

macro and micro views of erotic tourism

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This article examines the deviant phenomenon of erotic tourism from both macro and micro level perspectives. The current study deals exclusively with erotic tourism involving the provision of a sexual experience for male tourists either as voyeurs or participants in sex acts with females. The origins of the industry are discussed as well as its implications for sexual deviance.

This article examines the deviant phenomenon of erotic tourism from both a structural and interactionist perspective. The focus will be on the heterosexual portion of the industry, specifically males as tourists, with females as the providers of some type of sexual experience. Erotic tourism involves providing a sexual experience for tourists as voyeurs, participants, or both. Although erotic tourism is a unique structure for taking part in sexual deviance, the sexual roles of women in this industry are not. As a group these women engage in roles as strippers, prostitutes, and escorts. The authors also examine the historical origins of this sex industry. Data were gleaned from interviews with those selling sex tours as well as buyers of these services. Finally, the article frames erotic tourism within the literature on sexual deviance.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this research were obtained using three techniques: historical research, data from the internet, and interviews. Interview data were obtained from an available sample of men $N = 14$ who had engaged in erotic tours and from individual tour agents $N = 3$ who arrange such tours. These interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to four hours. In the interviews a guide was used to direct the dialogue. The guide was intended to be used as a probing mechanism rather than as a generator of specific responses. Informants were located first through a key informant and then snowballing. Snowball sampling is a method through which the researcher develops an ever increasing set of observations. Informants in the study were asked to recommend others for interviewing, and each of the subsequently interviewed participants was asked for further recommendations. The internet was used to view the method, location, and content of advertisements that are used in the erotic tour industry. Historical research focused on the origins of this sex industry in specific places.

ORIGINS OF EROTIC TOURISM

Erotic tours occur mainly in two general locations; Southeast Asia and the Caribbean; to a lesser extent erotic tours also occur in the Netherlands. Some researchers (Miller 1995; Truong 1990, 1996) have examined sexual tourism in Southeast Asia in terms of prostitution. As expected these researchers view these activities as exploitative, indeed, in some cases as a form of female slavery (Hodgson 1995; Spaulding and Beswick 1995). The industry in Southeast Asia has its roots in the Vietnam war.

In Thailand, the tourist industry has been a priority within the government's economic plans despite the social inequalities it exacerbates. Thai sex tourism got its boost from U.S. militarization. Although prostitution has a long history in Thailand and other Asian countries, Southeast Asian women were first turned into prostitutes on a mass scale in the context of the Vietnam war and the establishment of American air and navy bases in the Pacific region. . .this began. . .in Thailand in 1967, when the Thai government and the U.S. military signed a treaty to allow U.S. soldiers stationed in Vietnam to come on Rest and Recreation leave. . .(Miller 1995; 279).

This created an economic boom, with tourism being Thailand's main source of foreign capital. When the Vietnam war ended there was an economic need to keep this industry going. Since the sex trade was at the heart of tourism in Southeast Asia the effort to maintain it became more prominent. The Vietnam era had brought a constant supply of soldiers and tourists looking for hedonistic activity, now the pleasure seekers had to be enticed. Although not a focus of this research, the massage parlor business in U.S. cities with military bases expanded after Vietnam because of returning troops looking for sexual services they had received and become accustomed to in Southeast Asia (Bryant and Palmer 1975).

The origin of erotic tourism as an industry in the Caribbean is related to poverty and the expansion of foreign investment in the region. This has become particularly pronounced following decolonization or what some feminist theorists refer to as recolonization within the global economic market (Alexander 1997). The building and then maintenance of the Panama Canal and the U.S. commercial and military presence in the region precipitated the growth of a sex industry. The subsequent withdrawal and downsizing of these facilities were similar to the cycle in Southeast Asia when this foreign investment withdrew. A consequence was that a sex industry lay dormant. The erotic tourism trade represents an awakening of the desire to maintain viable economies in a world economic system that continues to exploit the resources, both material and human, of previously colonized areas. More specifically, erotic tourism represents the exploitation of third world women by both first world countries and their own governments (Alexander 1997).

The sex industry of the Netherlands developed in much the same fashion as a need for entertainment produced a lasting industry. In the case of the Netherlands the reputation of the sex mecca created a legend that has sustained it, hence there was no need to recruit tourists, although there are sex tours to the Netherlands (Amsterdam Redlight Tours 1999).

THE EROTIC TOUR

Sexual activity on tours exists on a continuum from voyeuristic to participatory. Like any other type of organized vacation or tour there are several different categories. There are voyeur tours in which women will greet the erotic traveler at their destination and spend a designated amount of time with them. In some cases,

women advertised as models will take a cruise with the travelers or act as guides for the travelers. Whether on a cruise or acting as guides these women will wear little or no clothing, perform strip shows, and “hang out” with the tourists. Other tours take the client to exotic areas and make the company of native women available. These excursions can be prearranged and the client can reserve with an already established tour, with perhaps some minor variation. Others tours are more creative in that sex tourists tell the tour agent what they want and these accommodations are made. This industry is fueled by the long held ideological tendency to eroticize nonwestern women that has been pervasive since the rise of western dominance.

The following are advertisements on the internet for erotic tours. These are representative of hundreds of such ads. Some tours allude to the fact that clients can develop their own agendas.

Relax and live your wildest dreams and fantasies (Fantasy Getaway Adventures 1999, p.2).

... travel should be relaxing, stress free, erotic and fun (SoloAdventures 1999, p.3).

Acknowledge and indulge your deepest desires (Fantasy Getaway Adventures 1999, p.2).

... live your fantasies (Fantasy Getaway Adventures 1999, p.2).

... looking for the perfect bachelor party or maybe a tour designed specifically for you (SoloAdventures 1999, p.1)?

Some erotic tours are obvious fronts for prostitution, even listing the age of consent in various countries. Some of these ads included photos of the women available.

... the legal age of consent varies (Fantasy Getaway Adventures 1999, p.2).

We will provide you with beautiful young women who take pride in their femininity. Wild, wonderful, lustrous, exotic Women for every discriminating taste!!! Your wish is our desire, we aim to please (Paradise Escort Agency 1999, p.1).

Your escort will be with you 24 hours per day... If additional escorts are required they can be arranged... (Paradise Escort Agency 1999, p.3).

Sex work is legal on this island (Paradise Escort Agency 1999, p.1).

We have only ladies of impeccable backgrounds who are thoroughly screened and subjected to bi-weekly HIV and other exams to insure your safety and good health. All our girls carry health cards, many have university degrees or are studying for a professional career... All have been formally educated as to how to best complete your wildest fantasies with the utmost discretion... Their interest is your desire (Paradise Escort Agency 1999, Pp. 1–2).

Most of the tours have legitimate covers such as fishing trips, golf, rafting, beach or scenic excursions.

There is really nothing like the exhilaration of white water and wet hostesses (SoloAdventures 1999, p.1).

Get out your calendars and your sandals boys. We're planning another cruise! To the sunny beaches of... for sun, fun and... Oh ya, WOMEN! ...Models scheduled to be on cruise: Kimberly Kupps, Wendy Whoppers... Stacey Valentine... Phoenixx and many more! Venture to exotic islands where you can enjoy these beautiful, sexy ladies without clothing! Don't miss this chance to cruise to a magnificent, dazzling tropical destination surrounded by gorgeous women. This cruise is the one for you! Your trip will be filled with fun, partying and the company of the most insatiable women in the world!... your fun is limited only by your imagination (Fantasy Dancer Cruise 1999, p.1).

Golf in a tropical paradise with a beautiful bikini clad caddy... (SoloAdventures 1999, p.1).

Some even label themselves as educational jaunts.

For 17 years...psychologist...has been giving lectures...involving Amsterdam Red Light District...brings you an insider's view... (Amsterdam Redlight Tours 1999, p.1).

The erotic tourism industry caters to the clients' need for confidentiality, as is evident in the following advertisement.

For your privacy we have a U.S. bank account with routing coded for your convenience (Paradise Escort Agency 1999, Pp. 1–2).

First world countries control the dissemination of information often through media depictions which eroticize third world societies. The resultant structures create

...advertising to provide the reader with a range of cultural tools with which fantasy, meaning, and identity can be created and constructed. In this connection, the ways in which promotional campaigns focus on aspects of hospitality, such as female submissiveness, caring and nurturing as well as sexual temptation, may be considered as part of this discourse sustained by governments and enterprises (Truong 1996:374).

Also situated within this erotic industry are individual tour agents, who recruit participants and the tourists who take part. Two owners of travel agencies that book erotic tours commented on their business:

I have been booking this kind of tour for years...it started out with some guys I knew...we were playing golf and someone was commenting on their fantasy vacation...you know like a scene from an X-rated movie...I said that I had heard of stuff like that and if they were serious I would look into it...of those four guys three went and they got three more...yea...I believe there were six guys the first time...that was about twelve years or so ago...now that is all of my business as a travel agent...I am also a...and I have gotten a lot of my clients from my travel business...there are certain tax advantages to business trips so I can advise them on that...the two businesses now support one another...a couple of years ago the ethics board of the...tried to make me separate my...business web site from

my travel agency web site...I did it for about a month...then I combined the sites again...I now refuse to do it because several customers started to ask why I had done that...the way I figure it they may have been embarrassed to get on the erotic tour site but my business site was okay...it also was affecting the amount of business I was doing in both areas.

Several years ago some couples were going on a trip and asked if we could arrange for them to see some sex shows...they didn't say they wanted sex shows at first...it was strip shows...then they asked for something a little more risqué...I gradually got the message...that turned me on to this sex stuff...since that request for sex on a tour...these kinds of tourists have increased...most ask for sex stuff as part of a tour...only a few people have the nerve to tell you they want to see big beautiful tits and ass for a week and fuck 'til I drop...If they got the fantasy and the cash...I can book it...as long as it is legal...If I can get what they want...they and their friends will come back...also it's less embarrassing for them if they can just ask for the same trip that {someone else} got...and we can proceed from there...for those who correspond through the internet the entire process is more private...either way I know what questions to ask now.

Both of these agents said that a growing number of customers were using the internet to arrange tours.

The following comments were from men who have taken erotic tours. Their perceptions of the experience appear to be contingent upon the extent to which the actual encounter is congruent with their fantasized ideal. The closer the actual experience is to typical prostitution the more negatively they view the experience.

A guy met us at the airport...we went to the hotel...each night we had dates with women...we went out to eat...and then to strip clubs each night...I had a great time...it was a great experience.

...they said it would be some quality fucking and it was.

We told the guy what we wanted...it was a kind of fantasy...we wanted to go to an island in the Caribbean and have four women meet us...we describe the women...the guy...sent...

some pictures...we also wanted to share all the women...we got off the plane and they met us...took us to the hotel...we stayed...with them for five days...it was something else...it was unbelievable...it was a real vacation from reality.

...went on tours in what seem like jungle areas...I met some nice looking women in these small villages...saw some nice terrain...

I had an incredible time...saw some great shows and met some great women...the next dirty deed we do will be on one of those cruises...the girls are on the boat...they stay with you the entire trip...I had a buddy who did one of those...he said the girls were fantastic looking.

The first of these tours I was on may have been my last if I had not talked to someone who had a much better experience. We were met at the airport by a pimp looking cab driver...he was a sleazy mother-fucker...he brought us to sex shows and strip joints...brought us to places with some ugly women...I think they must have been his relatives and he was trying to give them some business...when we complained he arranged some girls who must have been in their early teens...There were some moments...but overall I would give the tour a D minus.

...it was like we went to a lot of whore houses...I was very disappointed.

There is no academic literature on the micro view of erotic tourism from the perspective of the male customers. This is the case in research regarding sexual deviance generally. There has been much research on sex workers, who are usually female, and little research on the buyers of sex work, who are typically male.

When questioned about the issue of the exploitation of women, both agents and tourists attempted to neutralize their participation in the process. A tour agent commented:

If I had to worry about that then I would never book a tour to Central or South America...I would never book tours on foreign-flags ships...I would have to invest differently...stop using Coke products. Where would I draw the line?

A tourist who went to tours in Southeast Asia said,

...sure there is exploitation...so are strip shows in the U.S...but you look at what jobs are available in that area and it is not so abusive.

Two tourists who had taken Caribbean tours responded.

These women are paid well...they could do something else...they are not forced to do this.

Basically they are selling pussy...like they do in New Orleans, New York, and Vegas, or any other city in America...they could sweep streets or be some clerk for less money...they chose to do this.

The agent attempted to neutralize the stigma of her participation through the use of the technique or claim of "everyone is doing it" (Coleman 1994). The three tourists seem to suggest that this represents the economic empowerment of women. However, their responses indicate a need to engage in techniques of neutralization; denying the existence of a victim, since all parties are responsible for their own actions (Sykes and Matza 1957). Overall the informants did not question the nature of their experiences with sexual tours. They are embedded within a social structure that condones and often promotes the sexual exploitation of women and as expected, take this as a given.

DISCUSSION

Sociological Deviance

One goal of research on deviant behavior is to fit the behavior within a larger social classification. While the configuration of the sexual events of erotic tourism are peculiar, the behaviors fit within common frames of sexual deviance; stripping (Enck and Preston 1988; Forsyth and Deshotels 1997; Ronai and Cross 1998; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Thompson and Harred 1992), prostitution (Diana 1985; Forsyth and Fournet 1987), voyeurism (Bryant 1977; Forsyth 1996), and recreational sex (Bryant 1977; Forsyth 1992). Deviant sexual habits are often multiple, making a single label inadequate. Many deviant behaviors are embellishments of established patterns

of sexual activity or performance (West 1987). New variations in patterns of sexual deviance, or deviance in general, do not emerge from social lacunas nor are they the fictions of prolific imaginations. An increased interest in sexual variety, promoted by the economic structure and technology, has led some persons to experiment with erotic tours. Erotic tourism is a form of prostitution. It is much like the extended roles of the stripper and the escort. Similar to the interaction between the customer and the stripper (Forsyth and Deshotels 1997), the goal of the customer is to have some sort of sexual experience and the goal of the dancer is to make money. Like the stripper, the form of sexual interaction between the customer and the escort (Bryant 1982; Shaw 1972) or masseuse (Bryant and Palmer 1975) emerges depending upon the craving of the customer and the compliance of the woman. The tour agent figures out what the customer wants and the women become it. This is probably best understood as creative deviance (Douglas, Rasmussen, and Flanagan 1977), deviance which functions to create pleasure for the individual.

Some researchers (Forsyth 1996; Gagnon and Simon 1967; Little 1983) have defined three types of sexual deviance: normal, pathological, and sociological. Normal deviance is sexual behavior which is widespread and occurs with low visibility. Some researchers refer to this as secret deviance. Pathological deviance is considered by most people to be harmful, is against the law, and is engaged in by relatively few individuals. Examples include sexual contact with children, incest, exhibitionism, certain types of voyeurism, and rape (Forsyth 1996; Gagnon and Simon 1967; Little 1983). These behaviors usually involve one individual who is acting alone out of psychological need. Pathological deviance is treated as a sexual perversion. The third type of sexual deviance is sociological. Social structure that generates deviance includes behavior that uses specific social structures to recruit participants, train them, gather people together to perform the act, and provide social support for the actor. Examples are pornography, some forms of voyeurism, homosexuality, prostitution, and nudism in nudists' camps.

Erotic tourism is indeed sociological deviance. A complex assortment of ongoing associations supplies the participant with specialized knowledge to help manage interactions. It is precisely those sorts of behaviors that spawn unique forms of social structure that allow him to continue the behavior. Erotic tourism assembles

and creates an array of sexual behaviors. It has given rise to a specific form of social structure organized around sex workers.

Third world economies are dependent on this "experience commodity" (Truong 1996:373). Third world governments use prostitution, under the guise of tourism, to foster development. This social structure maintains the exploitation of female sex workers through the idea that sex work is immoral, legitimating the symbolic criminalization (Gusfield 1963) of these acts. Being criminal means that these workers are unprotected by legislation, unable to organize, and so forth., thereby furthering their exploitation.

Secret Deviance

The internet reaches tens of thousands of people who never before had private access to information. This privacy allows individuals to pursue and glean information that they would not seek in public (Durkin and Bryant 1995, 1999; Lamb 1998). Many people would not be comfortable looking at pornography in a book store or going into the x-rated room of a video store. Privacy enables individuals to satisfy their secluded yearnings. Most people discover they are too embarrassed or that the gamble of shaming by others is too great, so they do not carry on. The erotic tour works for some individuals because it is the realization of fantasies. In addition, enlistment can take place in private and participation takes place in far away places. The sexual tourist avoids public degradation. Technology has a vigorous influence on social behavior (Bryant 1977, 1982, 1984; Forsyth 1996). Computers have extended sexual boundaries catering to the most bizarre sexual interests (Durkin and Bryant 1995, 1999; Lamb 1998). For a growing number of individuals and cliques, erotic tourism represents socially acceptable and easily procured sex.

Boomtowns and Deviance

New forms of sexual activity have come about with changes in economics, technology, and lifestyles. Development yields fresh opportunities in the pursuit of deviance, particularly prostitution (Hodgson 1995; Spaulding and Beswick 1995). There has been recent scholarly interest in the negative consequences of rapid economic growth (Freudenburg and Gramling 1992). Commensurate with this growth is the almost law-like assumption that there will be an increase in deviance (Sampson and Groves 1989). While there is little need to attempt to refute this social fact, there is a

desire to know what forms this deviance will take (Freudenburg and Jones 1991). Erotic tourism is another example of macro and micro level social disruptions caused by global economic change. Hopefully this research will encourage additional scholarly investigations into these newly mined areas.

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