

# 9

## Sex and tourism

### SUMMARY

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Sex has been a part of tourism for a very long time, but according to Veijola and Jokinen's (1994) playful paper that sets up a fictional theoretical discussion between themselves and Urry and Rojek – on a beach – ‘the body has been absent from the corpus of the sociological studies on tourism’ and ‘the analyst himself has likewise lacked a body’ (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994: 149). As part of this discussion, the two authors (who want to argue an embodied, phenomenological position against the visualism of Urry and Rojek) engage in topless sun bathing and at one point are rudely interrupted by a naked man ‘or to be more precise, his sex’ whose volleyball has landed between them. Rojek and Urry meanwhile, are imagined to be sitting away from this embodied (and passionate) beach scene, under sunshades, on deckchairs deconstructing what seaside postcards *mean* with Ovar Löfgren (see Löfgren, 1999). Their point in writing this very witty paper is that the tourist gaze is impossibly abstracted from ‘tourist events and encounters, in the duration of time and [the] sexed body’ (Veijola and Jokinen, 1994: 149). As we saw in Chapter 6 the naked body and the ritual conventions of the beach interpellate a

sexualised subjectivity, not merely the recognition of signs. Whereas the recognition of signs may have consequences for thought, and is not unrelated to action, Veijola and Jokinen seem to argue that sexualised subjectivities have consequences for passion, arousal and sex itself. This is surely an aspect of tourism we cannot ignore.

At a general level, we can say that if tourism comprises an important part of ritual life in late modernity, then we should not be surprised to find sexuality so ingrained in the aspirations and practices of tourists, because a heightened sense of sexuality and playfulness typically accompany human rituals. In the case of western societies that have generally surrounded sexuality with all manner of taboos, injunctions and rules, it is little surprise that for most of the history of tourism, sexual encounters were widely hoped for and encouraged. This was certainly true at the seaside town of Blackpool in 1939 when a team of 23 observers set out to study what they called 'the image and reality of sex in Blackpool' (Cross, 1990: 180). This study is all the more interesting since this was part of the wider Mass Observation exercise in a nearby mill town (*Worktown*) whose workers came to Blackpool, almost exclusively. The authors of the study of sex in Blackpool are thus set in the context of a detailed knowledge of sex back in their home town. To my knowledge this is the only empirical study of sex and tourism in the modern 'Fordist' period.

### Sex at Blackpool pleasure beach

According to Gary Cross, 'the couple is the preponderant Blackpool unit' and 'sex in Blackpool is especially good for study because here it is bound to be more overt, for there is little opportunity for secrecy or home privacy in the supervised setting of the boarding house'. Although it might seem to be pushing the ethical boundaries of research these days, the team of Mass Observers had already been quite systematic in studying public sex in the back streets and lovers' spots in *Worktown*, turning car lights on lines of 'necking' lovers in order to count them systematically (Cross, 1990: 188). In Blackpool, observers also appeared to go in for participant observation: 'Altogether as a result of exhaustive research and many pick-ups by observers themselves, we scored only four records of copulation [in 1937]' (Cross, 1990: 189).

Reading their account it is hard not to notice their sense of disappointment at the relatively low level of sexual activity in Blackpool in comparison with what they knew to occur when the street lights went out (after 11.00pm) back in *Worktown*.

... the back street is the locus classicus of unmarried love in *Worktown*; here are the results of turning car headlights on back streets in the central Blackpool area. The back street behind Vance Road: seven couples necking against the wall and in the corner of doorways. In the other back street, on the other side

of Vance Road, are five couples. There is none of the *vigorous* activity that Worktown streets show at the same hour . . . (Cross, 1990: 188; my emphasis)

This 'vigorous activity' evidently included full sexual intercourse ('as common in winter as in summer') which took place in the back streets where there would be 'closely linked couples, standing, one or two in every back street' (Cross, 1990: 183).

Their disappointment was not due to a lack of thoroughness or commitment:

Observer units combed the sands at all hours, crawled around under the piers and hulking, pretending to be drunk and fell in heaps on couples to feel what they were doing exactly; others hung over the sea wall and railings for hours watching couples in their hollowed out sandpits below. With wild cries observers set out, fortified by a meat-pie supper, speeding through the night in a car to the extreme southern boundary of the town. Here a traditional sex area Number One, the sand hills, famous as the scene of alleged seductions and assaults. . . . Typical of the difference between truth and legend was an incident at 1.00am, when a band of weary observers stopped for coffee at an all-night stall on the promenade. The stallholder, an old hand in Blackpool, said that it was disgusting the way some of the young people went on, that right now there were thousands on the sands, and the largest part of them stay there right through the night. In fact, there were three. (Cross, 1990: 185)

Their apparent disappointment has to be seen in relation to the otherwise overtly sexualised nature of the seaside *during the day*. This began for many with the brochure for Blackpool, produced by the local council:

In the Blackpool holiday pamphlet, unlike that of Brighton, sport, entertainment and environment are subordinated to the charms of the girls in the bathing dress. Seven of the fifty photographs published in the 1937 pamphlet feature specially posed groups of girls shown playing leap frog, picnicking, riding donkeys, and playing ball on the beach. Their sex appeal is in their frankness and healthiness, reminiscent of the photographs of film stars published in fan magazines. Whatever they are doing they display more vitality and personality than one would find in a hundred Worktown girls. They wear the latest bathing suits, chiefly the brassiere and shorts type which is rarely seen in Blackpool. (Cross, 1990: 181)

Once in Blackpool the atmosphere is sexually charged. There are phallic sculptures along the front and the Tower looms phallus-like over the proceedings, but 'Blackpool's sex appeal is firmly based on the body'. Sweets such as 'Mae's Vest' and 'Sally's Whatnots' were clearly sexualised bodies; there were machines offering peeps at 'intimate scenes'; there were thousands of smutty postcards; states of undress and undressing extended from the beach to the theatre and side shows (shows were observed and reported in great detail: here is a sample for the George Formby show of 1939):

Men and women in rich costumes of eighteenth century France. Behind, the wrought iron gates of a manor house. Gauze rises to show a fountain-well. . . . Another curtain rises. Red suns are glowing; chandeliers descend from the ceiling, on which stand lovely girls, breasts naked, nipples upstanding and red. (Cross, 1990: 182)

Undress, nakedness and exposure were a feature of theatre shows but they continued into side shows such as in the Fun House, where for one shilling 'holidaymakers could see the undies of ordinary live girls . . . where air currents blow up skirts', but more generally, 'for the showman a little "dirt" draws the crowd' (Cross, 1990: 183). This carnivalesque atmosphere saturated and sexualised the public performance of people themselves. For example, groups of men and groups of women followed each other around, smiling suggestively and joking loudly. One of the team of observers, the wife of an Oxford don and Labour Party activist was constantly propositioned by men as she stood 'observing' outside the Tower, here are some excerpts from her notes:

Middle aged man in a bowler and mackintosh: 'Will yer come to bed with me love? 'Ave yer done it before?' Very tall man fairly well dressed: 'Are you all alone sweetie? Come along with me and I'll give you a real good time. Come on, don't be shy. You don't want to be alone tonight do you?' Man, 30, wearing mackintosh and cap. 'Come with me lass? I'll pay for you but you'll have to give me a cuddle. What about it lass, come on.'

Finally, and almost unbelievably, watching the courting, kissing and otherwise sexually engaged couple on the beach late at night was evidently a major draw for men of all ages:

Watchers are not youths only. For older men of scopophilic tendencies, the sands at night are a happy hunting ground. Whenever a couple get down on the sands in the dark shadows of the Central Pier, they very quickly have a ring of silent, staring individuals around them less than two yards away, apparently immune from rebuke. (Cross, 1990: 187)

As if talking about a colony of seabirds, Cross muses that 'this tolerance naturally helped observers in their study' (Cross, 1990: 188).

In sum the Mass Observation team found that Blackpool was highly sexualised and that this carried over into sexualised performances in both formal and informal situations, but although it was infused into day and night time activities, for most it was predominantly comedic and voyeuristic, and even for most of the mill girls and their boys it rarely went beyond petting and flirtatiousness. Prostitutes were conspicuous by their very low numbers, and most of these were outsiders restricted to propositioning punters, including the Mass Observers (of course) on the sea front. Why was this? Cross argues that for the mill girls going further than

necking was far too risky with a boy they did not know and have some means of controlling. Control and confidence were greater at home and sex on the street more likely between long-term partnerships and couples saving for marriage. However, the mill girls did leave the pubs more or less drunk and in theory were more at risk if men pressed their suit too hard. It seems they did not.

Evidently the males are also careful or merely flirtatious. We think this is so because, for the average young Worktowners, Blackpool does not offer a special outlet for sex. This he can generally satisfy as well in Worktown. Both men and women go to Blackpool for the things they cannot get at home – oysters, sleep, sea air, the Big Dipper, Formby in person, a first-rate dance band, variety and no factory. The tension of sex, often as severe as the tensions of time, money and work is a thing from which for one week you try to get away. (Cross, 1990: 190)

### Sexualising tourism

Between the 1930s when we see these first and valuable glimpses of ordinary people away on holiday and the present, a great deal has happened to change the nature of sex both at home and away. To begin with, those tight knit industrial communities did not last very long after this study; the war kept most very busy, but afterwards new technologies, new markets and competition from cheaper overseas locations saw many such moral communities split away and change. From the 1950s onwards, relative income rose considerably, particularly among a new and affluent generation and they began to take far more leisure and freedom, looking for more out of life than a factory career: social mobility, further education, travel. This and subsequent generations began to live away from home before marriage and this was hugely enhanced by the expansion of further education colleges and grants and scholarships for living away. In the 1960s, the so-called sexual revolution encouraged more sexual experimentation and sexual activity before marriage and in addition, the pill and other contraceptives made this a safer and longer-term possibility. Sex continued to sell tourism, and with the demise of the cold English seaside holiday and the global growth of the warmer sun holiday in the Mediterranean or tropical climates, based around the resort hotel, sex became a more normative part of tourism. A typical post-Fordist strategy in tourism is to segment the market into specialised niche areas, and sex itself became one of the ways tourism markets segmented. So, for example, new holiday packages exclusively for young and single people made the probability of sex an attractive selling point. Gay, lesbian and older age group packages were also marketed with clear erotic subtexts.

Recently Ryan and Robertson (1996) reported that, for example, 13 per cent of students in a survey reported having sex with someone they met on

holiday. Summarising most other recent research on holiday sexual relations, Ryan and Hall (2001: 60) reveal that between 8 per cent and 24 per cent (depending on the sample) report having had sex with a new partner on a recent holiday. As Oppermann argues, 'many tourists experience sexual encounters simply because the occasion arises or because they meet like-minded people' . . . or, they 'might simply feel lonely and sexually deprived (for example, people on conference travel). Ryan and Robertson (1996) found that 10 per cent of their student sample packed condoms.

Travel affords anonymity and respite from surveillance, duty and obligation (as well as engendering loneliness and sexual deprivation), but also the freedom for fantasy, imagination and adventure. However, sex and sexualities are also embodied practices and one of the more important ways in which we express ourselves through natural performance. We can lose ourselves in ecstatic moments during sex just as much as the surfer or the skydiver can through their physical experience; sex is also potentially exciting and 'dangerous' and for this reason Simmel included sexual adventures, affairs and the like, alongside his concept of *the adventure*, which was otherwise about mountaineering and other dangerous, risky and exciting alpine sports. In the next section I can do little more than summarise some of the key features that research on the subject of sex and tourism has revealed, but you will notice that I follow (the late) Martin Oppermann's injunction to recognise that the notion of 'sex tourism' does not exhaust the range of sexualities and sex that are significant to tourism studies.

#### Activity 9.1

Is there an intrinsic relationship between sex and tourism, or at least the conducting of courtship and establishing new sexual relationships at some distance from the everyday world? Even if such activities are not exclusive to tourism and travel it is surprising how many examples one can find. Take for example, the recent Bridget Jones books . If you think about these books, going away to touristic locations is often evoked for the perfect sexual encounter – even Bridget's mother discovers this association. Of course, the Bridget Jones books are a contemporary comedy loosely based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, but considering that the former were written recently and the latter early in the nineteenth century, it would seem, on the face of it, to be something of an enduring association. To what extent do stories in film and novels draw on this relationship and how do these literatures assist you in understanding *why* tourism travel and sex have become so closely associated?

### Sex tourism arrives

As Oppermann (1999: 251) says, 'While some countries may be more renowned for the availability of commercial sex, sex tourism exists everywhere . . .'. Men (predominantly) travel from more developed countries to less developed countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean for sex that is either not available or more expensive or qualitatively less pleasurable at home. But this is not restricted to men, because there is now a stream of discrete travellings by affluent western women to places in the Caribbean and Africa, where sex with local men is explicitly anticipated. However, Dahles and Bras (1999) also note similar relationships developing between local beach boys (who develop an 'entrepreneurial romance' style) and western women tourists in Indonesia. According to many recent analysts, sex is not motivated purely by the 'consummation of commercial sexual relations', and there are 'complex processes by which individuals choose to seek sexual gratification, first within prostitution and secondly as part of the tourist experience' (Oppermann, 1999: 252; citing Kruhse-Mount Burton, 1995: 192).

Certainly sex and tourism is not confined to wealthy international male tourists travelling to exploit poor local women, although that is common enough. But we know that prostitutes travel too and sometimes they are the international tourists, working the conference venues, international hotel districts, casinos and resorts. In Germany for example, 'the large share of foreign prostitutes actually means that in many sex tourism settings it is the prostitute who is the business tourist, an aspect of sex tourism that deserves more attention' (Oppermann, 1999: 262). Oppermann also reminds us that white slavery was common well into the twentieth century with young women abducted and sold into foreign brothels. Similarly, not all prostitution is heterosexual and there is an enormous complexity in the diversification of sexual desires and services. Further, sex tourism is not confined to the sexual services on offer to clients: red light districts are routinely listed as attractions in most tourist cities, and this voyeuristic tourism may be a prelude to further investigation or a sexualised end in itself. In addition, there are all manner of sexual spectacles that encourage a mild form of sexual voyeurism. Ryan suggests that Sydney's tourist-packed Mardi Gras and similar events in San Francisco and Auckland have a strong voyeuristic, sexualised quality, particularly among the largely heterosexual crowds (Ryan, 1998). Nor is prostitution all of a piece, indeed it is precisely because prostitution in some parts of the world varies from the (often) sordid 'brief' and unelaborated nature of client-prostitute relations in the west that men are particularly attracted to sex-centred travel to specific places (Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines for example) where this is not the case. Studies of prostitution have found that a lot of men who use them are dissatisfied and wish for more warmth and attention, intimacy and

understanding (see for example, Kruhse-MountBurton, 1995: 193). For the prostitute in most western economies, '[a]n important skill is to be able to bring a man to orgasm as quickly as possible. The narrow nature of the exchange is more than evident to the punter as well as the prostitute and a man would no more expect a prostitute to cuddle or stroke him, or act as his companion after sex than he would expect a plumber to do so after fixing a leaking pipe' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 48).

O'Connell Davidson (1995) and Kruhse-MountBurton (1995) have both documented what they call open-ended or non-contractual prostitution. In this, the relationship between prostitute and client is less explicit and less organised around the performance of a specific service for a specific charge over a specified time period. Instead, highly skilful 'sex workers' blur the commercial or economic nature of the relationship by encouraging something more approaching a holiday romance or affair; where the relationship might be for the duration of the man's holiday; where the relationship more closely resembles boyfriend-girlfriend amiability, attentiveness, love and romance; where the economic exchanges are less specifically orientated around sex acts and services and where in many cases the economic obligations continue after the man leaves. Typically, for the duration of their relationship, the man pays for everything and so the sex worker's living is made simply by accompanying him over a 24-hour period of each day. In addition, they typically ask for gifts of clothes and other things and they may also ask for cash to help sick or needy relatives. Frequently they keep in touch and may share time together on subsequent trips, and it is on the basis of a continuing moral tie that many men continue to send gifts of money. Indeed, O'Connell Davidson shows that there is range of relationships between western male tourists and Thai prostitutes (and non-prostitutes too) from marriage itself (and there are many agencies to facilitate this) through extended consortation arrangements of the sort noted above, to the very common 24-hour stays in clients' hotels, shorter sessions of a few hours or even fellatio performed on sitting clients in at least one Pattaya bar (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 46-7).

The extraordinary diversity of sexual experiences on offer in places like Thailand resulted from former (contradictory) policies aimed both to attract the military rest and recreation trade, which began during wars in the Asian theatre, and moral policies aimed to restrict and control it. There are thus a great many settings - bars, clubs, theatres, massage parlours, escort agencies, discos and so on - where sex workers are based, in addition to the street and beach areas. Sex workers of huge diversity are to be found in great abundance and these include child, transvestite and homosexual prostitutes.

O'Connell Davidson underlines the 'bottom line' fact that this trade and the tourist trade from the UK, Australia, the USA and elsewhere that came afterwards is attractive not only because the women are different but because it is cheap, very cheap by comparison with prices in their own country. As she says,



[i]n Thailand, a prostitute can be rented for almost twenty-four hours for as little as 500 Baht (around £18), a sum that would barely secure a man a ten minute blow job in Britain. The cheapness of sexual services (as well as accommodation, food, drinks, travel and other services) furnishes a single, working class British man with a level of economic power that he could never enjoy at home, or in any other European country, and all the sex tourists I interviewed commented on the fact that, in Thailand, they 'live like kings' or 'playboys'. (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 45)

The sex tourism trade in Thailand for example, has been growing steadily, particularly since the early 1970s. Truong's (1990) study of the economics and development of the sex trade in South-East Asia shows how the proportion of men to women entering Thailand as tourists grew from 66 per cent in 1977 to just under 75 per cent in 1986 – a period when tourist arrivals grew from just over one million to just under three million. By the 1980s, it was estimated that there were between 500,000 and 700,000 prostitutes in Thailand, which represented 2.3–3.2 per cent of the female population or more disturbingly, between 6.2 per cent and 8.7 per cent of the female population aged 15 to 34 (Truong, 1990: 181). By the late 1990s Thailand had 'well over one million prostitutes' (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000: 291).

The impact of 'sex tourism' to places such as Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam and elsewhere has been profound. Such is the money to be made from prostituting teenagers and young girls that many parents have sold them into the trade in return for a cash loan. Such debt bondage ties the girls on very unfavourable terms to particular bars or clubs where they are at great risk from violence, abuse and infection (see Seabrooke, 1996).

### Sex tourists

Just as sexual service varies in Thailand and elsewhere, so too do the tourists themselves. O'Connell Davidson found three broad types among the British in Thailand. The first were skilled or unskilled single working class men she calls 'Macho lads'. They often travel in small groups and 'for these young men, Pattaya is a kind of macho theme park with beer, motorbikes, Go-Go bars, kick boxing, live sex shows, pool tables in English style pubs and guaranteed access to dolly birds to posture with and fuck' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 43). Then there were what she calls 'Mr Averages', skilled manual workers, self-employed or junior/middle management, who pride themselves in being 'an ordinary, respectable bloke'. They are interested mainly in 'simulating some kind of emotional or romantic relationship with either one woman or a series of women rather than a large number of anonymous sexual encounters' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 44). Mr Averages claim never to visit prostitutes at home and do not see themselves as 'punters' in Thailand. Finally, there are 'Cosmopolitan'

men from higher socio-economic groups, who describe themselves as travellers or 'in Thailand on business' but who will spend a few days in Pattaya for 'relaxation'. They use prostitutes but only in a 'worldly wise' manner and claim never to visit prostitutes elsewhere in the world.

Part of the self-deception involved in these sexual economies is that experiences are refracted through complex transcultural differences. The men perceive, quite correctly in many ways, that the girls they meet are more civilised, refined and cultured than the women they typically meet socially at home. They are, in their view the beautiful Other but also the 'aesthete', refined in the arts of self beauty, poise and style that are again seldom encountered at home. The Macho Lads and the Mr Averages describe places like Pattaya as fantasy lands precisely because they have access to a Hollywood lifestyle for a few weeks with an unlimited number of willing, compliant and beautiful young women. They also mistake the *art* of Thai prostitution for a perfect, or ideal femininity that defers to their wounded sense of masculinity.

O'Connell Davidson is interested in the cultural worlds of these British male tourists, who are in many ways casualties of their own looks, their lack of sexual attractiveness to women at home in relation to norms of masculinity and their perceived problems with forming longer term attachments with women at home. The playful, tender and affectionate approach from Thai sex workers together with the men's relatively heightened economic power in Thailand gives them 'a greater sense of power over their own bodies . . . [s]ex tourism also frees men from other aspects of the body's power over them ' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 53):

Cultural definitions of beauty turn many people's bodies into prisons, making their sexual desires unattainable, and it is certainly the case that large numbers of sex tourists are either physically repellent by European standards (I have never seen so many enormously overweight men together in one place before), or disfigured or disabled in some way, or too old to be considered sexually attractive.

So, O'Connell Davidson seems to be suggesting that sex tourism in 'notorious' places such as Thailand is not simply one of the least savoury ways in which the most developed countries exploit the less developed. Clearly, the implication is that only a subsection of culturally wounded and sexually failing men are 'catered for' in these places, and certainly, their tourism points to problems experienced with women at home.

Macho lads complained that English women are 'hard work', that going to discos in England is 'a waste of time'; Mr Averages bemoaned the fact that 'pretty' English women know they are pretty and demand the world (they want to marry you then soak you for every penny when they divorce you); a Cosmopolitan Man told me: 'I'm 48, I'm balding, I'm not as trim as I was. Would a charming, beautiful, young, woman want me in England? No. I'd have to accept a big, fat, ugly woman. That's all I could get.' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995: 52)

For these sorts of reasons O'Connell Davidson (1995: 53) rejects psycho-dynamic theories to explain their behaviour. As she says, 'one could equally well argue that there is nothing very individual or distinctive about these particular men's desires, it is just that they are less well equipped (in terms of economic power, physical appearance and/or social skills) . . . to achieve the degree of access to British women they would like.' At this point it is worth reflecting back to those mill girls and boys in Blackpool in 1939. The Mass Observation team found that the majority of men could find a partner in the close knit industrial communities they came from and did not expect a more sexually charged time from their holiday. Perhaps, as a result of their reliance mainly on *visual* data, their own observations did not lead them to instances of casualties of love and courtship, those too unattractive to be successful. However, in many parts of the industrial world, women were not employed past a certain age and became dependent on finding a husband. In this way, perhaps most men with a regular job *were* attractive as husbands even if they were not attractive per se. On the other hand, the close-knit nature of communities and factory lives made it possible to meet potential partners in a way the more fragmented workplaces and more privatised neighbourhoods of today may not. Today women have greater work and career equality and finding a husband does not rank so highly and urgently as it once did; and arguably there is now a more intense sensitivity to body and beauty than perhaps there was in the 1930s. This means perhaps that finding a partner has become more fraught and frustrating even for those with the average charms and looks. That so many can sympathise with the man troubles of someone so obviously attractive as Bridget Jones, reveals something about this tension.

### Sex tourism for men and women

Which is not to say that all sex tourists to places like Thailand correspond to the very specific characteristics of the British men O'Connell Davidson interviewed. Thai sex venues attract men from all over Europe, the Middle East, Australasia and Asia and clearly their cultural backgrounds and gender relations 'at home' would enter into any analysis of their desire for sex tourism. However, at a general level we can say that throughout the world sexual taboos are often stringent, freedom of sexual access is often obstructed and difficult and the attainment of sexual pleasure is often blocked by social, economic or physical intervention. At the same time, the media and cultural forces of globalisation pour out a steady stream of suggestions and images that sexual pleasure, fulfilment and fantasy are not only desirable but also properly attainable, healthy and good. Here is the Dionysian impulse being projected on to a global screen and all forms of repression and denial of the body are being eroded.

We can begin to see this perhaps in the growing literature on relatively wealthy middle class women who travel on their own or with friends to

exotic African and Caribbean venues where a similarly 'open-ended' sex trade has developed with local attractive young men. Pruitt and LaFont (1995) use the interesting euphemism 'romance tourism' for this activity, a term not applied to men when they are the affluent tourists sexually exploiting local youth. Dahles and Bras use a similar euphemism to describe the beach boys who have sex with western female tourists, they call them 'entrepreneurs in romance'. To an extent, this is understandable, particularly because the men involved are usually fully adult, free agents as opposed to the (often) debt-bonded sex slaves, children and very young teenagers in Thailand and elsewhere. But still, it is interesting that when affluent western women are doing the exploiting it is not seen in quite so sordid terms as when it is unattractive working class white men. Pruitt and LaFont (1995) make it clear that the women they studied found their power in these circumstances to be part of the reward:

The economic and social status the women enjoy provides them with a security and independence that translates into power and control in the relationship. Some of the women enjoy the control they have in these relationships and express a preference for keeping a man dependent on them. (Pruitt and LaFont, 1995: 427; cited in Opperman, 1999: 260)

As Oppermann observes, the more women increase their economic and social standing around the world 'one might expect more and more female sex tourists and consequently more male sex providers serving female tourists' (Opperman, 1999: 260). And again, with these sorts of relationships, neither side likes to consider it prostitution and indeed it is so diffused in courtship and partnership behaviour that it neither 'looks like it' or even feels like it. This is all the more so because of 'traditions' of mistressing and toy boys among affluent European circles. And this is not at all new, nor even particularly well hidden. For example, readers of Henry Fielding will recall that his hero, Tom Jones, found himself the long-term sexual plaything of a wealthy countess when he was down on his luck visiting London.

Albuquerque's (1998) research in the Caribbean identified four types of female sex tourist: *neophyte first timers*; *situational sex tourists* who have sex with local beach boys and others if, and when (ever) the situation arises; *veterans* who travel to these places specifically for the sex and *returnees* who visit a man encountered on previous visits. Similar results from Barbados are reported by Phillips (1999: 190–1). According to this research, Ryan and Hall (2001: 60) argue another parallel with male sex tourists: '[t]hus like O'Connell Davidson's pictures of males who are balding, ageing and overweight, so too a similar picture might be painted of the female sex tourist. Just as Thai bar girls target their "partners", so too do beach boys. The parallels and complexities of who is exploited and who exploits exist regardless of the gender of the sex tourist; and equally it may be said, any picture painted of these complexities says as much of the researcher as well as the researched. Are . . . all sex tourists really so physically unappealing?'

### Sex workers

Finally, what about the prostitutes themselves and prostitution more generally? How should we evaluate ethically and politically these complicated social relationships. On the one hand, we might act along with the Dionysian impulses and say that liberating the body sexually has to be a good thing and that we should not censor or seek to ban the sex industries, only regulate those aspects of it that are illegal or contravening of human rights (see Ryan and Hall, 2001, chapter 6 for a full discussion of these issues). On the other, we might act with more Apollonian vigour and seek to curb it as far as possible on the grounds that it is producing intractable problems (rising HIV/AIDS; sexual exploitation of young children; slavery and debt bondage; reproducing economics and relations of dependency and inequality; patriarchal domination and so forth). Another view holds that whatever one might want to do on ethical and political grounds the current market for sex will be too difficult to regulate; that too many people and organisations have a finger in the pie (from taxi drivers, to bar owners, to clubs, theatres, resorts, hotels, local law enforcement agencies and government).

Similarly, how should we view the lifestyle and lives of the sex workers? There seem to be three broad views here. Again, according to Seabrooke (1996) and others, we might view prostitution as necessarily demeaning, exploitative and dangerous – whatever the circumstances, but perhaps especially where poor developing countries are targeted by richer developed countries. This was a widely held view about the sex tourism trade until recently. A second, and more recent view is that the sex tourism industries are so diverse, and within them the lives of prostitutes so varied that such a sweeping view is misplaced. Some women *are* duped into travelling to what they think will be better-paid work in a foreign country but on arrival they find themselves having to pay back debts through enforced sex work. *Equally*, some children *are* stolen and locked up in brothels, away from the eye of the public or regulating authorities. However, we know that a large proportion of sex workers in Thailand, for example, are voluntary prostitutes; who do this work because they prefer it to other forms of work and lifestyles. Many of the bar girls in Thailand like the life they lead; they stay for a considerable time in the exciting touristic centres, eating at good restaurants, sipping drinks beside pools in luxury hotels and being bought fine clothes and gifts. They are, to a degree, independent free agents and although they may not always relish every man they spend time with, not all of them are so very bad. After all, as the research we have cited has found, many of the men fall in love with them and their relationships are at least tender and cordial. They also earn more money than they would otherwise; they are able to buy good new clothes and maintain themselves in styles and fashions of their choosing; and they are able to drink, party and take drugs commensurate with a lifestyle they

enjoy. The beach boys are similarly calculating free agents whose lifestyle aims attract them to an association with wealthy tourists; in addition to the money, gifts and high life, there is also the chance of an invitation to travel themselves, to visit 'girlfriends' they met on their beach. In other words, there is a strategy, benefit and lifestyle that attracts young people into being 'providers'.

## Conclusion

From surfing to wine tourism via eco-tourism and sex adventures and adrenalin sports, part three has explored the burgeoning dimensions of embodied and sensual tourisms. These tourisms are predicated on the relatively new and diverse technologies of and attention to the body. These examples show that even though the visual tourist gaze is still a major feature of tourism, there is a trend towards more active, muscular and sensual objectives. Thrift offered some useful explanations of these new trends as well as the manner by which the body produces new apprehensions and spaces of nature. In a postmodern world bombarded by images and signs and the technologies of 'fast time' people have sought to resist it through developing body practices that value the *present moment*, rather than spearing off into the future. If tourism explanations offered by most theorists agree that tourism is predicated on a restlessness, movement and a fleeting attention to the tourist moment, then these activities point in the opposite direction: they seek to extend and savour the present moment by slowing down time. This was seen in a variety of ways, in climbing, in eco-tourism, in surfing (through the concept of flow) and in wine tasting where the experience is unhurried, studious and where the ultimate pleasure is the length of time a wine stays on the tongue. Importantly, this analysis is consistent with a major theme in this book, that touristic practices have a ritualistic and performative dimension in which tourists experience transition and change. In these activities, we have seen how nature is inscribed on the body, how moments of ecstasy are reached and how the technologies of the body enable sensual and muscular exfoliations that reach out to natural objects. These are tourisms that go beyond the naive hope for better health that our Blackpool holidaymakers anticipated in the late 1930s, or for a cure for illness among nineteenth century spa-goers. These were relatively passive tourists in comparison to some of the tourists we have met in this chapter. To repeat a line from earlier in this chapter, these new tourist practices with their emphasis on the body and physical experience constitutes an aesthetic reflexivity that enables sensual and emotional experiences to be recognised as inherently worthwhile. It is worthwhile because it generates transformative and pleasurable effects, carving a liminal space away from the tyrannies of fast time.

## Further Reading

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