

Travel Memoir

## Sex Tourism in Thailand

### What I Witnessed

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Streets of Bangkok started piling up with smoke-emitting automobiles. It was an unpleasant evening. And I was very tired of walking many miles during that day. Also, I didn't sleep much the previous night. Sweat had been pouring heavily since that morning through my cheeks.

Further away on a crowded pavement, I saw a few young Thai girls standing beside the doors of many foot massage parlours, inviting passers-by for a foot massage. I could see what was happening inside their parlour through the glazed windows. Hence, nothing sinister could be seen. When the girls saw me coming, they turned their faces away from me pretending I was not in existence. Wasn't I dressed well for the occasion? Or Wasn't I worth for it? Could be both. Once I passed them, they were back in their routine work calling passers-by for massage. Though initially got hurt for not being invited, especially they being young and pretty, didn't bother very much afterwards.

Neither, while walking on the roads of Bangkok, found any was caring about my presence. That was the kindest experience and a privilege. You know no one and no one knows you.

For walking so long, my legs become very painful and weak, so I embarked on a tuk-tuk for a night Bangkok exploration. I was keen to complete my itinerary of that day.

The tuk-tuk driver after taking me to many of my other locations ended up on a crowded road with seedy bars, adult souvenir shops and brothels. I felt the gnawing desire to leave immediately. The entire street retained an aura of mystery. There were hoarders of drunken tourists hanging off young, pretty Thai girls who were walking around half dressed, revealing themselves uncontrollably. Bright illuminating lights coming from everywhere were hitting my eyes, and excessively tuned loudspeakers were emitting noises rather than peaceful Thai tunes. Many Westerners, Asians, Blacks, men and women, were freely walking about, hugging, embracing, clasping, petting and caressing Thai girls. Many girls or women were standing in the street and were bargaining with some old kinky men. Even some old ladies were walking along holding the hands of young ladyboys. A further on I saw a young girl aged 17 or 18 with an old man of her grandfather's age. All made me unbearable. Nothing looked right to me. After all, who am I to judge those. It is mutual consent. Both who are involved in that relationship get their share. One gets the money, and the other gets the pleasure. Whether these people's public face is that of a saint or a sinner, Who am I in-between?

The tuk-tuk driver signalled me whether I wanted to relate myself to this 'free world' physically. His facial expressions and body language said all. Seeing such a muddled up situation, which is not suitable for a family-oriented gentleman, I became a bit nervous about it. While the driver was busily stationing his three-wheeler, I gazed over the surrounding area. Now I was sure that I was unexpectedly and involuntarily in the midst of Bangkok's one of many red light areas. Whether the driver calculatedly brought me here or we inadvertently ended up here, still clueless to me.

Unless you visit one of these red light areas, as I was accidentally bumped into, you have no way of knowing that prostitution is in full force in Thailand. There are 26 million travellers who are coming to Thailand every year. About 8% to 10% of them are sex tourists. That covers around 2.6 million of them. Other 23 million who come to Thailand come for many other positive things that could be adored by a monk. Like culture, food, hiking, travelling, nature and many other millions of things. An English speaking hotelier complained flagrantly, "We are neither a poor country, nor all our women are prostitutes".



Despite its illegality, it is true that prostitution is widely and openly practised with the blessings of many authorities of Thailand.

When I started researching on my South East Asian exploration, I was bombarded with many sex promotional blogs by almost all search engines. There were so many blogs giving in-depth details of what to get and where to get. It was a bit eerie.

While on the flight coming from Colombo to Bangkok, I was busy editing my videos on my laptop. When I had a chance to take a deep breath the neighbouring passenger who had been waiting for that very moment, curiously asked me what I was up to in Bangkok. I started telling him about my hobbies, and he was too happily shared his works as well until I mentioned the word "Backpacking". His forehead shrank, and he withdrew himself onto his own business, avoiding me fully afterwards. Is it very shameful to be a Backpacker in Bangkok, solo? What was going on his mind when I mentioned Backpacking? Only he knows.

The western world has overly misunderstood Thailand. All good-hearted men who are travelling alone to Thailand also have been misunderstood. When I told many people about my backpacking, mentioning Thailand was going to be one of my destinations, I witnessed many ominous faces with raised eyebrows. Some even openly said that I was going to have a nice time here in Thailand. I instantly gathered their ideas that were laying behind their sick minds. I agreed, with an offensive laugh, "Of course yes. I am going to have a nice time in Thailand", without referring to many other good things that I was about to explore in Thailand. They too laughed my answer off with negativity flowing on their faces. Some wanted to join me first and only to give up when my agenda didn't have any of those "happy endings" what they were craving for.

The "buying and selling of bodies" in Thailand seemed to be the only thing happening to the minds of many outsiders. Truly, it cannot be witnessed on the streets of Thailand. Apart from in red light areas, I never witnessed any freelance girls standing in the corner of any main streets looking for her catch of the day.

Though no girls openly approach any men on the streets, almost all male travellers travel to Thailand alone are approached by their brokers, the pimps. Mainly pimps are tuk-tuk drivers who get commissions for fetching clients for their madam. I too was approached by many tuk-tuk drivers. In all occasions, I politely denied any advances made by them and released myself out of it instantly. I saw a western white man, aged around 40, having a heavy conversation with a tuk-tuk man for offering him such a nasty thing. Not everyone here for that, I gathered.

While I was in Hat Yai, Thailand, I hired a tuk-tuk for a day out. While riding many hours into our journey the driver and I shared many matters and ended up establishing a reasonably good brotherhood. He had enough vocabulary for him to converse to any English speaking tourists. He is a Muslim, aged approx 45, is married to three women and has seven daughters all at a marriageable age. He eventually found out about my backpacking adventure. He then, after a few hours on the road, unexpectedly but voluntarily started talking about Thai girls. When I didn't show any temptations, he openly asked me whether I wanted to visit a brothel. I was curious than interested, started asking many questions about the Thai sex tourism. His claims about boyfriends, husbands and fathers living off from the money brought home by their girlfriends, daughters and wives after selling them off to strangers, were very shocking. The girls who are in the sex business keep boyfriends for their protection. These so-called protectors, in turn, demand money and sex from those girls and live a lavish life.

Then, he repeatedly asked me whether I wanted myself being given such comforts. I became very nervous about his approach and asked him whether he would let his wife or daughters to be sold in the market as you were selling off others'. He became uncomfortable with my question and stop talking to me for a while. After several minutes, he claimed that he was a good Muslim. That claim fumed me. I asked him how come you were brokering others' daughters and wives and claim yourself a good man. A look of weariness came over him. Our brotherhood didn't last afterwards. The atmosphere changed for sure from divine to mortal. My further questions went unanswered. I could see he was in a trance of unworthiness since then. He didn't even look at me when I got off the tuk-tuk. I might have been the first person to ask him such a straight question, and I might have been the very first person to open up his mind, as well.

In Surat Thani, no tuk-tuk or taxi drivers bothered me with any sinister ideas. Apart from a woman from the hotel massage parlour called me every night around 10 pm, many hours after I had gone asleep, whether I wanted a body massage. Her intentions might have been holy, but why at that time. This will continue to puzzle me even after I reach my grave.

It is too late to stop the human flesh trade with the help of law and order. It is a disease that never could be cured. It could be an age-old trade which had been in this globe since the evolution of the human race. Many centuries back it was the trade that was the main source of state income for many nations.

But for us, the visitors, it is a small task which could bring a big change. If we follow 'Don't Participate, Don't Contribute' slogan, it could be at least soften the situation. Your contribution brings more young girls into this, and your participation makes this trade legal. Whether it could be justified in a way, you wanted that to be justified, up to you. If I had participated and contributed, I wouldn't have had the courage to pen all these things here.

Next time when you hear about someone's visit to Thailand, don't spread a black and white smile. They could be travelling there for many other millions of good things happening around. I never gave anybody any explanations of what so ever why I chose Thailand. For many idiots, my lone trip to this beautiful paradise remains freakish. They will remain as frogs in the well until they open up their minds.

Welcome to Thailand. Spend your time and money nicely and wisely while backpacking here. **Solo**

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