

Tourism and Children in Prostitution¹

Introduction

International tourism organisations have been unanimous in condemning the use of tourism for the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The World Tourism Organisation calls it a “violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires strict legal action by tourist sending and receiving countries“ (Oct. 22, 1995). The Universal Federation of Travel Agents’ Associations, one of the first travel organisations to condemn child prostitution, has produced a Children’s and Travel Agents’ Charter which is being circulated for signature by national members and which pledges to "give every assistance to the various organisations, campaigns and charitable associations concerned with the welfare of child victims of sex tourism to help restore the dignity, physical and mental health to such children".

It is appropriate that the Congress in Sweden should recognise the growing concern among tourism bodies about the situation of children in prostitution and the related issues of sex tourism. Current estimates put the number of children entering the sex-market every year at well above one million. This issue is now being widely discussed within the industry itself and it is hoped that a new consensus will emerge from the Congress on how the tourism industry can help the international community bring an end to this modern form of slavery.

This paper provides the background to the involvement of the tourism industry with the issue and describes some of the actions which have been taken. Many people have contributed to the preparation and drafting of this paper. Officials from the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the Universal Federation of Travel Agents' Associations (UFTAA), the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Union of Food, Agriculture, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) have been particularly helpful.

I. TOURISM

1. The Tourism Experience

Travelling has become a part of everyday life in many societies of today’s world. Crossing a border has lost its magic for many people, thus making foreign and domestic travel in their minds more and more alike. However, this does not change a basic reality, namely that travel to a foreign country is not a neutral action. International visitors should therefore enter a foreign country with sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, social, economic or religious differences between their country of origin and should respect the values that these differences entail in the host country.

This is especially evident in sexual customs. What is acceptable behaviour in one country (e.g. public displays of affection or nudity) may be quite unacceptable and even illegal in another. Sexual mores require particular sensitivity from tourists.

Historically, travel and prostitution have often been associated. The earliest tourism destinations were religious shrines or trade centres and in the ruins of ancient cities such as Ephesus, Babylon and Pompeii prostitute quarters are still clearly visible and surprisingly large. Inveterate travellers in history, particularly seamen and soldiers, have helped to create a place for prostitution in the cities they visited.

Today the number of tourists is increasing dramatically. Most of these new travellers are not deliberately seeking sex when they travel but even so the number who make use of commercial sex is considerable, especially in those destinations where sexual services are readily available.

There are many psychological as well as social and cultural reasons advanced to explain why this takes

place:

- When the tourist is away from home there is an anonymity which releases him or her from the usual social restraints which determine behaviour in the home country. A man who would never contemplate visiting a brothel in his home town will often do so in a foreign country where there is little likelihood of detection. Many countries have noted this phenomena. A Japanese proverb claims that "the traveller knows no shame". A common saying in parts of Europe is, "the further I go from home the less moral I become".
- In "exotic" tourist destinations visitors usually cannot understand the language or the cultural nuances in the society. This leads them to make assumptions which are probably untrue but which enable them to rationalise their changed behaviour. It is common for those tourists who sexually exploit children to explain their behaviour by saying that sex with children "is more acceptable in this culture, and the people here do not have the same sexual hang-ups we have in our country". Equally common among exploiters is the rationalisation that this is a way of helping poor children to get some money.
- Tourism does not only change behaviour, it can also reinforce prejudice. Visitors who hold strong views, whether explicit or obscure, about the inferiority of people other than their own usually have their racist attitudes reinforced in foreign countries. They see what they want to see. Such people have no scruples about exploiting other persons because they consider them to be inferior.
- The experience of economic superiority in a poorer country tempts some visitors to sexually exploit and abuse local people. Modern tourists from industrialised nations may hold quite menial positions in their own country but the disparity in salaries can mean they are comparatively wealthy when they travel to a poor country. These 'nouveau riche' will sometimes spend their money in sexual activities which they have associated with the rich and the famous.
- Tourists are sometimes fleeing from an unhappy sexual relationship at home and are open to new sexual experiences. Aspects of this have been noted among men from Western industrialised societies. With traditional privileges of patriarchal society slowly being closed off in many Western countries some men feel inadequate to cope with the change. Marriages and other relationships break down, employment opportunities are no longer so readily available and 'strong' women are seen to be a threat to male domination.
- Finally, one of the most important reasons why child sex exploitation is taking place among tourists is because the children are readily available. The ease with which tourists in some countries can obtain a child as a sexual partner is, in itself, a powerful incentive for some to try the novelty of a child sex partner. The role of organised crime in the supply of children must be recognised. Because tourists are often willing to pay large sums of money for sexual services from children, the trade in children has become more lucrative to criminals and therefore more commonplace.

2. The Business Traveller

Those who travel for business rather than pleasure share many of the attributes listed above. However, they are often more sophisticated travellers and usually have more money to spend. Some of them are more likely to remain in one place for long periods, others return often to the same place.

Business people usually travel alone and are largely male. Not surprisingly, a number of serious cases of consistent commercial child exploitation have been uncovered among travelling men in the business community.

3. Business People within Poor Countries

On the other hand, business people in poor countries where tourists arrive in greater numbers, see and

seize opportunities for substantial profit at low risk and little investment by developing a sex industry, using the available prostitutes, enticing or forcing women to get involved, and if necessary, recruit or force children to become 'sex-workers'. The sex industry is organised like most other industries. It is a sector in which individuals as well as large organisations operate. It frequently has connections with other illegal and exploitative behaviour - such as trafficking of children, forced labour and pornography.

II. THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The tourism industry cannot be held accountable for the behaviour of its clients, unless the industry involves them in (commercial) sex opportunities. But it is always affirmed by those who promote tourism that the fundamental objective for the industry is "to promote peace, human rights, mutual understanding, respect for all peoples and cultures and sustainable development".

It is encouraging to see that a number of tourism bodies are taking these objectives seriously and there is a new sense of corporate responsibility among many branches of the tourism industry. This is seen particularly in the growing awareness of the need to protect the environment from the impact of too much tourism on some fragile eco-systems. Tourism must respect the environment and people.

In terms of tourism's promotion of human rights, respect for all people and sustainable development, there is clearly an issue to be resolved in the general area of "sex tourism". This blanket phrase, "sex tourism", first used by non-governmental organisations in 1980 to describe the phenomenon in South-East Asia, is now seen by many countries as contrary to sustainable economic and human development.

Several tourism organisations have established trade conventions which ensure that tour agencies which promote sex-tours will forfeit their licence to remain as tour agents. This is sometimes done in response to public pressure. During the Swiss ECPAT campaign in 1992, a journalist arranged a child sex-tour through a travel agent and on his return home he wrote an exposition of the agent's operation. The subsequent public outcry ensured that the agent was no longer able to operate his business.

In introducing laws of extraterritoriality to end child prostitution, several countries, including the United States, Germany and Australia, have also incorporated legal provisions which prohibit the operation of child-sex tours. Any tour operator who attempts to promote child-sex tours now faces the possibility of fine or imprisonment.

Sex tourism has thus created a "web-work" in which tourists, the sex industry and the tourism industry itself are involved either by necessity or by implication, by intention or not.

III. THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROMOTION AND ORGANISATION OF SEX TOURISM

The sex tourism "environment" (sex tourists' motives, economic interests, sex-oriented profile of tourist destinations, style of advertising, etc.) provides significant encouragement for persons inclined to exploit children when travelling.

The comments in this section give at least some insight and background to what the general issue of sex tourism is like and to encourage actions that would eliminate contributing factors to the sexual exploitation of children.

The flow of sex tourists is mainly from the economically developed world (Western Europe, Scandinavian countries, North America; Australasia, the Gulf States) to poorer countries of South-East Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. However, some wealthy individuals from less economically developed countries such as Mexico, Argentina and India, are also known to practise sex tourism and there are a small number of sex tourist destinations (for example Amsterdam, New Orleans, Las Vegas) in affluent countries.

Some countries in Eastern Europe are also now beginning to attract sex tourists and export child prostitution to other countries. There is enormous variation between the receiving countries in terms of the degree of national level involvement in organising sex tourism. Many receiving countries are under economic and political pressures to promote tourism as a means of generating foreign exchange revenue. In some cases, there is what amounts to official acceptance of the fact that tourism means sex tourism, some government officials have spoken of 'sacrificing a generation of women' in pursuit of economic development.

In most cases, however, organised crime represents the only concerted organisation of sex tourism at the national level. There are also numerous local individuals who involve themselves in prostitution, including child prostitution, in opportunistic ways; e.g. pimping and procuring, taking payment from either prostitutes or clients for the use of rooms and/or for 'turning a blind eye', etc. As in all other markets, their behaviour is partly a response to an existing demand for prostitution from tourists, and partly a proactive attempt to generate such demand by creating and promoting an effective supply function. Sadly, many such forms of involvement rely on the existence of corruption among the police force (itself usually explained by the low pay of police officers).

The international promotion and organisation of sex tourism takes place in different ways. First, there are individual men and groups of men who appear to view the sexual exploitation of people in 'Third World' countries as a benign 'hobby', and dedicate themselves to providing information for like-minded individuals on a non-profit making basis. This can simply involve the exchange of information between men in sex tourist resorts, or in bars and pubs back home. It is also achieved via the Internet, with some men contributing pornographic accounts of their sexual exploits for others to peruse and supplying details of bars, brothels, prices etc., in various sex tourist destinations. Descriptions of children and/or information about how to obtain child prostitutes are sometimes included in this material. The lack of adequate legislation allows these Internet locations to encourage sex tourists to target 'new' destinations, for example in Asia and in Africa.

Second, although there are very few tour operators that explicitly arrange child sex tours, there are still various small companies in Europe, Australia, North America and Japan which promote and facilitate sex tourism by identifying resorts where prostitution is widespread; by negotiating deals with local hotels to ensure that their clients will not be charged for bringing 'companions' back to their room for the night; by arranging 24 hour female 'guides' for clients; by providing on the spot 'holiday reps' with an intimate knowledge of prostitution in cities and resorts. Also, tourism destination countries are often marketed in such a way as to create or develop an image or 'reputation' for sex tourism.

There is reason to believe that European, Australian and North American companies involved in arranging sex tours which may include the abuse of children are usually very small-scale operations, often 'one man shows'.

Third, there are individuals and companies that write and publish travel guides which promote sex tourism at least by implication. Some guides cater simply and solely to a sex tourist market and provide a wealth of information for the preferential child abuser (specifying bars and brothels where 'younger girls' are to be found), as well as constantly emphasising the youth of the 'lovely and willing ladies' to be found in the locations recommended. There have also been cases of publications which cater very specifically to child abusers.

Finally, the broader tourist industry at least provides the vehicle for the movements of sex tourists. The fact remains that the travel arrangements of the vast majority of sex tourists are organised by reputable travel agents and package tour operators, and sex tourists are all transported around the world by 'ordinary' air lines. Sex tourism, by implication, means big business for large corporations as well as smaller travel companies, and the composition of sex tourists in any given resort in terms of their nationalities more or less precisely mirrors the pattern of foreign investment in that resort. The marketing material put out by many reputable travel companies also helps to sustain the flow of sex tourists. It often stresses the attractions of the 'nightlife' in resorts where the only nightlife that exists is centred around the sexual exploitation of local people. It also promulgates stereotypes about 'Third World people as 'happy', 'smiling',

'laid-back' and 'exotic'. Such stereotypes sometimes indicate quite ethno-centric and racist attitudes.

IV. THE ECONOMICS OF TOURISM VERSUS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Since 1960, world-wide travel has increased more than sevenfold - about half for recreational purposes. The number of international tourist arrivals in 1995 was estimated at 567 million, to increase by 2010 to 967 million. International tourism has already become item one in world exports (ahead of petroleum, vehicles, electronic equipment, etc.) and is the leading tradable services sector (WTO). With as many as 200 million jobs in travel and tourism, this industry is the biggest employer in the world. Every 6th job in the world on average is somehow depending on or related to travel and tourism (WTTC).

Such figures emphasise the economic importance of tourism. Many developing countries now rate tourism as their major export earner and their main hope for future economic development. In Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe enormous investments of time, people and money are going into the development of tourism.

For some of these countries sex tourism (including child sex) is seen as an unfortunate but necessary part of tourism development. There is a frequently quoted statement by a former Deputy Prime Minister of a government in Asia when his country was developing its tourism industry. Speaking to Provincial Governors in October 1980 he said that they should contribute to the national tourism effort by developing scenic spots while at the same time encouraging "certain entertainments which some of you may find disgusting and embarrassing because they are related to sexual pleasures". The Deputy Police General responded to the challenge to promote tourism "by lengthening service hours on entertainment places to welcome tourists". The link between tourism and prostitution is a mind-set in many places.

Sometimes the campaign to end child prostitution has run into conflict with tourism ministries in developing countries because it was considered to be anti-tourism. Tourism developers had been taught that the provision of every kind of sexual service to foreign tourists was a necessary part of tourism development. Fortunately, that phase is now passing but it is still necessary to remind tourism host countries that hospitality need not mean the sexual exploitation of their children.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is possible largely because of economic disparities. But this does not excuse it, nor is it a complete explanation. The sale of children can also be a reflection of greed on the part of the parents selling a child, or greed on the part of the criminal in the middle who abducts or seduces a child into prostitution.

By treating the child as a commodity which can be purchased, hired, sold or thrown away the issue is no longer just a question of poverty but rather one of values - and in particular the values of consumerism.

This is a subtle distinction but of considerable importance for the way in which tourism is marketed. When tourism advertising promotes the values of consumerism and hedonism as the central goal of the tourism experience it is affirming the same values which make the prostitution of children possible. Tourism promotion must always recognise the need to "protect children against all forms of exploitation and sexual violence attributable to the activities of tourists" (Children's and Travel Agents' Charter UFTAA).

It must be clearly pointed out that whatever short-term economic benefits might come from sex customers for tourism and related interests concerned, the unseen long term economic, social, cultural and health costs are high and passed to "others", i.e. the future generation, the future government, international aid agencies, aid programmes from the countries of tourists' origin, charity organizations etc. This reality defines - by implication - concrete responsibilities on the side of all those, who can influence the course of tourism development.

V. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The Congress in Sweden includes many sectors of society, from law enforcement officials to politicians to social activists to medical professionals. The tourism representatives will speak not only for the industry itself but also for the commercial sector of society which is driven by economics and profit. Their presence at the Congress is a sign that corporate bodies share the responsibility for ensuring that children will be protected from sex exploitation and that positive human values must be affirmed by the whole of society.

More importantly, the tourism industry has the capacity to help end the trade in children in a very short time. Tourism is the world's largest employer of people and therefore has representatives in most towns and cities of the world. In all tourism centres it is the tourism sector which provides the transport, the accommodation and the services which are required by travellers - including those who want to sexually abuse children. Workers in tourism are, therefore, in an unique position to see and report what is happening, thereby enabling management to put pressure on the authorities to ensure that crimes against children are properly investigated.

The following section of the paper asks what can be done and introduces - as examples of possible alternatives - some programmes which have already been attempted within the tourism sector.

1. Tourist Education

Tourists seek factual information on the place to be visited. Beyond their primary need for prices, timetables etc., they are also given background information on social and cultural customs and restrictions in the country they are visiting. Therefore, as a first level of action, education about child sexual abuse needs to be a major priority. In the last three years numerous groups have initiated some actions in this regard. Often it has been done as a partnership between the tourism industry and governments or the tourism industry and non-governmental organisations. Some examples:

- *Travel Agents*

Since 1993 a number of countries have passed laws of extraterritoriality which means that nationals from that country who sexually abuse children overseas can be tried for the crime in their home country. To inform the public of this new law several countries have produced material for the use of travellers.

- *Sweden*

The Swedish aid agency Rädde Barnen helped produce an imaginative card to be inserted in airline tickets to Asia. One side gave "the bright side" of tourism and the other "the dark side". The latter warned tourists that they should protect children--not exploit them. Cards were distributed by the Swedish Travel Agency Association.

- *Norway*

Redd Barna and Den Norske Reisebransjeforeningen co-operated to produce a widely-distributed brochure warning against AIDS and child prostitution.

- *France*

The French travel industry and several government ministries have combined to produce a leaflet which warns against child prostitution. Distributed through travel agents, more than 300,000 copies were distributed in the first months and by now over 1 million have been given out.

1.2 Customs

- *Australia*

The Australian customs service has a supply of leaflets at the counter. They are available to anyone,

but one is often directly handed to male travellers going to one of the Asian sex-tourism destinations. The leaflet warns against child sex tourism. It was initiated by ECPAT-Australia and funded by aid agencies. New Zealand is preparing a similar brochure.

1.3 In Flight

- *Germany*

During long flights travellers are receptive to some low-key information on the issue. Already in the late seventies and early eighties, Condor flights to Colombo/Sri Lanka successfully showed a 28 minute film on how tourists should not behave.

Responses to begging children, behaviour and dressing in sacred sites and temples as well as the personal and social relationship of tourists with a 12-year-old beach boy were topics treated in the film with sensitivity.

- *Indonesia*

Garuda airlines became concerned at the activities of tourists to Indonesia in the 1980s and inserted a brochure in the seat pocket of all their flights from Australia and America to Indonesia. This contained a Code of Ethics for travellers.

- *Italy*

The Italian Federation of Travel and Tourism has declared its willingness to distribute a leaflet and this will probably be done in association with Alitalia airlines.

- *Austria*

A negative example from Lauda Air, the Austrian airline shows that the issue of child sex abuse is not something which can be treated lightly. In 1992 the inflight magazine of Lauda Air contained an offensive mock postcard from a German tourist. The photo was a young Thai girl naked from the waist up and the message on the back boasted of the pleasures of sex in a bar in Thailand. "Must go", the message ended, "the tarts in the Baby Club are waiting for me". It was a particularly tasteless and insensitive piece of journalism and led to public protests in Bangkok and eventually a qualified apology from Lauda Air.

1.4 On the Ground

- *Thailand*

Groups concerned at the sexual abuse of children produced a pamphlet in 1995 to be widely distributed to foreign tourists through hotels and some shops. Produced by the National Commission on Women's Affairs, it carries the message "Sex with Children is a Crime".

1.5 Through Guide Books

- *United States*

Fodors guide books and videos are the authoritative American guide to travel. Fodors has taken an interest in the campaign against child prostitution and featured it on television programmes. They also include a Code of Ethics in many of their books.

- *Australia*

Lonely Planet is one of the largest travel publications in the world and the company has recently set up a watching brief on issues such as political repression, indigenous rights, ecological damage, the

environmental impact of tourism and now child prostitution. In relation to child sex tourism, Lonely Planet believes it has a responsibility to help raise awareness of the sexual exploitation of children, especially in countries where this is particularly acute. To this end it has been sending ECPAT-Australia's information kits to authors contracted to update Lonely Planet editions. The aim is to ensure that their authors are informed and address the issue of child sex tourism as well as the recent changes to national and international law which make this activity a criminal offence.

1.6 At Travel Fairs

- ***United Kingdom***

In several countries national travel exhibitions have had displays warning against child sex tourism prepared by local non-governmental organisations. The United Kingdom is one of several examples. In the UK the Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism was given a free stand by the Association of British Travel Agents for a display at the 1995 World Travel Mart.

2. Cooperation: Employers/Employees

Joint efforts by employers and employees in tourism facilities such as hotels and hostels can assist to ensure that the sexual exploitation of children is prevented or, if it occurs, is reported and cases are put into the hand of law-enforcement officials.

Already, the IUF/UITA/IUL (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association) has passed resolutions to this effect in June '95 and December '95 stating "that workers in the tourism sector can and must play a key-role in the fight against child prostitution" and calling for negotiations with employers for appropriate joint action. The IUF/UITA/IUL also "underscores the key responsibility of governments in this struggle, both in host countries and in the home countries of tourists", and "urges governments to intensify their efforts aimed at enforcing human rights, in particular for children, by enacting appropriate legislation that makes it a crime for individuals or businesses to promote or engage in business involving child prostitution".

3. Self Regulation

From within the tourism industry there have been several creative proposals for monitoring what is happening and for self-regulation. Two of the more interesting developments in this regard come from Taiwan and Germany:

Taiwan

Following an NGO report of 1993, which revealed a very high number of child prostitutes in Taiwan, the Kaoshiung Hotel Association and the Taipei Hotel Association initiated campaigns among their members to support ECPAT in combating child prostitution in Asian tourism. They discipline any of their members known to encourage child prostitution in their rooms. Other actions include:

- hanging anti-child-prostitution plastic cards in front of the hotel reception,
- issue of VIP cards for ECPAT supporters, entitling the holder to discounts in the participating hotels (50,000 cards issued so far),
- a statement by the Kaoshiung Hotel Association in support of ECPAT, expressing commitment to help victims of child prostitution and mentioning the actions taken.

Germany

On the basis of a draft, *Terre Des Hommes* Germany made contracts with 12 German tour operators to date, in which the signatories undertake to:

- ensure that there will be no child prostitution in their partner hotels,
- inform their customers about the background and impact of child prostitution,
- train their staff in hotel and tour guides accordingly.

4. Reporting the Crime

The sexual abuse or trafficking of a child is a crime and must be reported. However, many people prefer to look the other way when they suspect that there is some abuse taking place, while others are reluctant to report for fear of losing their jobs. Reporting is the task of everyone in the field: the tourism industry (tourism companies, trade organizations) individuals employed by the tourism industry (tourism personnel) and the travelling public. In addition, NGOs and private citizens in a given destination could and should report relevant facts and observations. Last, but by no means least, all media have to play a vital role to ensure that facts are brought into the open. Appropriate legislation by governments and self-regulation measures by all sectors of the tourism industry provide a useful and necessary framework for personal action and will encourage any voluntary action based on conscience, sensibility and awareness. The following cases illustrate that some courageous and active responses to this challenge do take place:

India

In 1991 a hostess on Indian Airlines noticed a young girl in distress. Speaking to her in her own dialect she discovered that she was a young girl sold by her parents and being abducted to Saudi Arabia by the man next to her. The hostess radioed to the police in Delhi, announced to the passengers what was happening and got them to sign a petition. The abductor was arrested and the girl freed.

Thailand

In 1993 a French group tour included some single men. When one of the men told his friend that he was going to have sex with a child the friend was outraged. There was a loud argument but the first man finally decided to go and have sex with a young child anyway. The second man went to the police and made them arrest his countryman.

It may seem an attractive proposal to encourage those in the tourism industry to report a crime or the potential for a crime but the idea must be approached with caution. The semblance of criminality does not necessarily mean that a crime is about to occur. The proposal also gives the possibility of persons fulfilling a vendetta against their enemies.

5. Lobbying Governments

In recent years laws to cover the commercial sexual abuse of children in tourism have been passed in Germany (June 1993), France (February 1994), Australia (July 1994), United States (September 1994), Belgium (March 1995) and New Zealand (July 1995) with several other countries considering similar measures. In most cases the government has received submissions from the tourism industry and from tourism ministries. The submissions were in all cases positive in their support of legislation.

In Italy the government passed an Order of the Day (March 1995) which requires travel agents to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

6. Training Programmes

Lufthansa and Air New Zealand are among the airlines which have included instruction of their staff on the dangers of commercial child sex exploitation in their regular training programmes. A number of other

airlines are discussing the possibility.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Congress will provide an opportunity for Governments to review their own role in the determination of tourism policies. In many instances political action will be essential to ensure that child sex tourism is prevented.

A cooperative partnership between governments and tourism could make a positive contribution to ending the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

¹ Submitted by ECPAT.