



Tourism Scan

Vol. 2 Issue 5 June 2006

This is a communiqué of the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism

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“The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism is a Chiang Mai; Thailand 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

In this issue of Tourism Scan, we once again cover a wide range of issues beginning with the issue that haunts the tourism industry- child abuse and child prostitution. The story from Vietnam only serves to underline how tourists, especially the single tourist, are easily attracted to children as the object of one's sexual gratification. Every now and then there comes a report of how a government agency has caught and punished an individual. In many countries of South East Asia, tourists are often threatened that should they commit a sexual offence against a child, they might have to pay for it back home. Yet, this has not served as a deterrent. Sexual abuse is on the rampage and an industry in its own rights!

We read in the story: 'Rock star jailed for abuse of girls in Vietnam' how economic conditions of the poor prompt them into the sex trade. Young girls and boys do this not as a matter of conscious choice but largely because they have no other options open to them. And this clearly shows the link between affluence, tourism, and exploitation. The rich tend to view things and people as sheer commodities for consumption and their satisfaction refusing to count the social and human costs of their actions.

In the ultimate analysis, the tourism activist and development workers need to forge alliances that link them to ideas about pro-poor tourism where issues of poverty and development are experienced by the tourist and through which experience, the tourist returns as a friend of those they visit, stay in support and solidarity especially with disadvantaged people in the developing countries. A good example of how that is done is our second story: GIFT FOR AID IN NEPAL.

Elsewhere in this edition, we highlight a story of how Japan plans to fingerprint and photograph foreign visitors except certain categories of them. And this points to how exclusive the tourism industry can be and how discriminatory governments can be about different categories of visitors. Fingerprinting is generally associated with criminals and it was after 9/11 when the USA enforced it on visitors to that country. Japan argues it is all about safety and protection from the terrorist. But we must ask: How can we hope to have a safe world in the midst of huge injustices, countries occupying other countries, the denial of elementary freedoms and so on? You cannot secure one section of the people and leave the rest vulnerable!

Several of our scans this time have to do with issues of ecology and tourism- the callous disregard for environmental standards by the tourism industry and the industry eye staying glued to profit, not sustainability. We do have an interesting example from the Centre for Sustainable Tourism which tries to promote alternatives to these trends. Time and again, the tourism industry shows contempt for environmental standards. Even the horrific lessons of the tsunami seem to have had no effect or re-thinking. There needs to be highly visible campaigns in this regard and the media needs to be brought in to demonstrate the urgency of putting in place stringent measures against those who violate environmental standards.

We have a short but stimulating piece contributed by a tourism activist (German now working in Sri Lanka) who offers us a challenge to look at the question of 'Tourism for Peace' and a quick look at post-tsunami tourism development and the challenges they entail. And, we conclude with some announcements about events in Europe which will interest our readers everywhere. They call on us to examine how art and literature can be a vehicle for a higher level of consciousness for a traveller. Indeed, tourism can produce the formula and inspiration for a better world. A large part now tends to take it the other way!

The question before us is: How can we make a difference?

Ranjan Solomon

Rock star jailed for abuse of girls in Vietnam

"*I'm innocent. This is a conspiracy,*" said former rock star Gary Glitter as he was led away from a Vietnamese courtroom. But the judge thought otherwise, sentencing him to three years in jail for committing lewd acts against two young girls, and describing the disgraced rocker as having "a sickness". So graphic was the court description of repeated sexual acts involving the two young victims that the assembled Vietnamese onlookers gasped as some of the details were read out.

Before the verdict, Glitter stood with his arms clasped behind his back, showing no emotion. But on a seat adjacent to him, the mother of one of the victims sat quietly, tears welling up in her eyes. When the guilty verdict was finally announced, the only surprise came from Glitter himself, who was clearly shocked by his sentence.

But it was not just the disgraced former rock star on trial on Friday. Vietnam's willingness to crack down on paedophiles and other sex offenders was also in the dock. Much of South East Asia is seen as a magnet for Western sex tourists, and Vietnam is no exception. In the streets of Vung Tau, where Glitter committed his crime, cheap sex is readily available. It is easy to find bars and massage parlours with scantily-clad girls eager to entice older Western men.

Western dream

One bar owner, who did not want to be named, said it was the dream of all the girls working in his establishment to marry a Western man. "Girls in this town don't have many options," he said. "They are just trying to make a living as best they can." The girls in these bars look young, but it is often difficult to tell their ages and none are likely to admit to being under 16.

There is little doubt, though, that child prostitution and sex abuse are relatively common in Vietnam. According to a joint study conducted by the UN children's fund UNICEF and the Vietnamese government in 2004, nearly 3% of people surveyed had suffered some form of sexual abuse - from being touched inappropriately to rape. Children from poor, dysfunctional families are often at risk of being forced into prostitution, and some are even trafficked to other countries in the region, according to Le Hong Loan, UNICEF's head of child protection in Ho Chi Minh City. She said the issue of illegal sex with children - especially sex with foreigners - had not really been addressed adequately before Glitter's trial.

The mechanisms were simply not there to deal with the issue," Le Hong Loan said. But it seems that due to the trial of the once famous, now infamous rock star, the authorities are determined to take action. "With this sentence, we have sent a signal to people like Gary Glitter who want to come to Vietnam," Nguyen Duc Trinh, deputy chief of the

"Before this trial, people here were not aware that tourism can have a bad side. Now they are more aware of the risks, and will hopefully look out for their children more," she said.

Kate McGeown

BBC News, Vung Tau, Vietnam

GIFT For AID Nepal

GIFT for AID is a charity organization. Its mission is to give travellers the opportunity to contribute in a concrete manner to the improvement of the lives of people in developing countries. For this purpose local GIFT for AID-information offices are established. Tourists can donate money to the project of their choice and they can even pay a visit to this project. The first information office is located in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. GIFT for AID consists of an International branch and a local branch.

GIFT for AID International was founded in May 2000 by Arlen Hoebergen and Jeannette Leenders. The organization has a decentralized structure and helps establishing local offices. GIFT for AID Nepal is the first local branch. GIFT FOR AID in Nepal aims to contribute to the structural improvement of the life of Nepalese people. Projects include training for women in the area of sanitation and water, installation of cooking stoves that do not use minimum amounts of wood and emit the least possible amounts of smoke.

GIFT for AID is proud of the fact that at least ninety percent of all donations reaches the projects directly. Only five percent of the budget is used for sustaining the information office in Kathmandu. This includes rent, salaries of local staff and public relations. The last five percent of the budget is used for GIFT for AID International and for a fund which will establish new information offices elsewhere in due time.



Japan to fingerprint and photograph foreign visitors

In an effort to combat terrorism, Japan's cabinet has given final approval to a plan to fingerprint and photograph all adult foreigners entering the nation.

The decision was taken as Japan's House of Councillors approved a bill which proposes revising the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law to fingerprint and photograph all foreigners aged 16 or over upon entering Japan. The bill is expected to go into effect by November 2007.

Permanent residents, including ethnic Koreans born in Japan, will be exempt from the law, along with state guests and diplomats. The information will be stored in a database for potential criminal investigations.

The Japanese government in early March put the bill, which stipulates that foreigners entering Japan must provide personal identification data in electromagnetic format, forward as part of its efforts to block terrorists from entering the country under false identities. As per the information available, the now enacted legislation includes a provision enabling the government to deport those judged by the justice minister to be terrorists and another term requires planes and ships arriving in Japan to submit passenger lists before arrival.

Japan believes it is a potential target for militants linked to Al-Qaeda because it has troops in Iraq as part of the American-led coalition keeping order in the country.

On its part, the Japan Association of Travel Agents said it was unclear what affect the fingerprinting would have on tourism to Japan,

as visitors also wanted to feel safe. Japan has launched a campaign to become more tourist-friendly and last year hosted a record 6.73 million foreign visitors, up 9.6 percent from 2004.

"We would like to cooperate to make foreign visitors feel more safe and comfortable," Shiro Aoki, a spokesman for the travel agent association told media.

Source: eTN Asia



Bird flu threatening Asian travel industry, PATA says

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has warned the Asian travel industry is facing an immediate threat from bird flu scares. In a new global survey released by PATA, bird flu has been cited by respondents as the third biggest deterrent preventing their travel to Asia, after media advisories and terrorism.

About 58 percent of those surveyed say they are less likely to travel to Asia due to the fear of terrorism, while 57 percent are deterred by bird flu scares. The situation is made worse due to confusion among potential travellers about which areas in Asia have been hit by bird flu. "It's all in the mind," said John Koldwski, director of Strategic Intelligence Center for PATA. "It's this unknown, it's this 'boogey man.' It's all in the mind of the consumer, but that's the battle, the actual perception."

Travel industry analysts warn the perception is borne due to the fact, most, if not all bird flu deaths, have occurred in Asia. "One third of respondents don't know the areas affected, and more than one in five believe areas with no cases of bird flu have been affected."



Green Hotels: Benefits for Developers

Hotels are not simply a home away from home. They highlight and introduce new techniques in structure, architecture and interior design to the public. With cost advantages and flexible design, the hospitality industry is beginning to embrace the growing trend of sustainable design. Green hotels have opened in Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, South America and the United States to glowing reviews from guests and investors.

Comfort and style always have been cornerstones of the hospitality business, but, with green design, environmental responsibility and health also are at the forefront. Developers can address natural-resource depletion, energy consumption, threatened ecology patterns and global warming while placing greater focus on the comfort and health of hotel guests and employees. Green design is the accepted new concept for hospitality projects, and it is important today's builders and developers join the trend.

Source: Sustainable Travel International. Write to info@sustainabletravel.com for more information.

Protection and Preservation of the Mesoamerican Mexican Reef and the surrounding Indigenous Cultures

In the past seven years the coastline from Cancun south to the Belize border has been rapidly changing, due to the rampant construction of large all-inclusive hotels, and their surrounding recreation facilities on one of the world's last untouched shorelines. The Eastern Shores of México from Cancun to Tulum, commonly referred to in tourist circles as the Mexican Riviera is currently miles of wild coastline consisting of mangrove wetlands and coconuts grooves along the shoreline that parallel the fragile coral fringing reef known worldwide as the Mesoamerican Reef.

The Mesoamerican Reef is significant around the world for more than just biodiversity and its rare status among endangered ecosystems. Beyond its natural beauty there are many economic reasons for a broader consideration of reef and shoreline protection. Reefs provide many important processes to the local environment, including:

1. Forming an important barrier against shoreline erosion
2. Supporting both commercial and recreational fisheries
3. Providing a primary attraction for millions of recreational scuba divers
4. Maintaining beaches through their natural cycles of growth and erosion
5. Preventing the erosion of sea grass needed for the health of endangered turtle habitats and the mangrove ecosystems which are critically linked to reef health.
6. Shield for fragile coastlands guarding against destructive ocean waves, ie. Tsunami and/or hurricanes

Development without Environmental Consideration: Tourism is the number one source of revenue for México so the drive to develop more and more hotels, malls, shops, large chain stores, restaurants, and golf courses threatens the very existence of this pristine shoreline for future generations. In Mexico, the developers of these super resorts have little consideration for their impact on native habitats and the surrounding ecosystems, and as a result any environmentally sustaining infrastructures are rarely considered. Sensitive and sustainable development has all but been forgotten here developers build booming tourist compounds focused on affluent leisure activities alone.

Karst Landforms: The Yucatan Peninsula has a unique geologic landform named KARST. Karst refers to a beautiful terrain usually formed within carbonate rock (limestone and dolomite) when groundwater has "solutionally" enlarged openings to form a subsurface drainage system. Over many millions of years, as flow routes are enlarged, and as water tables lower below the level of surface streams, these streams begin to lose water to a subterranean cave system. When the water table rises again, these water filled caves connect together to become a large system large underground rivers.

Groundwater flow in karst aquifers is significantly different from that of any other aquifers because of the "solutionally" enlarged conduits. In porous media aquifers, groundwater moves very slowly as laminar flow, (usually only a few feet per year), but in karst aquifers, turbulently flowing underground streams have velocities almost matching those of surface streams. The nature of these unique groundwater flow systems means that karst aquifers are extremely fragile and more vulnerable to rapid groundwater contamination.

Groundwater and reef contamination from Mega Resorts: These huge coastal developments are built without a comprehensive or environmentally sensitive infrastructure. For example most of these mega resorts have:

- 1) No organized garbage disposal. Typically at collection time garbage is heaped in piles and left unattended (although it would be perfect for a re-cycle center given we have mostly tourist garbage and up to 98% is recyclable?)
- 2) Sewage is all processed via private septic tanks and/or hotel private septic systems which have been documented to contaminate the nearby ground water.
- 3) Artificial landscapes, especially for golf courses are notorious for their high pollutants due to the runoff of harsh chemicals, and pesticides.

Golf courses are the craze in this region now, and both the existing and all new resorts are adding golf courses to their already expansive footprints. There are twelve courses currently in existence, and eighteen more are pending approval in the near future.

Finite Water Supply: Each golf course uses three to four tons more of toxic chemicals to keep their lawns and greens perfect rather than just a hotel or restaurant complex alone. Water is in finite supply in the Yucatan, and typically under each greens is a 90% filtration system of sand. This means that an 18 hole golf course can use up to 220,000 gallons each day - when comparatively this same amount of water can provide clean water for 8,000 people living in Cancun for one day.

As noted above, the unique geologic terrain of the Yucatan Peninsula is Karst, with very porous holes and fast moving underground river systems. There are also many cenotes (small lakes or waterholes) that are the openings to the aquifer made years ago by the collapse of surface lands, connecting these underground rivers to the surface. At least for now with the current level of development the local water systems are filled with million of gallons of pure uncontaminated water, but this expansive development and corresponding contaminants - what will happen to the drinking water?

Contamination is feared both for the local human drinking supply, and then subsequently into the Mesoamerican Coral reef with all its beautiful fish and mammal species since these underground rivers flow directly into the ocean.

Additional Cultural and Environmental Considerations: The cenotes, and this system of underground rivers along the coastline are also the primary source of water for the remaining Mayan communities of the area. Without these safe sources of water a cultural and an environmental inheritance saved from generation to generation, will be lost.

It is not just the reef that needs consideration, but also the cenotes and underground rivers, which are exclusively unique to this area. In order to save this fragile ecosystem supporting a diversity of human culture and animal life, it is vital that the continued expansion of these toxic golf courses be prevented and other type infringements be dealt with in the proper manner.

From: Nancy de Rosa cenotes@prodigy.net.mx (also MAP NEWS)

Advancing Sustainable Tourism in Latin America

The Rainforest Alliance, a leading international conservation organization promoting sustainable and responsible tourism in Latin America, is expanding the network for “Implementation of Best Management Practices and Certification Support for Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises” which started in early 2005. Already, more than thirty tour operators from different countries have signed the cooperative agreement including tourism certification programs, access to information about current market conditions and trends, and commercial alliances.

The purpose of the cooperative agreements is to encourage tour operators to motivate their affiliated business enterprises to join them in conserving biodiversity and reducing tourism's negative impacts. The agreements allow staff with lodges and other tourism enterprises that work with participating tour companies to receive Rainforest Alliance training related to effective business management and the requirements of sustainable tourism certification programs. Participants can then elect to receive technical assistance and marketing support, if their businesses meet specific requirements.

Member Tour operators agree to be responsible for organizing the seminar and training events, recruiting participants and motivating them to join the best practices program. Tour operators also agree to give priority to hotels and lodges that adopt best practices, in tour packages offered to international tourism wholesalers.

Rainforest Alliance is convinced that this type of agreement is an excellent way to promote communication between the private sector and non-government organizations.

More information: www.rainforest-alliance.org



Before the big come-back: Sri Lanka as tourism destination – post Tsunami

More than eighteen month after the Tsunami destroyed a lot of Sri Lanka's tourism infrastructure and with the process of reconstruction and rehabilitation of the affected communities still going on island-wide the Sri Lanka Ecotourism Foundation (SLEF) in cooperation with the recently created Association of Small and Medium Enterprises in Tourism Sri Lanka (ASMET). (www.sigstravelmart.com, www.ecotourismsrilanka.net) is organizing “Sri Lanka Travel Mart” in Colombo from June 16th-18th, 2006.

“Gateway to South Asia” is taking place for the third time. This year will focus on community based tourism efforts under the theme “Beyond Beaches to Nature, Culture and Adventure”. SLEF intends to promote Community Based Ecotourism Enterprises (CBEs). National and international organizations: like Sewalanka and Sarvodaya which are implementing projects with funds and technical advice from Hilfswerk Austria, Mercy Corps, ICEI (Italy) and others will present and promote their projects. Also, private entrepreneurs offering exclusive eco-tourism will use this platform.

Looking at the island, however it is obvious that no project is implemented in the Tsunami hidden North East Region. This region is also heavily struggling under the threats of the ongoing civil war between the Sri Lanka Army, paramilitary groups and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). Daily murders, claymore mine attacks and recently also suicide-bombing are challenging any

Regarding tourism development the situation looks even darker: in the past huge development programs like NECCDEP (north East Coast Community Development Program, funded by ADB) or IUCN's coastal management communities program have identified infrastructure projects. But nowadays everything is on hold. Nobody dares nor to plan nor to initiate a project.

Just a few individuals are brave M Joseph in Batticaloa, for instance, just set up his small home stay hostel and is eager to building loyal customer relations with some of the Expats working with INGOs in the district. Another entrepreneur in Kalmunai has construction a small Cajan-roofed beer-house/restaurant - again with the majority of customers being foreigners or local INGO staff.

In general, one can notice some interest in tourism development of the local population – at a small scale and community approach basis: for instance, women groups in Koddaikallar want to use the beach-peninsula gain and have some leisure facilities for their families there. The fear of the sea and Tsunami seems almost forgotten...

However, investors targeted by the Sri Lanka Tourist Board are directed to (re-)build in the South, West and Highland area but are certainly not encouraged to look at the war prone North-East.

Unfortunately, the ongoing ethnic conflict makes it difficult for Tamil people to get trained and find a job in hospitality and tourism: in the Singhalese part of the island businesses would not give them a job although they might speak Tamil, English and Singhalese. Discrimination and human rights violations are a daily fact in Sri Lanka's tourism business. Tamils are just not respected as "suitable" and trustworthy staff.

Will the discussion at the Travel Mart go beyond pure planning of big investments? Hopefully there will be some space to talk about the possibilities and means of tourism to contribute to peace building. It is a challenge to test the concept of "Peace through tourism" – but is Sri Lanka ready to take it serious?

Source: Julia Schönhärl, expat working in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province.



SignaTOUR 2006 –the Austrian media awareness for tourism with future

This award is designed by respect – institute for sustainable tourism and development in Austria. It goes once a year to writers, journalists or publishers who write about the aims of sustainable development of tourism and judge the development projects in travel reports and literature. Outstanding texts dealing with these topics will be promoted in order to motivate print media and publishing companies to encourage journalists to write more critically about these issues. Deadline to hand in submissions is June 30, 2006.

Articles for daily print media, weekly or monthly magazines, expert journals as well as travel and country guide books and all other travel literature and radio reports can be nominated. However, texts must be in German, and having been published between Jan and March 2006.

More information:

http://www.respect.at/content.php?m_id=7&id=149&newsdetail=607&ch_id=

Austrian Film Festival on Development Politics in Linz

At this years Film Festival on Development Politics ***“Between Amazon and Caribic – the three Guayanas”*** in Linz/Austria (May 26-31, 2006) outstanding films will be shown including the award winning movie “Der Gast” (Guest) of Mark Weiland. Hosted by the Institute for Development Cooperation (www.iez.jku.at), a research institute for development cooperation, the festival is focusing on the three Guayanas which share a similar colonial past. Nowadays, the countries’ multi-ethnic and multicultural societies are facing new challenges between tradition and modern technology centers, as many countries do. Post-colonial countries are often struggling with discrimination and human rights violations, as the “elite” selected by the leaning colonists, often tried to suppress other groups. Looking at tourism development, this challenge becomes even more obvious, as industries and commerce are often in the hand of the “leading” group neglecting others. Might community based tourism be a chance to overcome such injustice?

For more information see: www.iez.jku.at



Acknowledgements

- BBC News, Vung Tau, Vietnam
- eTN Asia
- Sustainable Travel International
- Nancy de Rosa
- MAP NEWS
- www.rainforest-alliance.org
- **Julia Schönhärl**
- <http://www.respect.at>
- www.iez.jku.at

Layout: Roselle Figueiredo Solomon