



Tourism Scan

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“The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism is a Hong Kong based coalition of Regional Ecumenical Organisations and over seventy secular and faith-based groups. It seeks to unite people around collective efforts that negate the undesirable effects of modern tourism and, in its place, institute socially responsible and ethically oriented tourism. It believes that tourism must be based on justice and sustainability for host communities and that, therefore, tourism planning and practice must be democratised. ECOT advocates respect for the protection and dignity of the human rights of women, children, indigenous peoples and workers in the tourist trade. It opposes tourism projects that create environmental devastation.”

Editorial Comment

We are now into the third edition of Tourism Scan. The responses have been encouraging and prompt to pursue the idea. From 2005, it will be a once a month letter.

In this issue, we cover a wide spectrum of topics. There are the struggles against environmental violence, the never decreasing numbers of sex tourists and violation of child rights. Somehow the bounty of nature is often taken for granted in the promotion of tourism. There seems to be no accountability in this regard. The construction of an artificial beach on the banks of the Lake Phewa in the mountainous regions of Nepal can only be described as an irresponsible and 'weird' way of enticing tourists. The question simply is what are the limits to which precious ecosystems can be allowed to be plundered.

In our first edition, we had reported on protests by the Solomon Islanders to allow the sale of their National Art Gallery area and to build a five star hotel in its place. Despite the arguments and alternative proposal put forward by civil society groups, the Solomon Islands Government has approved the construction of the five-star hotel. It is obvious that peoples protests are easily disregarded and annulled by the arrogance and influence of the tourism enterprise. There seems no choice but to forge broader alliances within countries and across borders. Unless we choose more creative and far reaching forms of protest, the voices of people will be suppressed. The challenge is, as we formulate it in the WSF 2004, who benefits from tourism.

Statistical data on the number of children trafficked around the world shows no sign of de-escalating. Law enforcement has failed and NGO's need to adopt a watch dog mentality if the problem must be curtailed.

*The times and the issues must make us reaffirm our commitment to "**make another tourism possible**"!*

Shirley Susan

Editor

4th December 2004

Artificial beach on Phewa Lake in Nepal – At what cost?

The Phewa Lake located in the town Pokhara is one of the most important lakes of Nepal touristically speaking. It represents a hotspot for ecotourism promotion. In the recent past growing urbanization and unplanned tourism development activities around the lake in the absence of inadequate infrastructural facilities have negatively affected the lake's recreational values. Research reports reveal that area of the lake has narrowed down by 55 percent in the last four decades and its current area is only 4.25 Sq.km. The water is polluted as hotels and restaurants throw their waste into the lake. But worse is on the anvil.

According to e Turbo News, the Phewa Beach and Environment Conservation Committee (PBECC) is to go ahead with the construction of a beach of European standards on the banks of Phewa Lake at a cost of Rs.3 billion (68,933,823 USD). The beach is to be constructed from Ambot Ghat (Hima Ghiha) to Kameri Ghat (Fishtail lodge), spanning 300 feet in length and 60 feet width. Sand is to be overlaid on the beach spot so that people can savour the pleasures of a real beach by sunbathing, walking, playing and building sandcastles. All of this is aimed to attract foreign and domestic tourists and to entice them to stay longer than their schedule on account of the beach.

There have been efforts in the past to declare the lake as “Phewa Lake Conservation Area”, however this has not been implemented. Already threatened ecosystems are now being completely sold out for tourism development. It is the responsibility of the government to bring in necessary regulation to stop such bizarre ideas and promotional activities which will completely destroy the existing lake ecosystem. Who will pay the costs of environmental damage? It is not just enough to look into the immediate benefits of gaining money through tourism but the long term sustainability of the ecosystem and in this case, the lake must be taken into account.

Source: e TurboNews, 30/09/04

Tourism threatens Wildlife in Zambia

Tourism in Zambia has been placed as one of the country's economic spinners. However, it cannot tick if the country's unique fauna and flora are not preserved. Efforts need to be taken to protect such resources of endangered species of wild fauna and flora.

Zambia became a member of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) when it acceded to the Convention 1980 and came into force on 22nd February 1981. Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) is both the Management and Scientific Authority responsible for implementation and

management of the Convention on behalf of Zambia, administered through the Zambia Wildlife Act number 12 of 1998. Its aim is to ensure international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival by regulating international trade. This does not take the place of national laws, rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

Although ZAWA administers the operations of CITES, it recently through the board recognised the collaborative complexity and demands of the Convention. A National CITES Secretariat (NACS) was created in 2003 comprising scientific and law enforcement sectors. This collaboration has enhanced the implementation of CITES in that efforts have been of a concerted nature in the fight against illegal imports and exports.

Source: The Times of Zambia, 27/11/04

Government okays five-star hotel in spite of protests

Solomon Islands Government has approved the construction of the country's first five-star hotel on a controversial land at the prime foreshore of Honiara city. The developer is Papua New Guinea-based Constantinou Group, which is known for establishing luxury hotel and resort developments in Papua New Guinea. The planned Heritage Park Hotel is to have 64 deluxe rooms, bars and swimming pools. The development is to provide a boost to the Solomon Islands tourism industry.

With the cabinet approval, Mr. Kostas Constantinou, Director, Constantinou Group said his company will now go ahead to acquire what is needed to start construction work on the site. The work is to begin in early January 2005.

As reported in the past editions of Tourism Scan, civil society groups had argued that the area would cut off access to locals if it is developed. They reasoned that majority of Solomon Islanders will not benefit from it. As an alternative, they had called on the government to develop the area into a recreational area for the benefit of the local community who would not have a chance to visit the spot if it is developed into a five star hotel. However, the approval of the hotel by the government is seen as a decision that is not in the interest of the local people but in the interest of those in power.

Source: countrywatch.com, 26/11/2004

Protests over continuous Maldives detention

UK-based advocacy group Friends of Maldives staged a protest outside the Maldivian High Commission in London to draw attention to the continued detention of pro-democracy activists in the Indian Ocean island nation. One of the objectives of the protest was to prevent Maldivian authorities from denying their rights to participate in a forthcoming general election to the Special Majlis or national representative assembly, for which the application deadline has just expired.

Maldives is a republic on a string of over 1,000 islands, some of which have been developed into high-class resorts offering luxury hotel accommodation and some of the finest ocean diving facilities in the world. Development and modernization of the Maldives is largely dependent on the foreign earnings the country makes from luxury tourism. Maldives has strong ties with the United Kingdom and was a British protectorate for much of the 20th Century. It remains a member of the British Commonwealth.

Amnesty International and the Maldivian Human Rights Commission have expressed concern. An international campaign has also been launched to highlight the inequalities of recent tourism wealth and the on-going poverty amongst the majority of the islanders.

Source : e Turbo News, 17/11/2004

Prince of Wales advocates responsible tourism

The Prince of Wales made a major speech on the need for the whole travel industry to adapt to responsible and sustainable business methods throughout the world. The speech was given at the launch of The International Tourism Partnership (ITP), a new program within the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum which aims to promote debate, good practice and solutions for responsible business in travel and tourism.

Prince Charles told tourism business leaders that there was a growing awareness of the environmental, social and economic issues around the components of sustainable tourism, and people were starting to address issues such as poverty and the practical things that can be done to close the gap between rich and poor. "Take examples such as eco-tourism, whoever thought even of consulting the locals? When I started a development in Dorchester I called in the locals. It wasn't liked at all because the conventional approach could not involve consultation with local people. The conventional approach could not have poor people living next to rich people. But unless we learn from ghettoization there will be a real problem. Globalization needs balance. Balance with other considerations or else we will be in great trouble in 20 years time," said Prince Charles.

Ed Fuller, President of Marriott International, has been appointed Chairman of ITP. "Only by safeguarding the quality and viability of the environment and local communities will the tourism product be able to flourish," said Fuller. Because of the global inter-dependence of the tourism industry, ITP stresses the need for global influence, and encourages large multinational companies to take the lead in responsible tourism. The ITP program has the backing of some of the largest companies in the sector, which should enable it to act at a global level in addressing environmental and social issues arising from global tourism.

Let's hope that these grand promises from people in high places convert into real action where it matters.

Source: e TurboNews, 18/11/2004

Slave Labour and Burma Tourism

The 25th World Travel Market (WTM) had record number of tourism professionals from 190 countries with over 5000 exhibitors taking in the ultra modern ExCel complex in London's Docklands.

Feedback from exhibitors indicates that the key to expansion is that all the markets are reporting significant increase in business. There is a definite increase in confidence after three difficult years for the industry," said Fiona Jeffrey, Group Exhibition Director of Reed Travel Exhibitions. "This is a reflection of the recovery within the industry after three very difficult years after 9/11."

The World Travel Market was not without its critics. Tourism Concern director, Tricia Bamell, criticized the organizers for giving space to Myanmar (Burma). "The country slave labour to support the travel industry," she said. Ms Barnett was presented with a responsible tourism award and used her acceptance speech to highlight the drive for ethical and fair trade in global tourism. "It's a great shame that, while our work for ethical and fairly traded tourism is being acknowledged, a request to the organizers to reconsider their invitation to the repressive Myanmar regime was dismissed. This simply undermines the value of the award," she said.

The government of Myanmar has rejected claims that it uses slave labour in the tourism industry and said its presence at WTM was purely to raise its tourism-related profile and was not political.

Source : e Turbo News, 15/11/2004

Troubling times for Flight attendants in the US

Troubled at how members are being treated, union leaders of the Association of Flight Attendants in the United States have unanimously voted to authorize a nationwide strike.

"Our entire industry is in turmoil and the careers of our flight attendants all hang in the balance," said Patricia Friend, president of the Association of Flight Attendants. "Almost everywhere we look, flight attendants are being forced to work longer hours with reduced rest time, and all for ever-decreasing wages. This must stop."

The Association of Flight Attendants said it would immediately poll members at four airlines on whether to strike, as union members must also approve the strike before any walkout takes place. A tally of the vote is planned by the end of December. The union has 46,000 members at 26 airlines, but the four airlines at issue now are United, US Airways, ATA and Hawaiian. So far, there is no clear indication as to how many flight attendants - and from what airlines - would strike if US Airways attendants were to strike. Union representative David Kameron, however, noted that the union would probably use "our trademark chaos strike tactic, which involves intermittent strikes without notice as to flight, time, day, airport."

According to reports since 9/11, over 100,000 of airline workers have lost their jobs and several others have taken huge pay cuts. Apart from deep pay cuts, flight attendants face occupational hazards due to poor working conditions. Repetitive motion injuries, blood borne pathogens, equipment injuries, cabin air contamination, noise and radiation have led to respiratory diseases, nausea, nervous system damage and memory loss.

Source: e Turbo news, 16/11/2004

Hotels in Chennai thrive on child labour

Child Labour is a pervasive problem throughout the world. According to reports, Africa and Asia account for over 90 percent of child labour. Lack of social security systems and enforcement of child labour restrictions perpetuate child labour.

The Hindustan Times reported that a recent study carried out by the NGO, Peace Trust, India shows that over 50 percent of hotels and tea shops in the southern city of Chennai, India employ children under the age of 14 as labourers. About 58.49 percent tea shops and 56.34 percent of the hotels in the city and suburbs employ children for 12-14 hours a day. The study said child labour existed in one out of every three tea shops and six out of every ten hotels. The study revealed that the wages of most children were low and even the knowledge of wage is unknown to the child labourers. Poverty and compulsion by parents were cited as reasons for taking up jobs by 33.80 percent of children in tea shops and 39.62 percent children in the hotels. Over 66 percent workers in tea shops and hotels said poverty and lack of interest in education forced them to work at this age.

Working children are objects of extreme exploitation in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay. Their working conditions are so severe that do not allow mental and physical development. There must be an economic change in the condition of a struggling family in order to free a child from the responsibility of working.

Source: hindustantimes.com, 03/10/04

Children deserve dignity, freedom and protection of rights

Child trafficking is a multi-billion dollar industry involving an estimated 1.2 million children every year. Studies reveal that more than 250,000 sex tourists travel to Asia each year, 25 per cent of them from the US, 16 per cent from Germany, and 13 per cent from the UK and Australia.

At the fourth annual Youth Off the Streets conference in Australia from the 8-10 November, Fr Chris Riley, Founder, Youth off the Streets said “Children as young as 10 are literally forced into sexual slavery and routinely abused by men from wealthy western countries, including Australia. “Young people who lose their souls in the child trafficking trade are victims of sexual abuse and the adults who abuse them in this way should be treated accordingly.

Participants included Nobel Peace Prize nominee Fr Shay Cullen, well known for his campaign to save children from commercial sexual exploitation in the Philippines. Fr Cullen said: “Australians must remember that these perpetrators don't leave their sexual appetites at the airport once they return home to Australia.

“Their appetites have been whetted and this makes Australian children more vulnerable.”

Often children who are caught up in such activity are often treated as criminals and society need to treat them with empathy and understanding. While people are horrified to hear about the abuse of the countries, the horror that these children experience is painful to even imagine. While we fail to continue to address what

is happening in each of our own countries, the longer we will continue to sacrifice the dignity and freedom and rights of our own children.

Source: The Catholic Weekly Online, 21/11/04

Child trafficking and sex slavery – Worst form of slavery

The situation of trafficking in the Asia- Pacific region is worsening. Officials from United Nations and 20 Asia-Pacific countries met in Bangkok in November to discuss on the problems of tackling trafficking. The UNICEF representative, Gopalan Balagopal said that forces driving trafficking and sexual exploitation of children are stronger and more vigorous than in the past, despite changes in laws and government policy. He said, “Children continue to be sexually exploited, particularly through the use of the Internet, promotion of sex tourism and a lack of education about HIV/AIDS which make some people believe sex with children can cure the disease.”

According to Welfare Groups in Thailand, the total number of children being trafficked in Thailand could be rising by as much as 20 percent each year, earning the country the dubious reputation of being South Asia’s human trafficking hub. Bangkok’s Chulalongkorn University said that the police complain they are fighting an uphill battle against an increasingly sophisticated industry worth up to 100 billion baht (US\$2.45 billion) a year. The long and porous borders, rampant police corruption are reasons for the getting the children into Thailand from the neighbouring countries of Myanmar, Cambodia and China. Others are flown as far as Australia, Japan, South Africa and the United States to be kept as brothel sex slaves. Corruption is seen as one of the foremost reasons for the worsening situation.

Source: TaiwanNews, 9/11/2004

Don’t turn a blind eye

Paedophiles often go scot free as general public or other travellers do not report on the incidences. This has been seen as one of the major reasons for increasing number of paedophiles. The international organisation, End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT) has compiled a list of destinations where British sex offenders have abused children, and is calling on witnesses to contact police and name suspects. ECPAT urges that holiday makers who suspect other travellers of abusing children overseas should report them to the police immediately. Alternatively people should tell their tour representatives, tour guides or travel agents who can pass on reports.

Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines, Morocco and The Gambia are among offender hotspots, said Christine Beddoe, Director of ECPAT, UK. But countries in Eastern Europe are increasingly suspected, as low-cost airlines increase their schedules to Poland, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia and Slovakia. Several travel organisations including Thomson Holidays, Britain’s biggest tour operator, and Accor, which runs the Sofitel, Novotel and Ibis hotel chains, have signed up to ECPAT’s code of conduct. Carlson Wagonlit Travel, one of Britain’s biggest business travel agents, has also joined, and is considering training staff on the issues.

An employee at a major UK travel agency, who asked not to be named for fear of losing his job, said that he often comes across “very likely sex tourists who might well be paedophiles”. He said: “Of course I don’t know for certain, but when someone turns up in the shop wearing an old mac and asking to pay for a ticket to Thailand in cash — and saying that he doesn’t want to give his address or phone number — then it does raise questions.

Source: Timesonline 13/11/2004

Sex tourists prowl in Latin American Cities

Cartagena, a sparkling colonial city on the coast that Colombians call "the jewel of the Caribbean", has become a magnet for men, many of them Europeans, seeking sex with young girls and sometimes boys. Many of the children come from families displaced from their rural homes by fighting among leftist rebels, government forces and right-wing paramilitary groups. An estimated 1,500 girls and boys work in Cartagena's sex industry and according to Renacer, a private group, girls as young as 7 and boys as young as 9 are sexually exploited

Fabian Cardenas, the local co-ordinator for Renacer, a private group that helps victims of sexual exploitation says "There are many foreigners who come here with the sheer objective of having sex. And what the tourist wants, the tourist gets."

Cartagena is not the only one, many Latin American cities, in countries such as Mexico, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Brazil, are now being frequented by "sex tourists" looking for minors, as a result of a shift in the business from Asia following police crackdowns. "The kids are on the street because of desperation," says Bruce Harris, the former Latin America director of Casa Alianza, a children's rights group. "The last thing they have to sell is themselves. This is mixed with the fact that the laws for the most part are still very weak, and there's corruption in the application of the law."

Source: Associated Press, 10/11/2004

Acknowledgements

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- The Taiwan News
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