

# Stop Trafficking!

# Awareness Advocacy Action

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**FOCUS:** This issue highlights the increase in sex tourism and what governments and the tourism industry can do about it.

*With globalization, international travelers have increased significantly, predicted to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. Unfortunately, the rapid expansion of the travel industry has coincided with significant growth in sex tourism.*

*Sex tourism is travel specifically to procure sex. Sex tourism involves travelers who desire casual sex with fellow travelers or local people. It may also include specifically arranged tours to access full-time commercial sex workers in destination countries or engage in commercial sex acts with children. For the sex industry, sex is just another visitor attraction, a money-making commodity, and it is marketed to tourists in destination cities worldwide, including in the United States. In addition, online ads target individuals traveling to specific locations.*

*Many commercial sex workers and children are forced to engage in sex and are caught in human trafficking networks. Sex tourism benefits other travel industries such as airlines, hotels, and restaurants. Many tourists involved in sex tourism justify their behavior as contributing to the country's economy. The tourists may be told that the sex workers' money is helping their families and that these men and women engage in these behaviors willingly. However, most receive little or no money and are victims of force, fraud, or coercion.*

*There are many possible reasons why sex trafficking exists and its interplay with tourism. These illegal sexual acts might be driven by anonymity because of being away from their home. The rapid and global growth of low-cost air travel has made airfares more accessible. So new and emerging destinations are within reach of a larger number of tourists, including potential perpetrators of child sex crimes.*

*Those who engage in sex tourism usually travel to countries where sex work is legal. However, in poor and less developed countries, sex tourism often occurs illegally. The World Tourism Organization of the United Nations agrees that the sex tourism industry is organized both within and outside the structured laws and networks. Even if prostitution is legal in a country or region, human trafficking, sexual encounters with a minor, and child pornography are almost universally considered crimes. Individuals caught breaking these laws can be prosecuted. In addition, citizens of any foreign country must abide by the country's rules in which they hold citizenship and the local laws of the country they are visiting, including laws regarding consent.*

## ECPAT's global study on sexual exploitation in travel and tourism

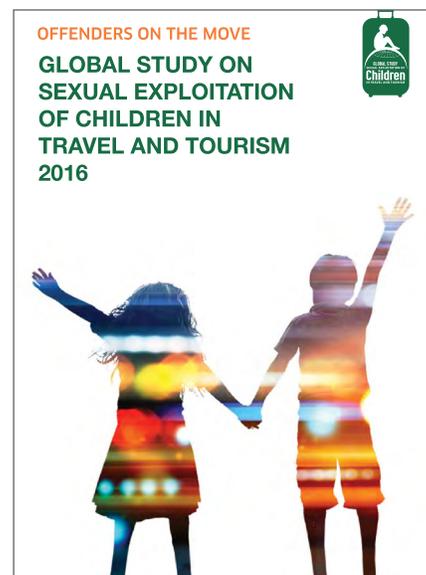
asserts that the buyers of sex tourism come from all backgrounds and do not all fit the stereotypical profile: a white, Western, wealthy, middle-aged male pedophile. Some may be pedophiles, but most are not.

Both the age of the clients and the age of the victims are decreasing. Men who seek women as sexual partners are most commonly involved in sex tourism; however, women seeking men, men seeking men, and adults seeking children also occur. As with all types of human trafficking, challenges in gathering data have made it hard to find out the exact number of victims of the sex tourism industry.

Sex tourists generally come from developed nations with the most common destinations to visit less-developed countries. Popular destinations include Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, the Netherlands, Kenya, Colombia, Thailand, Cambodia, Cuba, and Indonesia, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Spain and Portugal, Egypt, Turkey, Sri Lanka, India, and the Gambia, Senegal, Bulgaria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, Peru, and Fiji. Sex tourism also takes place in the United States and Canada. Although a global problem, sex tourism rates are much higher in countries that have legalized prostitution.

As with all forms of human trafficking, the sex tourism industry preys on the most vulnerable. Often sex work is presented as the only viable option for the people who become its victims, all for the profit of others.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



# Awareness

## Child Sex Tourism involves people who travel from their own country to satisfy a specific desire to have exploitative and illegal sexual contact with children



The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner report on Combating Child Sex Tourism in 2013 defined child sex tourism as an “exploitation of children for sexual purposes by those who travel to engage in sexual activities with children.” This includes child trafficking, child prostitution, child pornography, and the selling of children for sexual exploitation. Child sex tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry.

While it is criminal in most countries, it involves as many as 2 million children worldwide. Thailand is considered to have the worst child sex trafficking record, followed closely by Brazil.

Child sex tourists may not have a specific preference for children as sexual partners but take advantage of a situation where children are made available for sexual exploitation. It is often the case that these people have traveled from a wealthier country (or a more prosperous town or region within a country) to a less-developed destination, where poorer economic conditions, favorable exchange rates for the traveler, and relative anonymity are key factors conditioning their behavior and sex tourism.

In developing countries such as Cambodia, families often sell their children to human traffickers out of extreme poverty; they feel they have no other choice. There is usually a societal acceptance, again, due to the extreme poverty, which assuages the conscience of the “tourist.” The crime is typically fueled by weak law enforcement, corruption, and poverty in many tourist destinations.

Children abused by sex tourists suffer not only sexual abuse but also physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, poverty, and homelessness. In addition, they suffer from health problems, including addiction, malnourishment, injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, and emotional trauma.

UNICEF notes that since sexual activity is often seen as a private matter, communities are reluctant to act

and intervene in cases of sexual exploitation. These attitudes make children and trafficking victims more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. However, to eradicate the practice, some countries have enacted laws that allow the prosecution of their citizens for child abuse outside their home country, even if it is not against the law in the country where the child abuse took place.

The Code of Conduct for the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism is an international organization composed of members of the tourism industry and children’s rights experts to eradicate the practice of child sex tourism.

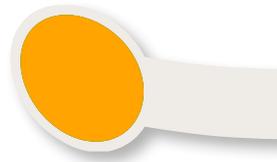
In the United Kingdom, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 allows for prosecution in British criminal courts of British citizens who commit sexual offenses against children while traveling abroad. This legislation was used to prosecute Richard Huckle, a convicted English serial sex offender and child rapist. Britain’s National Crime Agency arrested him after a tip-off from the Australian Federal Police.

He was convicted of 71 counts of serious sexual assaults against children while working as a freelance photographer and posing as a Christian teacher in Malaysia.

In cases involving children, the United States has relatively strict domestic laws that hold accountable any American citizen or permanent resident of the U.S. who travels abroad to engage in illicit conduct with a minor. Someone who participates in these activities in a foreign country can be prosecuted under that country’s law while abroad and under U.S. law after returning to the United States. Although the age at which someone is considered a minor may vary by country, federal law makes it a crime for U.S. residents to engage in sexual or pornographic activities with a child younger than 18 years anywhere in the world. It is also illegal to travel abroad to have sex with a minor.

According to the PROTECT Act, U.S. citizens are considered criminals when they exploit children, and those found guilty will be imprisoned for a maximum of thirty years. Since 2003, when Congress passed the federal legislation, over 8,000 Americans have been arrested for child sex tourism and exploitation.

The PROTECT Act strengthens the U.S. government’s ability to prosecute and punish crimes related to sex tourism, including the incarceration of up to 30 years for acts committed at home or abroad. Cooperation of the host country is required to investigate criminal activity, resulting in a much lower than hoped-for conviction rate. Some countries are wary of working too closely with the United States. In others, the judicial system may be prone to bribery and corruption, or the government is otherwise willing to expand tourism, and the money it brings in, at the expense of children being trafficked for sex.



## Progress Made Globally

Although travel worldwide decreased in 2020 due to the pandemic, child sex tourism was cited 183 times in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report. Most of the entries included the following sentence: “The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or child sex tourism.”

Notable exceptions cited below include efforts some governments are taking to curb child sex tourism.

### Thailand

The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, including displaying a video in four languages discouraging child sex tourism in Thai airports and on Thai airline flights. In addition, the government coordinated with foreign governments to deny entry to known sex offenders. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel.

### Dominican Republic

The government continued to participate in a multi-country operation to identify and investigate individuals traveling overseas who had been convicted of sexual crimes against children and may engage in sex tourism. The government denied entry to such persons at the second-highest rate in the program. In 2020, the government reported two open investigations to sell tourist packages to individuals in the United States, Canada, and Europe, including sexual contact with individuals identified as children. In addition, authorities reported increasing personnel assigned to the protection and rescue program for children and adolescents run by specialized tourist police, who received additional equipment and opened a new facility in a popular tourist location for this program. Laws did not provide for the prosecution of Dominican citizens who engage in child sex tourism abroad.

### Belize

In December 2020, the A-TIP Council and an international organization supported and conducted training for tourism sector officials, including 23 tourism police officers and 11 community police and other officers. The law allowed Belizean citizens to be tried for trafficking and child sex tourism crimes committed abroad. The government reported sponsoring billboards to combat child sex tourism at the international airport and border crossing points. The government participated in a multi-country program to identify and deny tourist entry to registered sex offenders.

### France

The government made efforts to reduce the demand for child sex tourism by funding programs to raise awareness in airports. They also trained tourism operators on the illegality and penalties associated with child sex tourism. Furthermore, they required students to complete an awareness course on sex tourism before departure abroad. In addition, the government included warnings

on its website for travelers for destinations with higher incidences of child sex tourism, like Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, and Madagascar.

### Mexico

NGOs reported that child sex tourism remains a problem and continues to expand, especially in tourist areas and northern border cities. In addition, parents are sometimes complicit in exploiting their children in child sex tourism, and homeless children are believed to be at high risk. Many child sex tourists are from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.



### Sri Lanka

Traffickers reportedly exploit boys and girls in commercial sex, including in coastal areas for child sex tourism, hotels, beaches, and annual festivals. However, tourism volumes fell substantially in 2020 during the pandemic. Reports allege some hotels allow clients to book “services” with children for child sex tourism. In addition, some hotels use intermediaries to provide their guests with males and females—including children—for commercial sex.

### Sweden

The National Police’s Department of National Operations handled investigations involving Swedish citizens suspected of child sex tourism and assisted police departments throughout Sweden on child sex trafficking. In addition, the National Police’s specialized cybercrime unit maintained a child protection team that trained travel agencies to detect and report child sex tourism. However, the government did not reduce the demand for participation in international sex tourism by its citizens, despite allegations of such actions.

## Travel and “The Code”

To combat trafficking and child sexual abuse, some international hotels and other tourism services have voluntarily adopted a code of conduct that includes employee training and reporting suspicious activities. One purpose of the [Global Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism](#) is to educate tourists that the exploitation of children is wrong in any country. Tourist establishments supporting this initiative to protect children from sex tourism are listed online. Providers and travelers who suspect child sexual exploitation or other trafficking activities occurring overseas can report tips anonymously.

By agreeing to “the code,” companies agree to combat and eliminate child sex tourism. In addition, it is believed that by adhering to the six criteria outlined in the code, businesses are doing their part in ethical tourism. The Code criteria are as follows:

To establish an ethical policy against commercial abuse of children through sexual activities.

To actively train its personnel on children’s rights and ways to protect these rights.

To add clauses to contracts with related parties that state a common castigation of those who abuse children’s rights.

To inform travelers through brochures, websites, in-flight videos, etc., on children’s rights.

To inform stakeholders in the local community and leverage them in combating the exploitation of minors.

To submit annual reports on their efforts and progress.

## Role of Social Media

Predators are going online to share stories, trade child pornography, and plan sex tours. Sex tourists use chat rooms, message boards, peer-to-peer file-sharing servers, newsgroups, and specialized websites to obtain information on potential destinations. One disturbing activity is the establishment of “cyber-sex” dens where a foreign pedophile may sexually abuse children, and the images beamed via a webcam to the Internet. Payment to watch these live “shows” is often made by a credit card via an Internet connection.

The links between child sex tourism and child pornography are strong. Child pornography is used by predators to relive or share their experiences and “groom” and blackmail the child victims. The Protection Project determined that child pornography was connected to 42 percent of the child sex tourism cases documented during a 2006 project. In addition, the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that the victims portrayed in pornographic images are getting younger and becoming more graphic and violent.

While technology has been misused, governments, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), financial groups, non-governmental organizations, and Interpol are banding together to find technological solutions. ISPs are working with law enforcement to report and shut down child sex tourism chat rooms, eradicate the distribution of child pornography, and conduct specialized cyber-training for law enforcement personnel. Financial coalitions are forming to deny purveyors of child pornography the ability to use the banking and financial system.

A Virtual Global Task Force of law enforcement agencies worldwide has been developed to combat these cyber-crimes. Technological answers, however, cannot replace the power of individual involvement. Individuals should report suspected cases of this criminal behavior to the local police and the embassy of the alleged perpetrator’s nation. To read more, please click [here](#).

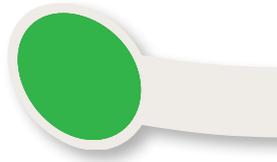
## Legal Ramifications

Even if prostitution is legal in a country, human trafficking, sex with a minor, and child pornography are always crimes. Someone from the United States who engages in these activities in a foreign country can be prosecuted under that country’s law while abroad and under United States law after returning home.

The PROTECT (Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today) Act is a United States law with the stated intent of preventing child abuse as well as investigating and prosecuting violent crimes against children. Although the age at which someone is considered a minor may vary by country, federal law makes it a crime for US residents to engage in sexual or pornographic activities with a child younger than 18 years anywhere in the world. It is also illegal to travel abroad to have sex with a minor. If found guilty, perpetrators will be imprisoned for a maximum of thirty years.

Despite legislation, a fourth of the world’s international child sex tourists come from North America, according to End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT).

In addition to the legal ramifications, ethical concerns arise from the economic gap between tourists from North America and the exploited residents of the destination country. Please click [here](#) to read more.



## What Can Be Done

Companies can raise awareness and develop specific training programs on the dangers of sex trafficking and sex with minors. They could also educate employees about prostitution legislation in different countries when they take business trips abroad. Unfortunately, the corporate culture sometimes can view certain humans as sexual objects or tradeable goods.

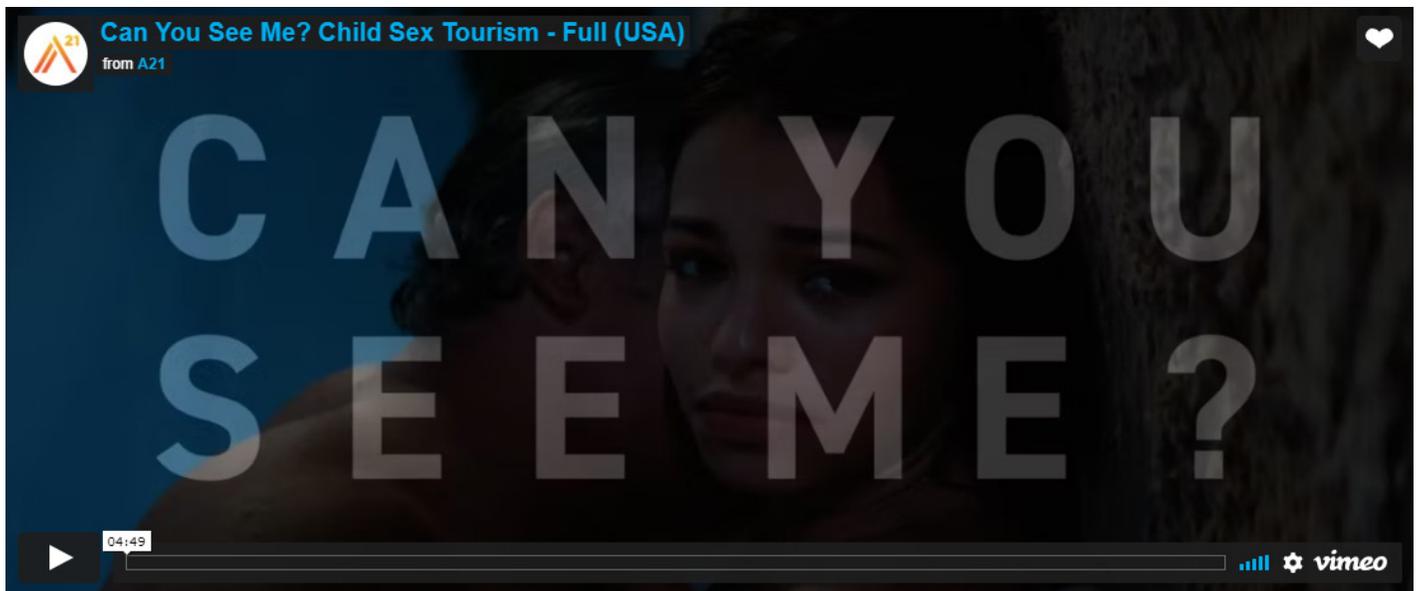
The tourism industry has a unique role in combatting human trafficking. Tourism communities need to publicize a zero-tolerance policy. This policy means that tourism officials need to produce information warning visitors that the tour agency and community will not tolerate the exploitation of adults and children. This information must be prominently displayed at airports, hotel rooms, and tourism information centers. It is the responsibility of everyone who works in tourism to use their marketing capabilities to alleviate this problem.

The tourism company can also join organizations like the Code, which will provide tools and resources to fight child sex tourism. Flight attendants and other airline workers can help by educating themselves about the signs of human trafficking and watching for potential victims. If you are a tourist and booking a hotel room, check to see if they have signed the Code.

Rescued victims of trafficking tend to fall back into prostitution and other illegal activities because they suffer from discrimination and are excluded from society. Companies can create programs for supporting trafficking victims, giving them traineeships and jobs to help them reintegrate into society.

Finally, there must be consequences for those participating in sex tourism. This includes the consumer, the trafficker or provider of the victim, and the intermediaries, such as hoteliers who know but permit other human beings to be exploited on their premises. They all need to be fully prosecuted by the law. This should also include publicizing the names of people who are selling or buying other human beings and the names of people and companies that allow the use of illegal or immoral activities on their premises.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Please click [here](#) to view a short video on child sex tourism by the A 21 Campaign. The A21 Campaign is a global 501 non-profit, non-governmental organization that works to fight human trafficking, including sexual exploitation & trafficking, forced slave labor, bonded labor, involuntary domestic servitude, and child soldiery.

# Action



**THREADS  
OF  
HOPE**

**Threads of Hope** is located in the Philippines. In a country where sex tourism thrives, this organization offers an empowering alternative to walking the streets at night: weaving beautiful bracelets.



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
**MISSING &  
EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN®

Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, via its toll-free 24-hour hotline, 1-800-843-5678.



Please click [here](#) to view this 20-minute film on **Talk in The Gambia on Child Sex Tourism**



**Equality Now**

A just world for women and girls.

**Equality Now** is a non-governmental organization founded in 1992 to advocate for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and girls. Equality Now fights sex tourism through legal advocacy.

SUMMARY PAPER ON

**SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN  
IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM**



In late 2021, ECPAT published Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism (SECTT) which may be available by clicking [here](#).

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AND CUSTOMS  
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