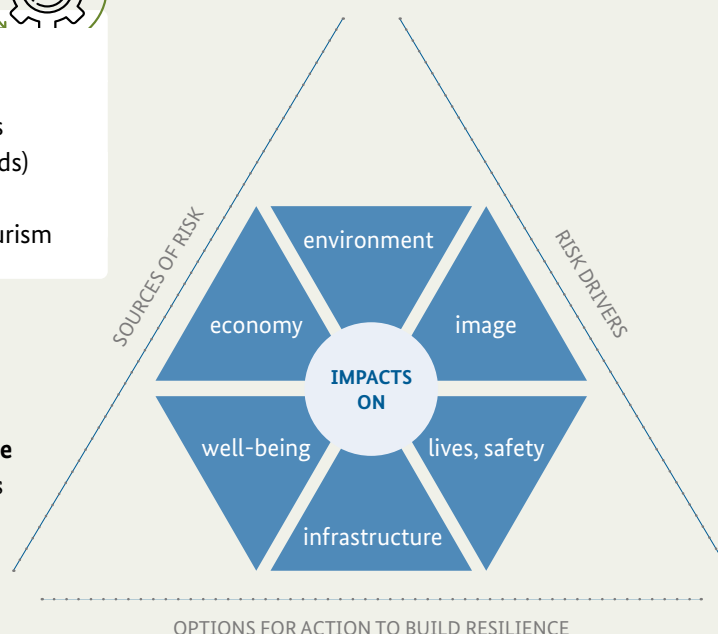


Figure 4: Analysing risk and resilience in a tourism destination

UNDERSTANDING RISKS AND OPTIONS FOR ACTION



OUTCOMES



- Identification of key risks for tourism
- Discussion of underlying drivers of risks
- Overview of potential options for actions

developing **risk diagrams** with the workshop participants to visualise perceived probability and extent of consequences of different risks. The table used in step 2 can be extended by reviewing the underlying risk drivers and adding a column for options for action.

HOW TO GET THERE?

This step should involve a variety of experts with different backgrounds and risk-specific expertise. Therefore, a **participatory workshop** is a favorable format to achieve the aims of this step. Setting the context of the workshop can be achieved with creative methods such as a **gallery walk** on the destination analysis and identified hazards and risks. Identifying key risks in engaging formats such as a **World Café** can be supported by



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ANALYSING ENABLERS AND BARRIERS FOR ACTION



OUTCOMES



- Overview of local preferences to pursue selected options for action that address risks and promote sustainable development
- Identification of enabling and hindering factors for action

HOW TO GET THERE?

The aim of step 4 is to evaluate tourism actors' preferences for actions because peoples' ability to take action strongly depends on their access to assets or capitals, while the willingness to take action is shaped by individual values, norms and beliefs. We suggest the use of a **survey methodology** to capture a broad spectrum of preferences. Ideally, a survey or short, structured **interviews** can be used to activate a sample size large enough to decide on commonly agreed-on actions.

CREATING OWNERSHIP AND REFLECTING RESILIENCE PRINCIPLES



OUTCOMES

- ▶ Identification of responsibilities and strengthening of ownership for resilient action
- ▶ Development of pathways for resilience
- ▶ Integration of resilience principles into daily tourism practice



HOW TO GET THERE?

In step 5, all findings are brought together. Hence, a participatory workshop with different actors and representatives of the tourism destination is advisable. First, **results from step 1-4** are presented to get participants on the same page in terms of risks for tourism and what options for action have been deemed desirable, practical and realistic for future implementation. Then a **strategy** can be mapped out and **responsibilities** for future action can be assigned. Lastly, as not all risks are foreseeable, **general resilience principles** are presented and discussed, guiding a shared vision on how principles can be integrated in daily tourism practice.

What to expect

Conducting a structured destination resilience analysis not only enables destination managers to better plan and act to prepare for, prevent, adapt, and respond to hazards that pose a risk for tourism, but can also act as a **communication tool to customers distinguishing the destination as a safe place for holidaymaking**.

The implementation of the analysis is ideally led by a destination management organisation, (non-) governmental organisations or academic institutions, which are engaged in activities at the intersection of tourism management, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.

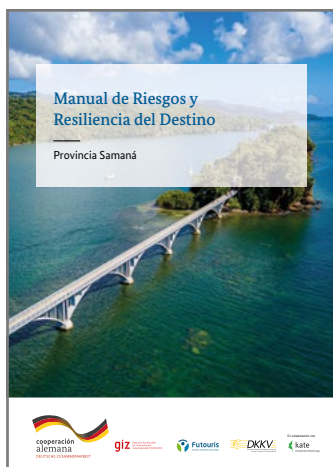
The entire **process is flexible** and allows for a resilience analysis **tailored to the local context** thus ensuring the relevance of proposed options for action. In the face of scarce data availability, the guideline offers advice on how to specifically include **local expertise and knowledge** already available in the destination and



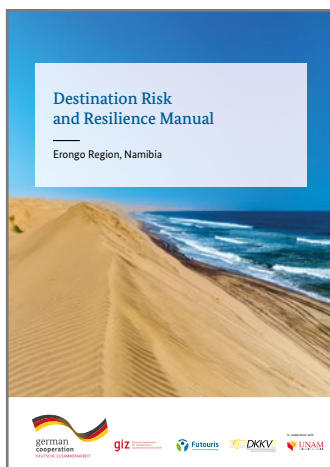
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builds on the concepts of participation and co-creation of knowledge thus increasing **ownership** of proposed strategies.

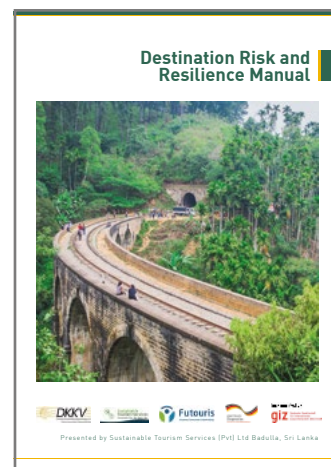
This approach has already been successfully implemented in three tourism destinations. For further insights, good practice examples and options for action to build resilience, please find more information on the Destination Risk and Resilience Manuals from these destinations below.



[Samaná,
Dominican
Republic](#)



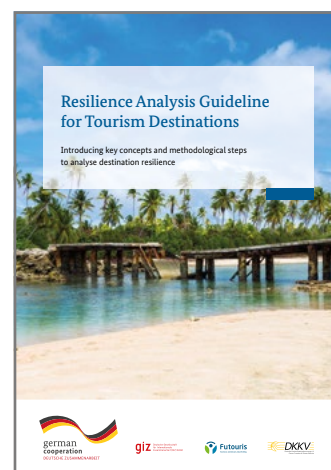
[Erongo Region,
Namibia](#)



[Ella,
Sri Lanka](#)



For more information on the conceptual background of risk and resilience in tourism destinations and a more elaborate explanation of the 5-step approach (incl. good practice examples and ideas and inspiration to build resilience), please refer to our [Resilience Analysis Guideline for Tourism Destinations](#).



The concepts and outcomes presented in this brochure form part of the joint project “Destination Resilience” carried out by the German Committee for Disaster Reduction and Futouris. The project is supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Published by

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