



**SCHYST
RESANDE**

“Welcome to Sin City”

Swedish male sex tourists
in prostitution industries abroad

A report from Sweden's Fair Travel network

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Swedish male sex tourists in prostitution industries abroad

This report was written by Joakim Medin on behalf of [Schyst resande](#) – Sweden's Fair Travel network. The information is partly built on interviews conducted in Thailand.

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All photos by: Joakim Medin (except on p 69)


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The aim of the Fair Travel network is that both tourism and business travel should contribute to a sustainable development. That means, among other things:

- › Making sure that the workers in the tourism industry have decent working conditions.
- › Choosing climate-friendly and environmentally sound options.
- › Supporting locally owned businesses.
- › Acting against prostitution and trafficking.
- › Refraining from activities that may contribute to the exploitation of children.
- › Thinking about one's "alcohol footprint".

Eight organizations are part of the Fair Travel network: [Unionen](#), [Childhood Foundation](#), [Fair Action](#), [The Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union](#), [the IOGT-NTO movement](#), [RealStars](#), [the Church of Sweden](#) and [Union to Union](#).



BAD GUYS GO TO
HEAVEN
GOOD GUYS GO TO
PATTAYA

Pattaya, Thailand, August 2018.

52-year-old “Karl” from Sweden is sucking intensely on the nipple he has just bought some playtime with. His eyes are half open, and with his left hand he is pinching and pulling the nipple of the other naked breast in front of him. Karl adores these nipples. He pointed them out from our sofa, calling them the biggest nipples he has ever seen in this strip club. He praises the prostituted woman “Natalie” for still being so sexy, having reached the mature age of 45.

Natalie makes a painful grimace. Karl is sucking much too hard and the vodka drinks he bought her cannot hide her discomfort. She has been a familiar face in this Swedish-owned strip club for the past six years. The club is located in one of the infamous red-light districts in Pattaya, a place often called the “biggest brothel city in the world”. Natalie undresses here almost every night and tries to sell her body to sex-buyers, usually to foreign tourists. She is a single mother and the money pays for her 26-year-old daughter’s university education in Bangkok. Natalie grew up in a dirt-poor village in north-eastern Thailand and has sworn that her only child will live a better life, no matter what the cost.

Karl has frequently visited the strip club and has been acquainted with Natalie for years. But he has never asked her much about herself and why she is doing what she is doing. Their conversations have always just been a short bridge to having his sexual desires fulfilled. Like many other men buying sex from women, Karl is only after the rush of pleasure, and he is indifferent to the person he is paying to provide it.

This is a report about Swedish sex tourists. About Swedish men who have bought sexual services from people in prostitution on one or several occasions, when they have been abroad.

The main focus is to describe why these Swedish men have chosen to find and pay prostituted people for sex, by trying to identify several mechanisms behind their behaviour.

Prostitution is a global problem that is estimated to affect 40-42 million people in the world. It has a clear gender component, as the vast majority of the victims are women and girls, while almost all of the buyers are men. Around 75 percent of all the victims are between 13 and 25 years old. Global prostitution is considered the second most lucrative business on the black market, and its revenue is estimated at USD 186 billion annually.¹

1) [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET\(2014\)493040_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf), Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality, 2014, pp. 6

This report investigates the behaviour of Swedish male sex tourists in Thailand, in the Dutch capital Amsterdam and in the Spanish city of Barcelona. All three places are famous for their big sex industries, and for also being top travel destinations in international tourism.

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Method

The main focus of this qualitative report is to describe the mechanisms behind Swedish male tourists buying sex in Thailand, Amsterdam and Barcelona.

In Thailand both interviews and field observations were used as methods to gather material, during a three-week field trip on behalf of the network Schyst Resande (Fair Travel) in July and August 2018. Interviews were made with international non-governmental organisations, with both Swedish and international law enforcement agencies active in Thailand, and with governmental sources and the public sector in Thailand.

Extensive field observations were made in the capital Bangkok, in the city of Pattaya and on the island of Phuket. As the author of the report, I had numerous encounters with Swedish male sex-buyers in Thailand, to get them to comment on their actions. All of this field work was done undercover. I pretended to be a sex-buying tourist visiting Thailand for the first time, and I asked the Swedish men whether they could recommend certain strip clubs, red-light districts and massage salons, and if they could explain how the interaction with people in prostitution works. I met the Swedish men in restaurants, in ordinary bars, in red-light bars and in strip clubs. All of the discussions with the men were secretly recorded with a hidden microphone.



I pretended to be a sex-buying tourist visiting Thailand for the first time, and I asked the Swedish men whether they could recommend certain strip clubs, red-light districts and massage salons, and if they could explain how the interaction with people working in prostitution works. – Joakim Medin

This report doesn’t claim to present a full and representative picture of all Swedish, male sex buyers in Thailand, but rather those that I met during the field work in July and August 2018. The selected number of men who are included in the report were between their late 30s and early 70s, had different socio-economic backgrounds, different educational backgrounds and came from different geographical places in Sweden. All of the men have been completely anonymised. The locations of the meetings and other details that could reveal personal identities have also been anonymised. In the report the Swedish men have been divided into six subgroups, to exemplify the different mechanisms behind why they have bought sex.

The report also includes the socio-political circumstances around the prostitution and the legal status of the prostitution in these three places. Published research was used to gather background information about the prostitution in all three places. Interviews were also made with national researchers in the Netherlands and Spain to get further material about Amsterdam and Barcelona, and comments from Swedish male tourists who bought sex in these two cities were retrieved from social media discussion forums.

Understanding the sex buyer

Academic research shows that there are no social characteristics that can distinguish sex-buying men from other men. A colleague at your workplace, a kind-looking grandfather feeding the pigeons, and your own father can all be people paying for sexual services. Or they might just as well not be.



When Dr Sabine Grenz, professor for Gender Studies at the University of Vienna and previously a post-doc at the University of Gothenburg, conducted interviews with German male sex-buyers for a 2005 landmark article, she found that they were men of all ages and from all socio-economic backgrounds. From the young single man to the middle-aged and married family father, from the highly educated to the blue-collar manual labourer.¹

A study made by the National Council for Crime Prevention in Sweden in 2008 similarly came to the conclusion that sex-buyers in Sweden are not a homogenous group.

- **They consist of everyone from young teenagers to 80-year olds, even if the majority of them are between 30 and 50 years of age.**
- **Swedish sex-buyers also belong to all classes and layers of society. The buyers often have a good job with a regular income, and about half of them have a college or university education.**
- **About 50 percent of all Swedish sex-buyers are married or are in a relationship, and almost as many also have children.**²

The men’s motive for buying sex has been a hotly contested issue in international debates. While they all obviously have in common that they take advantage of other people – girls and women, mainly – researchers have been able to point out several reasons behind the men’s behaviour.

According to academic research, certain men are seemingly drawn to the prostitution industry because they are sexually frustrated, either because of what they think is a stagnating relationship, or because they experience difficulties in meeting people to get intimate with in regular ways. Other men want to experiment sexually and live out their erotic fantasies. There are also emotional and psychological motivations behind the sex-buying. Some men have a romantic streak in them and feel

1) www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-do-men-buy-sex-2012-10-23/

2) https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/targeting_the_sex_buyer_en_1.pdf, “Targeting the sex buyer. The Swedish example: Stopping prostitution and trafficking where it all begins”, the Swedish Institute, 2010

that they manage to build a “real” relationship with the people they pay for sexual services. They think that they can identify real “feelings” between themselves and the exploited person, but in a way that doesn’t involve what they think are inherent problems in a “traditional” relationship. This thinking is what often also leads many men to return to the same person for sexual services.³

The Swedish professor of social work Sven-Axel Månsson, who has a long record of prostitution research, has also pointed out that sex-buyers speak about prostitution as a simple “consumer product”. Buying sex is no different from buying other commodities. Månsson has also argued that men’s dominance over women in prostitution represents a “last bastion of antifeminism”, for this group of sex-buyers.⁴

“The professor Sven-Axel Månsson has also argued that men’s dominance over women in prostitution represents a ‘last bastion of antifeminism’, for this group of sex-buyers.”

In Sweden, few other people arguably have a better insight into how male sex-buyers are thinking, than the staff of social workers and psychologists at the municipal project KAST. KAST stands for Buyers of Sexual Services or “Köpare av sexuella tjänster” in Swedish and is an initiative in the municipalities of Stockholm and Gothenburg, and in Malmö and Umeå too but with other project names there. The project aims to meet and help men who are both suffering from compulsive sexual behaviour and hyper sexual behaviour, and who are buying sex and want to change their behaviour. The project was first initiated with phone counselling in 2000, after the introduction of the Swedish law criminalising sex-buyers. From 2006 there has also been treatment with personal meetings.

The social worker Marie Johansson is the project leader at KAST in Stockholm, with many years of experience. She confirms

3 and 4) www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-do-men-buy-sex-2012-10-23/

the diversity of the sex-buyers in Sweden. In 2017, KAST in Stockholm was contacted by 130 men asking for assistance. At least 80 percent of those had bought sex. The average age was 39, but there were also men as young as 18. Several of them contacted KAST only after being caught by partners or parents. Others took the initiative themselves.

“The sex buying first and foremost serves to reduce the men’s own angst over something. This angst can also be triggered from an over-consumption of pornography, which will eventually dismantle moral boundaries.”

Johansson explains that there are several reasons behind why the men had bought sex.

“Often these men have had some form of problem since an early age,” Johansson says. “It might be that they themselves were victims of sexual exploitation in the past, and they are looking for an outlet. It might also be that they are afraid of closeness, not in a physical form but in a sense of getting too attached to their feelings.”

In this sense, it’s irrelevant that certain sex-buyers are still young or good-looking. Even if that is the case, they can have difficulties with getting too close to their feelings, and consider it much easier to buy women they can be physically close to, without having to spend energy on emotions.

According to Marie Johansson’s experience, the sex buying first and foremost serves to reduce the men’s own angst over something. This angst can also be triggered from an over-consumption of pornography, which will eventually dismantle moral boundaries and cause confusion about what is right and wrong. According to Johansson, a thirst for “physical closeness” appears, but without any feelings or care that would come with a real, intimate relationship. In other cases, though, Johansson has observed how certain men truly believe that they are building a “romantic relationship” with a person in prostitution.

“In reality it’s all roleplay,” Johansson explains. “You enter into an agreement with someone, to trick yourself into believing that

there is someone who actually likes you, that you have created a bond, that this feeling is terrific. But it's all just about one person buying someone else.”

In 2017, the KAST branch in Gothenburg was contacted by 115 different men asking for assistance. About half of these were looking for help to stop buying sex, and their average age was between 35 and 45.

Staff member Eva-Lotta Hansson-Palmqvist also confirms that there can be several reasons behind why men buy sex.

“Most of the men that we meet have managed to sexualise other, strong and painful feelings. Instead of approaching a relationship or something that will be emotionally sustainable, they retreat to buying sex instead.”

The sex-buyers in the Gothenburg area are from different socio-economical groups and have different educational backgrounds. But according to Hansson-Palmqvist’s experience, many of them have in common that they have faced a traumatic or overwhelming experience in their life that triggered them into first buying sex. Since the men often have low self-esteem and difficulty in expressing how they feel, they find outlets to vent these feelings.

This is remarkably different behaviour compared with how women with low self-esteem or a traumatic past behave. Many women can have the same problems as these men, and can experience the same difficulties in expressing how they feel, but this will only very rarely result in the women buying sex. Taking advantage of people in prostitution remains a typically male behaviour.

“It’s certainly not unusual that they have bought sex abroad. And it’s quite possible that abroad was the first time. They know that it’s wrong to do it here, but they can let go of that when they are away on holidays or for work.”

In Sweden, the overall responsibility to document prostitution lies with the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), a government agency under the Ministry of Health and Social

Affairs. According to a report published by this board in 2015, the latest national study showed how 7.5 percent of all Swedish men have bought sex at some point in their lives, while 0 percent of Swedish women have ever bought sex. Around 0.8 percent of all Swedish men, or 24,000 individuals, had paid for sex in the last 12 months. Around 80 percent of the men who have bought sex, have done so while being abroad.⁵

Both KAST in Stockholm and KAST in Gothenburg have experienced that a lot of the men approaching them for assistance have purchased sexual services outside Sweden.

“It’s certainly not unusual that they have bought sex abroad,” Hansson-Palmqvist says. “And it’s quite possible that abroad was the first time they bought sex. They know that it’s wrong to do it here, but they can let go of that when they are abroad on holidays or for work.”

“What I have noticed is that men often begin by buying sex abroad,” Marie Johansson says. “That can lead to them continuing buying sex at home too, even if they promised themselves that they would never do such a thing again.”

But, it must be said that these are the thoughts, motives and regrets of men who sought professional help, either by their own decision or because they were caught in the act. KAST doesn’t meet the sex-buyers who choose to continue with what they are doing.

In Stockholm there is also a helpline called PrevenTell, that anyone who is concerned about their own or someone else’s unwanted sexual behaviour can call to get assistance. The helpline was launched in 2006 by ANOVA, a multidisciplinary centre treating patients with sexual disorders, among other things, at the Karolinska University Hospital. Around 90 percent of all those visiting ANOVA with the aim of getting help are men, and the most typical visitor is 39 years old.

The clinical psychologist Katarina Görts Öberg works at ANOVA, and has talked with a great number of men who have become concerned about their sexual behaviour. Often because

5) www.socialstyrelsen.se/Lists/Artikelkatalog/Attachments/19950/2015-12-4.pdf, “Sex mot ersättning. Utbildningsmaterial om stöd och hjälp till vuxna”. Socialstyrelsen, 2015, pp. 45

these men have felt a gradual loss of control due to spending too much time on sexual activities and/or fantasies.

“They know that they are about to, or already have crossed a line, by watching illegal sexual abuse material on the internet, or by buying sex,” Görts Öberg says.

Görts Öberg says that of all the men approaching ANOVA for treatment after having called PrevenTell, no less than 40 to 50 percent have already bought sex – abroad, mostly as tourists.

“Tourism will help to lower your guard, since you get away from your normal context,” Görts Öberg says. “That, in turn, means that the contact with different temptations will increase. And once you are no longer in your normal context you can liberate yourself from moral codes, and there is less to stop you from committing sexual acts.”

You experience a mental somersault: an ability to liberate yourself from your normal way of acting, because you are abroad: doing things that you would not necessarily do in your own country. And in this case, it will lead you to purchase sexual services from people in prostitution, or commit other forms of sexual exploitation. Görts Öberg calls it a kind of circle. Many people obviously have the intent of buying sex when going abroad, and they can get a kick out of it.

“They can feel excitement in what they are doing. An excitement over liberating themselves from the things normally holding them back. They can detach themselves from those things and forget about the consequences, which don’t seem as obvious when they are far away from home.”

Thailand:

Prostitution in the land of smiles



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“Welcome to Sin City”

Prostitution in the land of smiles

Few things could better sum up the problematic relationship between tourism, prostitution and the culture of impunity in Thailand, like the entrance to Nana Plaza in Bangkok.

Nana Plaza is a courtyard surrounded by three-story buildings, close to the Nana metro station in the Thai capital. The place bathes in neon lights from early evening to early morning, and the buildings are packed with different go-go bars, strip dance venues, brothels and sex clubs. There are dozens of transgender women known as “ladyboys”, hundreds of other prostituted people, and thousands of both Thai and foreign visitors. Nana Plaza oozes sex and has long been a main centre of prostitution in Bangkok. It proudly declares, on an enormous sign above the entrance, that it is “The world’s largest adult playground”.



Prostitution is illegal in Thailand. To the left of Nana Plaza’s entrance is a smaller sign, saying “Lumpini Police Station”. Yet the officers in this police station, and the Thai law enforcement agencies in general, will only very seldom intervene against the widely available and open prostitution. Police actions are very rare, even in cases where the procurement of sex is taking place right in front of a police station, as is the case at Nana Plaza.

One big reason behind this double standard is the very high domestic demand for prostitution. According to the Ministry of Health in Thailand, quoted in a 2013 report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), there are up to 250,000 people in prostitution in the country. Around 10 percent of these people selling sex are men. The UNODC report referred to a sampling of Thai men, which showed how 43 percent of single men and 50 percent of married men reported having purchased sex in their lifetime. Around 13 percent of the married men had purchased sex within the last year. A total of 70 percent of all the Thai men reported that their first sexual experience was with a prostituted person.¹

Another big reason behind the double standard on prostitution in Thailand is explained through a second, smaller sign to the right of Nana Plaza’s entrance in Bangkok. The sign reads: “Land of smiles: your second home”. Thailand adopted the nickname “The land of smiles” in the 1990s, in a big effort to further promote itself as the best tourist destination in Southeast Asia. The campaign was successful, and the nickname stuck. Today Thailand is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, and it was expecting to bring in a record 37.5 million tourists in 2018.² The tourists come for the tasty food, for the warmth and the beaches, for the cheap prices, for drinking – and in many cases, also for exploiting people in prostitution.

1) www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2013/April/first-comprehensive-unodc-study-on-transnational-organized-crime-threats-in-east-asia-and-the-pacific.html?ref=fs4, “Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific”, pp. 17-18

2) www.reuters.com/article/thailand-tourism/update-1-thailand-plans-for-even-more-tourists-as-numbers-top-35-million-idUSL3N1PB1XU

Prostitution in Thailand: a brief history

Thailand is world-famous for its enormous prostitution industry. The country’s organised exploitation of women selling sex has a history that goes back several hundred years.

But the modern prostitution industry with both domestic and foreign demand can be traced back to the 1960s, when American soldiers and servicemen that participated in the Vietnam War came for rest and recuperation in Thailand. An amusement industry of bars and prostitution grew around the soldiers, in certain neighbourhoods in Bangkok and in the then sleepy fishing village of Pattaya.

The still notorious red-light district Patpong in Bangkok had developed a few years earlier, through the demand for prostitution by foreign investors.

Years later, international tourists replaced the soldiers and investors as the biggest foreign sex-buyers. As a 2013 report¹ from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime concludes, the sex market in Thailand is in several ways an international phenomenon.

1) Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific, pp. IV

In many places in the world, female tourists outnumber their male counterparts. But in Thailand, almost twice as many foreign men as women have been vacationing in recent years. More than half of these male tourists are from East Asia. Many of them visit Thailand with the intent of buying sexual services.³

3) Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 18

Prostitution was first criminalised in Thailand in 1960. Today, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, the Criminal Code and above all the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act constitute the legal framework regarding prostitution. The Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act appeared in 1996 and states, that:

“prostitution” means sexual intercourse, or any other act, or the commission of any other act in order to gratify the sexual desire of another person in a promiscuous manner in return for earning or any other benefit, irrespective of whether the person who accepts the act and the person who commits the act are of the same sex or not;

“prostitution establishment” means a place established for prostitution or in which the prostitution is allowed, and shall include a place used for soliciting or procuring another person for prostitution[.]⁴

Under this act, any person selling sex in public places is liable to a fine. Selling sex in establishments meant for prostitution is also punishable with a fine, or with imprisonment for up to a month. Buying sexual services is also illegal and punters can be fined or sentenced to prison for one to ten years.

The act also stipulates that any person who advertises prostitution is liable to a fine or to imprisonment for six months to two years. The punishment for owning and/or managing prostitution establishments ranges from a fine to three to 15 years in prison. Finally, anyone who detains or causes bodily harm to another person to compel them to engage in prostitution is liable to a fine and to imprisonment for a term of ten to 20 years.⁵

But generally, none of these laws are followed. The Thai sex industry today generates such enormous money and engages so many people – from the people in prostitution, to the people sending both domestic and foreign victims of trafficking, to the managers of sex clubs, to the security guards and to the cab

4) <http://un-act.org/publication/view/thailands-prevention-and-suppression-of-prostitution-act-1996/>, Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act, pp. 1

5) Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 2-4

drivers transporting the sex-buyers to brothels and selling them Viagra pills and cocaine during the ride – that it would prove itself extremely difficult to dismantle the whole industry.

The people that present the biggest resistance to having prostitution dismantled are naturally those earning the most money from the industry: the leaders of trafficking rings, and the owners of bars and brothels. It is also highly problematic that certain state officials are also involved in the trade. Many cases have shown the involvement of corrupt segments of law enforcement agencies in Thailand. One example of this from the spring of 2018 was when two police officers were sentenced to 176 and 320 years in prison for direct involvement in the human trafficking of underage girls and women to the prostitution industry.⁶

In other cases, segments of state institutions are also allowing the industry to operate because they are profiting from it financially, through bribes and corruption. It is not very difficult to see why, as the industry remains highly lucrative. The UNODC report from 2013 states that 3,750 foreign victims of trafficking were found in Thailand in the year before, and how these victims had generated approximately USD 169 million in revenue – in only one year. These 3,750 people were of course also far from all the victims of trafficking.⁷

“The country’s first female tourism minister pledged to make Thailand a female-friendly tourist destination in 2016, after serious concern was raised over human trafficking and underage people selling sex in Thai brothels.”

Several times in recent years when major scandals have emerged, the Thai government has pledged to rid itself of its notorious sex tourism. The country’s first female tourism minister pledged to make Thailand a female-friendly tourist destination in 2016, after serious concern was raised over human trafficking

6) www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1448283/traffickers-given-167-to-320-years

7) Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific, pp. IV

and underage people selling sex in Thai brothels.⁸ Raids and mass arrests of both Thai and foreign sex-buyers in brothels and clubs did follow these statements. Similarly, both the prime minister and the Tourism Authority pledged to end sex tourism in the spring of 2018, after the Gambian government had called Thailand a “sex destination” and after Thai police arrested several Russians for running an illegal “sex training class”.⁹ But just like before, things got back to normal after a while.

There are serious doubts that the Thai government alone has the tools to end the international sex industry in the country, even if it wanted to.

The poverty problem

The main reason why prostitution is a global problem affecting many millions of mostly female victims, is that there are buyers – almost exclusively men – who are willing to take advantage of people who are economically or socially vulnerable. A demand is created, leading to the continued exploitation of the female body. This is the problem in its essence and it explains why prostitution is found in all societies in the world.

But several other factors can also jeopardise the social status and well-being of women, and thus further increase the risk of men taking advantage of them. One such factor is poverty. The prostitution industry in Thailand is clearly linked to both poverty and the necessity for Thai women to find an income.

On a Monday evening I befriend a woman called Aon, in the middle of Bangkok’s Nana Plaza. Aon is 32 years old but looks younger. Today is one of the rare days when she is free from selling sex here in the courtyard, but since she has no better place to go, she still comes to Nana Plaza just to get drunk.

“Skål”, she says in perfect Swedish, when we are making a toast to empty our glasses.

8) www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/17/thailand-is-closed-to-sex-tourism-says-countrys-first-female-tourism/

9) www.travelweekly.com.au/article/thailand-clamps-down-on-sex-tourism/

Aon has learned several words and phrases from Swedish customers. That is the word she uses to describe them, customers. She says, that for her, the prostitution is all about a business transaction. Something she has been forced into doing because of her situation and background. Like the majority of the people in prostitution in Thailand, Aon is from the large Isan province in north-eastern Thailand. Isan is the country's poorest province. Most of its inhabitants are farmers or engaged in low-income work.

Aon grew up in a small village with a Thai mother and a Khmer father from Cambodia. The family are poor rice farmers and as a child Aon used to capture snakes, rats and beetles, that her mother would make dinner with. When she grew up, Aon became responsible for improving the financial situation of her parents.

“I worked in a factory here in Bangkok for seven long years, but I could never earn enough. After I had paid my rent and sent money to the family, I had nothing to live on myself.”

Finally, three years ago, she saw no other solution than moving into the prostitution industry, where the payment is much better. A friend helped her to get employed as a “bar lady” in Nana Plaza. She remains there. Aon's parents do not know what she has to do in order to be able to send them money. At least she hopes so. They officially believe that she is just a bartender, and it would be very shameful if the truth came out.

Every evening Aon spends up to ten hours in Nana Plaza, hanging out in the same bar, drinking vodka drinks and looking for customers. If she finds one and the customer wants to bring her with him for sexual services, he has to pay a “bar fine” to her employer, to cover for her being away from her “workplace”. He also has to pay her directly for the sex. If she fails to find a customer, her only payment will be the bar fee of a few hundred Thai baht. That will not be enough for her and her parents.

“I worked in a factory here in Bangkok for seven long years, but I could never earn enough. After I had paid my rent and sent money to the family, I had nothing to live on.”

A common phenomenon in the Thai culture is that it is the daughter – not the son, as in many other countries – that has to support the parents financially after reaching adulthood. Because women are disadvantaged in the labour market, they have a difficult time fulfilling their obligations. Many therefore risk ending up in prostitution as the last solution. And this is certainly true if you are a woman from Isan, a place where the young generation has very few opportunities to find a job that can give them a higher income, or any kind of bright future. This is the poverty problem that explains why so many of the women in the country’s prostitution industry are from the same impoverished province, Isan, or from other parts of northern Thailand.

Aon agrees that the poverty has forced her and many others into selling sex. But even if that poverty disappears, it will not be enough to change things. Behind the prostitution is also the simple but very big question of men thinking they have the right to take advantage of women.

“It will not be enough with the poverty disappearing. Nothing will really change here until the men also change.”

Apps and new challenges of sexual abuse

The tropical paradise island Phuket in southwestern Thailand is another place where there is a large sex industry especially serving male tourists. Phuket has long been the most popular destination for Swedish tourists, and the beach resort town Patong is famous for its late night party scene and prostitution.

The island has a combined shelter and help centre for women and underage girls who have faced abuse. It is located in the green outskirts of Phuket Town and is run by the provincial branch of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. Achara Surakul, who is the governmental director in charge of this assistance, has her office in the same building.

“The women and girls we help here are victims of domestic violence, of human trafficking and sex tourism,” Surakul says. “We mostly see victims of sex tourism who are over 18 years old.

But some girls are involved in it before they are 18, and we see that many women are facing problems already before the age of 20.”

One of her employees at the shelter and help centre is Urai Maiduhem, a social worker with over 20 years of experience of working with abused women and underage girls. Maiduhem explains that the sex industry has seen several changes during those years. The deadly and devastating tsunami in 2004 became a sort of Year Zero for Phuket. Many international NGOs came to assist with rebuilding and with social work, which together with new national laws managed to reduce the problem of sexual exploitation of children.

But the prostitution of adult women remained and has long had problems with cases of human trafficking. Phuket is a place many people come to, or are sent to, to earn money. It is especially common in the sex trade.

“We see a lot of cases from northern Thailand and from Isan,” Maiduhem says. “But we also meet women from Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar. Last year I also met a woman from Russia who came here to ask for help. On Phuket there are many bars owned or controlled by the Russian mafia, and they make Russian women come here to work with customers.”

One of the new, biggest challenges is the growing use of communication between sex-buyers and people in prostitution with the help of mobile phone apps. In these, the women will send erotic pictures of themselves to the men, along with their contact details. Dating sites have been used for years to establish links between buyers and sellers of sex, but lately Maiduhem has heard the women in prostitution speak of changes in the market, because of the apps.

“Several of the women have told me about the apps. Now they do not have to use a middle man any more, they do not have to dress up in the same way and spend hours in a bar, losing money and time. This makes it easier both for the seller and the buyer.”

Why this development opens up a whole new problem is because the use of apps makes the prostitution more secret. It creates a grey zone where there can be an increase in abuse, and where more underage girls may end up being exploited, because there is no one there to check what is happening. The exploitation of children, that

was almost defeated after the tsunami, can make a comeback.

“The government is doing check-ups in the bars to see if the women are over 18 years old,” Maiduhem says. “But this will be irrelevant if the younger girls don’t even go to the bars anymore, since they use the apps.”

The phenomena with a growing use of apps has also been described in a report published by the children’s rights organisation ECPAT International, where it is explained that it is also an even bigger problem that the communication between sex-buyers and the young people they are trying to reach is not only one-way. Teenagers and children alike are also actively seeking to establish contact with foreigners via apps, driven for example by curiosity to learn about the world without parental help, by curiosity to practice foreign language skills or to work as translators or guides. This means that contact can also be actively sought by many teenagers.¹⁰

The Thai government has lately made efforts to try to strengthen the law, at least when it comes to the sexual exploitation of children. There have been efforts to make online exploitation the focus of a national strategy, since this is also linked to the exploitation by travellers and tourists. A task force investigating the legislation has also been created within the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the employer of the Phuket director Achara Surakul.

“We have a new channel now campaigning against child abuse, Child Online Protection Thailand,” Surakul says. “We provide information about how children can protect themselves when they use social media.”

Sexual exploitation of children

Over a number of years a handful of countries in Southeast Asia, among them Thailand, have become established tourist destinations for foreign travellers from all backgrounds. Lately, other

10) www.protectingchildrenintourism.org/resource/use-of-smartphone-applications-by-travelling-sex-offenders/, Use of Smart Phone Applications by Traveling Sex Offenders, pp. 1

countries in the region have also been attracting an increasing number of tourists. While such a development means increased economic opportunities and more investment, organisations such as World Childhood Foundation have highlighted the increased risks of sexual exploitation of children, connected to a growing tourism sector.

Another organisation that has highlighted this increased risk is ECPAT International, which has been campaigning against sexual abuse of children in Southeast Asia for almost 30 years. In a report about the current risks and trends, published in 2017, ECPAT International explains that an increased level of travel and tourism also results in more children being exploited in the commercial sex sector, to fulfil the desires of travelling sex offenders. Such foreign sex offenders integrate themselves into the flows of tourists, and reach countries in Southeast Asia that have not experienced travelling sex offenders, and that for this reason lack adequate legislation and resources to confront them.¹¹

ECPAT International has its headquarters in Bangkok. When Schyst Resande visited the office to talk about these new challenges in a growing tourism, the staff members – who wish to remain anonymous – explain that there is now also a growing understanding that the sexual exploitation of children is bigger than previously expected.

In the past, most attention has been on Western, male offenders. “But more often than not these days, the offenders are travellers from this region,” says John, an ECPAT staff member. “It’s still true that there are older men from Australia, Germany and Sweden, but not as true as we thought it used to be. I don’t know if it’s always been like this and we were just blind to it, or if it changed with the increase in cheaper travelling in the region.”

One of the problems with investigating the crime of sexual exploitation of children is that it is very hard to find good quality data. ECPAT International writes in the report from 2017 that recent research suggests how Asian men are more likely to sexually abuse young girls, and to seek out young virgin girls, and how they also constitute the vast majority of sex offenders targeting children

11) The Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia, pp. 34-35, 38-40

in Southeast Asia.¹² This expanded understanding of the sexual exploitation of children also suggests that the abuse could be more common than previously thought.

Several social circumstances need to be taken into account, to understand why many children end up in the Thai sex industry where they can be exploited by both Asian and Western men, and why the reaction from the majority of society is not stronger. One big reason is poverty. A poor economy is still a major factor behind the sexual exploitation of children, among several other factors in Thailand.

“There is a culture of impunity that comes from a weak legal system and a weak enforcement of the laws, if they exist at all,” John says. “There is also a low general awareness of the crimes.”

Despite this, it appears that the Thai government has been taking some measures to protect children and to punish offenders. Kate, another staff member, says that the Thai law enforcement agencies have been discussing how to develop standard operating procedures, so they know how to enforce laws when the police want to arrest offenders. There have also been discussions on how different agencies in Thailand can work together to integrate databases.

“At a regional level, the Thai government has signed memorandums of understanding with neighbouring countries, to make the process of migrants entering Thailand legal,” Kate says. “They have tried to ease the process to stop people from coming illegally, since many have accompanying children who are vulnerable for exploitation.”

In another part of Bangkok is the office of Friends International, a children’s rights organisation, financially supported by World Childhood Foundation, that works with assisting marginalised youth, homeless youth, migrant youth and young victims of human trafficking. Their most recent campaign has been to highlight why it’s wrong to arrange exoticising visits to Thai schools and orphanages, for tourists.

Friends International first started working in Cambodia in the mid-1990s and followed Cambodian migrants into Thailand to

12) Ibid., pp. 16

assist them here as well. The porous land borders in Southeast Asia have long seen the phenomena of irregular migration and child trafficking for begging and for sexual exploitation.

But long-time Bangkok staff member Sebastien Le Mouëllic explains that Friends International has seen a new threat against children appear in the novel forms of tourism expanding in several countries in Southeast Asia. Both so-called volunteer tourism and community-based tourism are becoming more popular, and this is something travelling sex offenders can exploit.

“If you are a foreigner, a Swede, and you want to abuse a child, you will not go to a hotel where everyone can see you,” Le Mouëllic says. “Instead you will go to the community where everybody lives, where you can interact with the parents or find the kids by yourself. And the major problem we have today is with the community-based tourism, how tourists want to experience to live like ‘real’ Thai people in villages. So you have more and more villages in mountains or remote areas starting to invite tourists, and this is what the predators are targeting.”

Friends International has started working with these communities to increase awareness, and realised that most of the people there were not aware of potential problems happening. They think it is fine and fun to have foreigners coming, that it is good to send their kids with them to learn English.

“But if you have bad intentions, this is the best place to go,” Le Mouëllic says.

“If you are a foreigner, a Swede, and you want to abuse a child, you will not go to a hotel where everyone can see you. Instead you will go to the community where everybody lives, where you can interact with the parents or find the kids by yourself.”

Le Mouëllic and Friends International agree that the Thai national police have worked more actively as of late; not against prostitution but against child exploitation, and that this has reduced several of the problems. More obstacles have been put in front of sexual traffickers, which has obstructed their activities and

exposed more cases. A government shelter where Friends International works recently housed a large group of Laotian girls aged under 18, who were saved by the police and an NGO from a karaoke bar. The girls were victims of human trafficking and had been sexually exploited – many karaoke bars are also brothels where customers can pay girls and women for both company and sex.

“The reason why things have started changing is because of the law enforcement,” Le Mouëllic says. “But of course, just because we cannot see the problem, it does not mean that it has disappeared.”

A special note is also necessary on the problem of boys and young men ending up in prostitution in Thailand. While underage girls and women make up the majority of the people exploited in prostitution both worldwide and in Thailand, this other category of victims also exists, but without receiving the same amount of attention. The vulnerability, though, is the same for both groups. John at ECPAT International explains that the problem of sexual exploitation of children is one that exists in the shadows, and there is a lack of representative data – especially on the exploitation of boys.

“We do know that children from minority groups and boys are far more vulnerable than previously understood, along with children living in poverty. Gay, transgender and gender diverse youth tend to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than their straight peers; however, straight boys can be exploited too.”

As mentioned earlier, the overall sexual exploitation of children by travellers and tourists in the region appears to be dominated by Asian men. But the patterns of sex offenders vary between Asian and western men. One of these differences is that offenders from Asian countries are more likely to seek out “virgin girls” than western men are. Meanwhile, western tourists are more likely to seek out boys than Asian tourists are, John explains.

“Also, vulnerable boys tend to be involved in street-based sexual exploitation, which exposes them to a range of unique dangers, while girls tend to be victimised in brothels and other sex venues.”

While the girls victimised in prostitution often come from Isan and other parts of northern Thailand, the boys are often migrants

or refugees from Burma or belong to ethnic minorities from hill tribes in northern Thailand, where many people are still stateless. They come to the cities to seek financial stability for themselves and their families and face discrimination due to ethnicity and lack of education. Low-skilled jobs are offered to these boys and young men, but low wages, long working hours, unfair treatment and abuse might make the sex industry a more “appealing option” to make money from, according to a 2017 academic article on the prostitution in the Thai city of Chiang Mai.

With no legal protection in Thailand for stateless people and refugees, young men and boys from these groups seek income from selling sex because they believe they can receive larger sums of money than in traditional jobs. Studies have shown how informal communities of these boys and young men selling sex as freelancers on the streets can often be from the same village.

There are reports of hill-tribe, Burmese and Laotian male victims of trafficking ending up as so-called “freelance money boys” available for sexual services on the streets, or in venues of the prostitution industry where they serve the demand from the gay scene. According to the 2017 article, the fetishisation of these young men is typical in the promotion of establishments catering to sex tourists and the gay community in Thailand. Tourists in this community are guided to buy sex at go-go venues and karaoke bars. The owners of these venues and bars, in turn, frequently recruit boys and young men based on their body size and/or ethnicity.¹³

Comments by Interpol and the National Operations Department in Sweden

One of the most famous stories about survivors of the prostitution industry in Thailand, is that of a girl called Lon. Her story has been published in the book “Only 13: The true story of Lon”, which has been translated to Swedish and several other languages. A Catholic

13) <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol2/iss4/10/>, “No Other Choice”: A Baseline Study on the Vulnerabilities of Males in the Sex Trade in Chiang Mai, pp. 8-10

nun fighting against prostitution in Pattaya gave me a copy of the book.

Lon was born in the impoverished Isan province and became the sole supporter of her family after the death of her father. She was exploited in the prostitution industry in Pattaya from the age of 13 and stayed in the industry for five years, during the 1990s. Lon left the prostitution industry at 18 and ended up working as a stripper in Stockholm for two years, before eventually settling in England. Photos from her years in Pattaya show a short and clearly underage girl, with a childish appearance. Because of her looks, Lon became a favourite bargirl among hundreds upon hundreds of American and European sex tourists.

The widespread presence of tourists who also exploited children sexually made Thailand a centre of attention for law enforcement agencies. Interpol, the organisation that coordinates international police cooperation, still keeps a watchful eye on Thailand through its Crimes Against Children team, which is led from its headquarters in Lyon, France, by the Swedish police officer Björn Sellström.

“Considering all the work that has been invested in Thailand, it’s not a surprise that the situation has improved,” Sellström says. “All of the larger United Nations agencies and police agencies are present there, together with many NGOs, to work against this problem. Thailand also understands the value in getting rid of the label of being a destination for travelling child exploiters.”

This is the reason why sex offenders targeting children today have mostly relocated to nearby countries, where the international interventions are not as developed: Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and more than any other place in Southeast Asia, the Philippines. Interpol has also concluded that the great majority of the travelling sex offenders exploiting children are from neighbouring countries in Asia. But that doesn’t mean that the Western sex offenders have disappeared; not from Thailand either, for that matter.

Sellström explains that Swedish men wouldn’t travel all the way to Thailand to sexually exploit children, unless they saw a good reason to do so.

“And Thailand happens to be one of the top destinations for Swedish tourists, and has been for many years. That makes the

sex offenders also want to go there. Especially if there is poverty and a supply of children, but other factors such as access to the sea, cheap living, good food and nice weather also play a part.”

Interpol is still struggling to get good quality information from the ground. Another issue is that many other countries besides Sweden have a problem with offenders going to Thailand. Everyone is competing to cooperate with the Thai law enforcement agencies, which makes most cases very time-consuming to investigate.

“Sex offenders targeting children today have mostly relocated to nearby countries, where the international interventions are not as developed: Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and more than any other place in Southeast Asia, the Philippines.”

Since 2009, the responsibility to investigate Swedish citizens’ sexual exploitation of children abroad lies with the National Operations Department of the Swedish police. The department has a special Child Protection team dealing with cases all around the world, under the leadership of Detective Inspector Cathrine Hagström Hägg. Since 2009, ten cases have ended with convictions in the courts. However, that number doesn’t in any way reflect the real scope of all crimes committed by Swedish men.

“A lot is going on, but who is going to report the crimes? The suspect has no interest in doing so, and not the person selling a child either,” Hagström Hägg says. “There are enormous hidden statistics and our problem is that we can’t get hold of any crime reports. We usually get information about Swedes being involved either from the Thai police if they arrested someone, from other foreign law enforcement agencies and from international NGOs if they observe Swedes doing something.”

Information about suspected sexual exploitation of children abroad also arrives from other departments of the Swedish police, often after evidence of such crimes is found in the form of screenshots or films in a confiscated computer, when other Swedish police departments are investigating other suspected crimes.

The Child Protection team also gets a lot of its information from the Swedish liaison officer in Bangkok, who is responsible of handling all crime cases related to Swedes in all of Southeast Asia. To cooperate with the Thai police is, however, not an easy thing. The police agencies are very bureaucratic and hierarchical, and it can take a frustratingly long time to get formal approval so that the Swedish police can get to work.

“And once we succeed, we might have to start all over again, as all high-ranking contacts tend to be replaced every second year,” Hagström Hägg says.

In the end, this makes it difficult to even begin exchanging information, which is damaging to international efforts to track down travelling sex offenders. And few things can be done from the side of the Swedish law enforcement alone, because Thailand owns the legal cases until they accept international cooperation. As a result, Swedish authorities are unaware of how many citizens are likely to be involved in sexual exploitation of minors in Thailand, and the Thai authorities are not obliged to report this either.

But more information is certainly needed. Hagström Hägg argues that the development of internet-based communication tools has made it even easier for travelling sex offenders to find each other and to share information undetected.

“It seems like these men are drawn to each other somehow. We have had cases where older men who know each other from earlier will go to Thailand to help each other buy accommodation, to share children, to give advice, to pay the bail if someone is arrested, and to explain how to bribe a Thai police officer.”

The health question

The prostitution industry in Thailand creates both mental and physical health problems for the people selling sex. The women, men, children and trans persons exploited in the industry are obviously all at great risk of becoming traumatised for years, by the abuse and violence they have experienced. They can suffer from it sooner or later, and some wounds may never heal.

But the prostitution industry is also closely connected to alcohol consumption and problems related to this. An enormous

amount of alcohol is consumed by foreigners in Thailand’s tourist spots. Rivers of beer and spirits flow through the areas with the highest tourism investments. Nightclubs offer free shots by the entrance, bars offer two beers for the price of one. The happy hours are extended to cover early morning until early evening – and people do drink right after having breakfast. The sex buyers are also part of this culture of alcohol consumption, which means that the people selling sex are forced to be a part of it too.

The case of Aon mention earlier, a woman who spends ten hours a day in a bar in Bangkok’s Nana Plaza and who went there to drink even on her day off, serves as an important example. The people who are selling sex in bars are at special risk of facing alcohol related problems and injuries, as they are often forced to drink practically every day, in order to interact with sex buyers. Alcohol is now estimated to be the third most important health risk factor in Thailand.¹⁴

14) www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4690366/, Alcohol consumption patterns in Thailand and their relationship with non-communicable disease, BMC Public Health, 2015



There are no national statistics on the alcohol related problems faced by the people in the prostitution industry, but to constantly spend time in bars, clubs and other venues where alcohol is flowing naturally increases the risks further. One can also guess that the forced consumption by all of these people has an effect on the general per capita consumption level. Only a minority of Thai adults drink alcohol, yet Thailand has the highest per capita alcohol consumption in Southeast Asia among its citizens.¹⁵

Thailand also experiences substantial alcohol-attributed harm because of the alcohol consumption. The latest global status report on alcohol and health by the World Health Organization, published in 2018, explicitly warns that a harmful use of alcohol contributes to the spreading of sexually transmitted infections, and to men’s sexual violence against women. While alcohol consumption has been decreasing among women in most parts of the world, Southeast Asia stands out as a notable exception.¹⁶

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The prostitution industry and the culture of alcohol consumption are also two big factors causing mental and physical health problems among tourists in Thailand, either as separate problems or as a combined problem. Even if it not always spoken about, a not so small number of tourists end up in a state of mind where they need professional help, before it’s too late.

One of the actors involved in assisting Swedish tourists and expats in Thailand with such issues is the Swedish Church. The newly appointed vicar in Bangkok, Erik Stenberg-Roos, previously worked for three years serving the Swedish community on Phuket.

15) www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/en/, Global status report on alcohol and health 2018, World Health Organization, 2018, pp. 91

16) Ibid., pp. Xiii, xiv, 12

He has met Swedish men who have faced problems with crime and drug abuse in Thailand, but so far, never a Swedish man who admitted to having bought sex in the country.

“I don't think that is something one would say to a priest, because of the great shame that is attributed to it.”

But Stenberg-Roos has met several Swedish men suffering from alcohol related problems. Due to this happening more than just rarely, the Church is also cooperating with the Swedish chapter of the organisation Anonymous Alcoholics, who have a local branch in Thailand reaching out to all those in need. At times, Thai authorities have also contacted Stenberg-Roos to ask for help when they have encountered Swedes in dire situations. On other occasions, it's Swedish travel agencies contacting Stenberg-Roos to inform him about intoxicated guests in need of support.

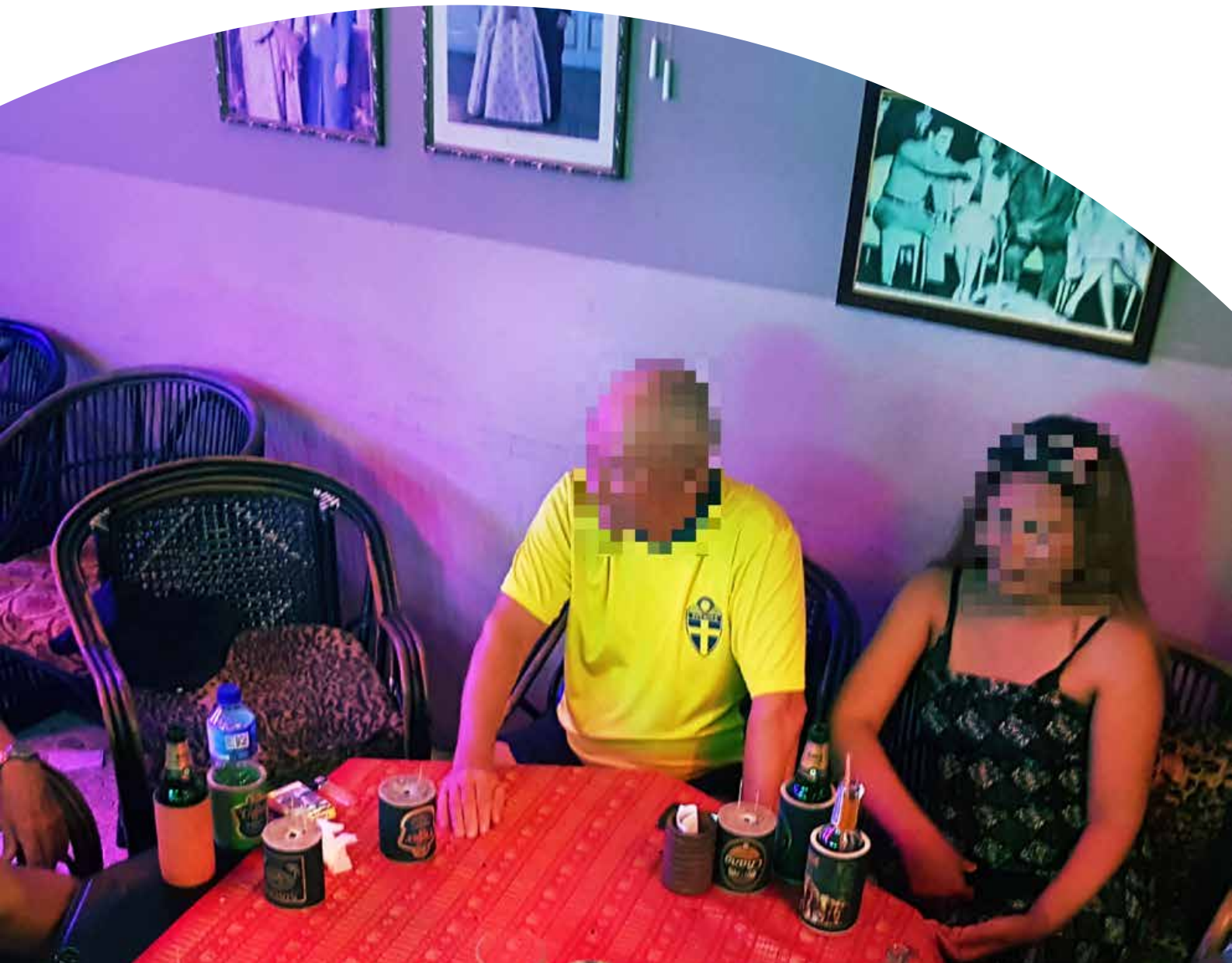
“The travel agencies usually feel that they need extra assistance to deal with a situation, so they turn to the Church to ask for help. But later, when we arrive at the location, it often turns out that the people in question do not want our help. They might have sobered up and don't want to talk to us.”

The number of cases reaching the Swedish Church in Thailand varies. Sometimes it's twice a week, at other times twice a month. Stenberg-Roos suspects that the environment with alcohol and prostitution in Thailand has generated a much bigger number of Swedish men in need than what is shown in the available statistics.

“He has met Swedish men who have faced problems with crime and drug abuse in Thailand, but so far, never a Swedish man who admitted to having bought sex in the country. ‘I don't think that is something one would say to a priest.’”

Mechanisms behind Swedish sex tourism in Thailand

A closer look at why Swedish men choose to pay for sex abroad as well as the myths they create in order to legitimize their actions.



The famous party and prostitution street Bangla Road at Patong Beach, on the island of Phuket, is lined with hundreds of bigger and smaller amusement venues. People are flocking to the most popular bars, chatting to the prostituted bar girls, listening to music and watching strippers perform. Along the whole street, vendors are openly selling black market cigarettes and illegal drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. Other people will walk up to you with small laminated signs, trying to convince you to follow them to the shadier venues down Bangla’s side alleys, where there are illegal “fucking shows” and the infamous “ping-pong shows”, where women will shove table tennis balls, rope, razors, fruit and live animals up their vaginas, and then eject them. All done in front of an audience.

And, of course, Bangla Road is lined with hundreds and hundreds of lightly dressed prostituted people. Women either standing still or walking around, and live-streaming videos of themselves that potential customers can look at.

“The Thai people don’t have the same view of sex as we do.” – “Henrik”

“When you come to Thailand for the first time, you can easily be shocked about all the girls here,” says “Henrik”, a 50-something-year-old man from southern Sweden. “But the Thai people don’t have the same view of sex as we do. They don’t look down on the girls working in the bars and on the streets. Sure, prostitution is officially illegal, but the Thai police don’t see it that way. Like everyone else they see it as a business transaction between two adults.”

Henrik arrived in Patong yesterday. He’s lost count of how many times he’s been to Thailand over the years, but believes it’s something like 40 times. He can easily get nostalgic talking about the “good old days” on Bangla Road, when there were a lot more side alleys where hedonistic things happened.

“Most of it has been cleaned up and the place has lost much of its charm. And it might sound strange, but I think the bar ladies used to be more honest in the old days too. You could sit down in



This chapter exists in Swedish too

To see that version with the original quotes from the interviewed men, go to Appendix II.

a bar, meet a girl, talk and eventually offer her a drink. You were the one in control. These days you can hardly enter a bar without the manager immediately asking if you can buy her and the whole staff a round a drinks. What the hell is that all about?”

As mentioned in the method chapter of the report, I, the author, had a number of encounters with Swedish male sex-buyers in Thailand, working undercover and pretending to be a sex-buying tourist myself. During a three-week period I met Swedish men in restaurants, in ordinary bars, in red-light bars and in strip clubs in Bangkok, in Pattaya and on Phuket. My mission was to figure out the mechanisms behind why they decided to visit prostituted people for sexual services.

It turns out that there are several different mechanisms behind why the Swedish men have paid for sex, and they are also usually influenced by a couple of these mechanisms simultaneously. Other than that, the men I met had few things in common. They came from all over Sweden, some of them from cities and others from villages and towns. Their ages ranged from the late 30s to the early 70s. They had different socio-economic backgrounds, and some had academic degrees while others have always worked with manual labour.

One thing that many of them had in common is that they had previously been in relationships or marriages with Swedish women, but not anymore. They were usually single when they first arrived in Thailand. The only things that all of them had in common was that they were born in Sweden, and that they all saw the women in prostitution as being there for the taking.

Going local, going traditional

It all started with a long, sweaty walk from downtown Pattaya all the way over to Jomtien Beach, some five or six kilometres away. The sun was burning hot. After “Mats” and his friend had been walking for almost two hours, they took a break in a massage salon for a full body treatment. The young lady in the salon asked Mats to undress, and to also take his underwear off. Mats didn’t know what to expect. The lady gave him an excellent massage, rubbing

his buttocks and groin too. Mats got an erection. She asked him to turn over on his back and pointed to his erected penis. Extra massage?

“In that situation, it was practically impossible to say no,” Mats says. “And that was how I first discovered how many of the massage salons are actually hidden brothels. You get to follow the lady up to a separate room, you get an oil massage for 15-20 minutes, and then a proper fuck.”

“I see it as a financial transaction between two individuals, like if I would go and buy a kilo of pork.”

– “Mats”

I bump into 47-year-old Mats from Gothenburg on a night out in Pattaya, when he has stopped to drink a few beers in a bar. Six years have passed since got his first “happy ending” in the massage brothel. Since then he has returned as often as possible. He immediately fell in love with the Thai food, the nice weather and the cheap prices, but first and foremost with the cheap sex. Before going to Thailand, he used to visit the Spanish Canary Islands for holidays. But buying sex there would cost him 120 euros every time, and he could not know if the woman in question would “stick a knife into him”. Here, in Thailand, you can get the whole deal very safely and pay only 30 or 40 euros.

“My friends back home started saying that I had got hooked on prostitution. Well, for sure. I have never rejected prostitution. I see it as a financial transaction between two individuals, like if I would go and buy a kilo of pork.”

People like Mats will often repeat what other defenders of prostitution are saying: that most people in the Thai society have a “different view of sex”. They claim that prostitution is a lot more accepted in Thailand, than in a country like Sweden. Hence, Mats has “gone local” and defends himself and his actions with the same mind-set he claims is dominant in the Thai society.

But then again, he asks, what is prostitution? And what really counts as sexual services? He recalls reading in the paper a while ago that there had been a police operation on different Thai

massage salons in Stockholm, where customers had been given “happy endings”. One of the Thai women charged with having operated a brothel denied the accusations and explained in an interview that she had simply offered a “massage of the penis”, which she did not consider a sexual service.

“Giving a penis massage is a sexual thing in Sweden, but not here in Thailand,” Mats says. “Here you see Thai men also visiting salons for the same kind of massage. It’s just a very different way of looking at sex, and Swedish women have a very hard time understanding it.”

“Giving a penis massage is a sexual thing in Sweden, but not here in Thailand.” – “Mats”

Mats falls into a category of sex-buyers that claim to have “gone local” in their thinking. He considers buying sex fully acceptable, as he sees women selling sex as a very natural and normalised thing in Thailand. Mats argues that certain sexual services should not even be labelled prostitution, an argument that can easily be rejected as he and other men are still paying for the services – which is, in essence, what constitutes prostitution.

He shoves a large portion of Swedish snus under his lip and drinks a mouthful of beer. Mats can easily pass as a stereotypical macho man, embracing an ultra-masculine identity and conservative gender values. It’s been easy for him to go local in Thailand. But he also claims to have changed some of his earlier values, thanks to his frequent trips to Thailand.

“I used to be the world’s biggest homophobe,” he says. “I could not stand gay men; they were disgusting bastards who should all die. But when I came here and saw one ladyboy after the other, what could I tell them? You are unnatural, go and die? That way of thinking became even more difficult after I had a few beers with the ladyboys and discovered that they are also humans, getting plastic tits simply because they want to become ladies. Ladyboys and transsexuals are much more accepted here than they would be standing on a street in Gothenburg.”

Almost a year ago now, Mats also found love in a bargirl he picked up and at first paid to have sex with. He now calls her his permanent girlfriend. This has caused friction with several family members, who have had a hard time accepting such a choice of partner. His mother immediately asked him how much he had paid for the girlfriend when first meeting her, which resulted in a heated argument. Mats says that, sure, one could argue that it's very easy to find a girlfriend in Thailand, since the women want to have better lives.

“I know that it's the same with my girlfriend, but that's how all people work. I would have hoped too that a 50-year-old hag would step forward in Gothenburg and ask if I could fuck her once a week, if she could get this and that as a reward. Of course, I would have accepted that immediately.”

Mats has applied for a Swedish visa, to eventually bring his girlfriend home to stay with him in Gothenburg. He told her when applying, that he would only demand one single thing of her: that she helped him take care of their home. She replied: “If I come to Sweden, you will work, and I will take care of your home.”

“Thai girls are what Swedish girls used to be until 50, 60 years ago. If I'm thirsty I don't have to go get a glass of water myself, she will get it for me. And I think that attracts a lot of Swedish men. Who the hell would not want to be treated like a king?” – “Mats”

This is an advantage Mats discovered earlier in Thailand, when paying for prostituted women to stay with him for longer than just an hour: the new services you would get as a man. This is something that comes with the traditional gender role for Thai women, which is completely different to that in Sweden.

“Thai girls are what Swedish girls used to be until 50, 60 years ago. If I'm thirsty I don't have to go get a glass of water myself, she will get it for me. And I think that attracts a lot of Swedish men. Who the hell would not want to be treated like a king? I have a couple of friends back home who are left-wing, and they would probably call me a male chauvinist. But that's their culture, and this is my culture.”

Mats has thoroughly enjoyed the benefits of more traditional gender roles. This is something that he now wants to bring with him permanently, to Sweden. He says that equality between men and women is not a bad thing, but that Sweden is such a “damn politically correct country”, that people can’t see that there are other forms of relationships in other countries.

He refers to the documentary film “Thailand Dreams” (“Thailandsdrömmar”) from 2016, where the film makers Renzo Aneröd and Hanna Aneröd investigated why several of Renzo’s male relatives from Gothenburg had chosen to migrate to Thailand, were they also found partners. The men were missing the feeling of the nuclear family they had grown up in, in “the old Sweden”.¹⁷ Asian women are raised to serve a much more traditional role in the home than Swedish women are. Mats can recognise himself in the film.

“I don’t just want to be treated as a man, but I want a relationship where she wants to do everything for me, and I want to do everything for her. My last Swedish wife would only complain about me not cleaning the kitchen, not cleaning the living room, and would ask when we could go to buy her things. I couldn’t stand that culture.”

The good-hearted helper

On an early evening in August I’m out taking a walk in Pattaya to find a Swedish-owned restaurant, where they allegedly are serving great food from the home country. The place, however, turns out to be empty of Swedish customers. I continue my walk and a few streets south I stumble upon a small, rugged Thai restaurant where some older Western men sit in plastic chairs and are drinking ice cold beer.

“Hugo” is one of them. He is 71 years old and retired from his work as a hospital technician five years ago. He says that he “was” from Stockholm. *Was?*

17) The documentary film “Thailand Dreams” (“Thailandsdrömmar”) premiered in 2016. For several years the documentary makers Renzo Aneröd and Hanna Aneröd followed and interviewed male relatives of Renzo that had migrated to Thailand in the 1990s, and another relative that was looking to fill his life with a Thai wife.

“Yes, *was*. I have sold everything I owned there and there is nothing left. I live here now and I’m never going back to Sweden again. There are only Muslims there now; they don’t want old people any more. All I need from Sweden is my snus, and I usually ask people travelling to Thailand to bring me some.”

Hugo says that he lives a good life here in Pattaya, and he has a “Thai lady” too. He first came to Thailand on a business trip in 1996, and returned many times after. It was the food, the sunny weather, and most of all the women, that made him love the place and eventually emigrate here.

“Women in Sweden think that we are bastards and damned perverts to go here. But we can’t all think the same way. Here in Thailand people don’t see the ladies as whores, but instead as escorts for company. They look at it differently and accept it.”

Hugo is another man defending prostitution with the argument that the local population is fine with it, while in reality there is also resistance and a much more complex view on prostitution in the Thai society.

“I live here now and I’m never going back to Sweden again. There are only Muslims there now; they don’t want old people any more.” – “Hugo”

Over the years, Hugo has paid several Thai women for long-term sexual services. He considers the woman he is with now to be his permanent girlfriend. It doesn’t bother him that she was in the prostitution industry when they first met. Like many other women selling sex, Hugo’s girlfriend is from the impoverished Isan province in north-eastern Thailand. She is there now to visit the family for a couple days. Hugo stayed at home.

“All Thai ladies want to get together with a ‘farang’, a Westerner, who can take care of them financially and help them support their parents. It’s all about money and getting a better life.”

And Hugo was happy to help the parents and his girlfriend even back when he was still paying her for sex. He has remained a “helper” after the cash-based relationship developed into something more long-term.

The “good-hearted helper” is a role many sex-buyers in Thailand identify with. Every Swedish man that I meet is fully aware of how the women are from poor families and didn’t join the prostitution industry just out of curiosity. At the same time, several of them express a belief that they are “helping” the women, when paying them for sexual services: that they have to earn their money selling sex anyway, so the men are actually doing them a favour by becoming their customers!

I spend an evening out in Pattaya together with “Marcus”, a 47-year-old from Stockholm. He works part time as a musician and plays and tours with a well-known band that had several commercial hit songs in the mid-1990s. Marcus is one of the original band members. He’s in Thailand for two weeks and has been here many times before.

We start the evening in a Swedish-owned bar, drinking six shots of vodka before heading to the nearby red-light district LK Metro. Marcus prefers to come here instead of to other places. There are sex clubs along the famous Walking Street here in Pattaya, but he thinks there are too many Arab and Indian men there. Marcus picks a sex club where the women are wearing both their names and numbers on a tag, attached to a string or to their tiny clothes. If a sex buyer is too drunk to read or remember their names, he can hopefully at least see the number.

Inside the club, Marcus starts sucking on the naked breasts of a young stripper, before he proceeds to tell a story of how he took a “young street girl” out for a good time in Bangkok.

“We went to that famous restaurant with a roof terrace, the one from the movie ‘The Hangover Part II’. It was full of rich Chinese, Japanese and Korean business men. The prices at this place were insane and we only ordered two tiny starters, but it still cost me 9,000 Thai baht. Almost 250 euros. The girl I had with me came from the countryside in Isan. She was just staring at the prices in the menu. She said that a full meal with a starter and dessert cost the same amount of money that her parents could live on for two full years. They were working in the forest, extracting sap from rubber trees.”

Marcus felt pity for the woman, who came from such a poor background, and wanted to show her a new world with the visit to

the luxury restaurant. It's unclear if she appreciated the gesture, but Marcus hoped so. He also made sure to pay quite generously for her sexual services, which was money he hoped would partly go to her parents.

The “good-hearted helper” doesn't mind expenses and to give gifts. But he still requires sex in return.

Some of the men also think very highly of themselves collectively and can argue that they are helping the women simply by being Swedish, which somehow guarantees that the prostituted women are treated better than if they were to spend time with non-Western men.

“Tobias” from Gothenburg, a tall man just over 60, tells me during an evening out in Pattaya that the Thai women are very happy that Swedish and Scandinavian men are visiting Thailand in such great numbers.

“Because we are nice and polite to them, while there are those who are cruel instead: the Indians and the Arabs. The Thai ladies hate them and that is why Westerners also hate them. The Indians always send out just one guy to arrange for a meeting with a lady, but when they arrive to the hotel room three other Indians are waiting there, and they will all take turns to fuck her for just 1,000 baht. She has no way of getting out of there. That's how fucking disgusting they are, I can't even find the words for it. That's something we Swedes or Scandinavians would never do! We have a whole different kind of respect.”

“We are nice and polite to the women, while there are those who are cruel instead: the Indians and the Arabs (...) We have a whole different kind of respect.” – “Tobias”

Racist remarks and generalisations are widespread among the Swedish sex buyers. Comments like the one from Tobias show how some of the Swedish men consider their exploitation of the women to be innocent, and even good-hearted, compared with the exploitation by the men from Asia. From a racist point of view, Swedish and Scandinavian men will treat the women better and with greater respect than Indian and Arab men could ever do.

Girlfriend-for-hire

“Conny” gets a new message every other minute, on the different apps and dating sites he is using on his phone to communicate with Thai prostituted women. Tinder, Line, ThaiLove, ThaiCupid. The list is long. All you need to do is to register a profile at one of the sites, he says. Next thing you know, 300 women have sent you messages.

“Here is one of them,” Conny says. “I ‘liked’ her earlier today, and she wrote to me instantly: ‘What are you doing? You want to meet me?’ But I don’t think she’s actually 20 years old, she looks more like 26, right? Here is another lady, who works at a bar close to here. I usually write to her if I need a blowjob in the daytime.”

These days, Conny and many other foreign men are frequently using various apps and dating sites to arrange meetings with women. These are the same apps that the social worker in the governmental women’s shelter on Phuket warned about. The apps are making it even easier to buy sex. They also make it easier for some men to take advantage of girls under 18.

Conny is nearly 50 and from a small town in central Sweden. He’s been coming to Thailand a couple of times per year during the last five years, and his greatest interest here is the sex. On this visit, the first woman he paid to join him in his hotel room was the young cleaning lady at the hotel he’s staying at, on the day he checked in. Now she’s been a bit too persistent in trying to get his attention again, he says.

But on his second day in the country, Conny went to see a prostituted woman in the city of Khon Kaen, in the north-eastern Isan province. He met her via a dating site a year ago and calls her his “girlfriend”. The last time he went to Thailand, he took her on a five-day trip to a paradise island. But he had also been in touch a lot with a very cute 19-year-old woman called May, via a dating site. So he left his “girlfriend”, flew down to Bangkok and met with May, who brought her family members with her. It turned out that May was a lot quieter in real life than on the internet. And after only one day she started asking Conny for money, to help with the renovation of her family’s restaurant.

“She tried to use me,” Conny says. “I had already paid all the hotel expenses for us and her family members. So I lied and said

that I needed to go to help a friend, and went back to the girlfriend in Khon Kaen.”

In real life, Conny is far from a playboy able to change love partners as often as other people change their underwear. He is a middle-aged, bald and obese man, who lives a lonely single life back in Sweden. Here in Thailand he fills his days with as much sex and many women as possible, to make up for the lonely times at home.

Conny and many other men are after what can be called a “girlfriend experience”, where they try to establish fictional, usually short-term “relationships” with women in prostitution. According to research, both younger and older men find such “girlfriends” during visits to Thailand. In some cases the men are doing it just for fun, and especially when it’s with a woman of the same age, they can even argue that it’s not prostitution: that they are not “paying” a woman for sexual services and company, but instead “giving” her things.

In other situations, the men looking for a girlfriend-to-hire are trying to fill a gap in their lives. They might have been single for a long time, they live alone, and lack female companionship. They might suffer from all of these things and have low self-esteem.

Conny is definitely after a “girlfriend experience” with some of the women he’s paying, and he’s trying to find a girlfriend-for-hire. He doesn’t only want them for sexual services. He wants to spend days and nights with them, and talk to them about society, history and Thailand’s past. But he explains that he has been frustrated and disappointed, over how “uneducated” the young prostituted women from the poor Isan countryside are.

“They only care about their mobile phone, their job, the money and the street outside. That’s their whole world.”

Not good girlfriend material.

On a Wednesday evening Conny arrives with a new woman to a bar where a few Swedish men have gathered to drink and talk. She’s wearing braces and could probably be 27 or 28 years old. Conny got in touch with her the day before, via the Tinder app. She is quiet and I can’t hear her utter a single word during the entire evening.

A few hours later we have all gone to a strip club, to watch bare-breasted women dance on a stage and cater to potential sex-buyers. Conny's Tinder date doesn't look happy to be in this establishment. It's noisy, the alcohol is flowing and she's got a lot of competition from other women. Perhaps she would prefer to go back to Conny's hotel room to sell the sexual services, so that she can move on. She leans her head against his shoulder and starts to squeeze his thigh.

Tobias, the older man from Gothenburg, has joined us at the club.

“Ah, look at that. Conny, I think she likes you.”

“No, it's only about the money,” Conny says, and rubs his thumb over the tips of his index finger and middle finger.

“No, no, I have a good eye for these things. She really likes you,” says Tobias.

“Really, you think so? Yes you might be right,” says Conny, now with a wide smile on his face.

Perhaps this is the girlfriend material he is looking for. She may actually like him, even if Conny is paying her to be with him, and despite them not having said a word to each other during the whole evening.

It must be mentioned that plenty of Swedish men have met local women who perhaps have never engaged in prostitution, while vacationing in Thailand, and several Swedish men also got into relationships with these women. Some Thai girlfriends have relocated to Sweden, where they have married their Swedish men and built families with children. In other situations, Swedish men have successfully found a new girlfriend or wife via Thai dating sites, as the documentary ‘Thailand Dreams’ shows.

Stories like these are well known among the Swedish sex-buyers in Thailand, and those who are looking for a “girlfriend experience” or some form of a long-term “relationship”, want to experience the same kind of success story. This is also why some of the sex-buyers can argue that certain “lovesick” Swedish men searching for a girlfriend have to take good care in Thailand. They argue that it's important not to get tricked, and “to have one's feelings stepped on”. Especially if there are signs of depression.

There are plenty of stories circulating about foreign men

committing suicide in Thailand, often in spectacular ways. Several webpages are dedicated to keeping a track of all the stories, with gruesome video and photo material showing lifeless men from Sweden and other countries. The reasons can be many: accumulating debts, incurable sicknesses, alcoholism. But foreign men also commit suicide because of the prostitution industry.

“There is something called the ‘Pattaya Dive’. It means that you check in to the 17th floor in a hotel and take a dive from the balcony down to the parking lot.” – “Staffan”

In a Swedish-owned bar in downtown Pattaya I meet a man we can call “Staffan”. Despite being only in his late 30s, Staffan has been buying sex for several years. He acts and thinks in the same way as the older Swedish sex buyers he is drinking beer with in the bar. Staffan tells me that certain men try to find love and relationships when arriving in Thailand. Some men are left devastated when their “relationships” crumble, and they realise that it was never real. Thai newspapers regularly report about foreign men killing themselves, while also mentioning considerably younger Thai “girlfriends” or “boyfriends” somehow being part of the picture. Certain ways of killing yourself are well known among the sex buyers.

“There is something called the ‘Pattaya Dive’,” Staffan says. “It means that you check in to the 17th floor in a hotel and take a dive from the balcony down to the parking lot. I’ve met several guys here who got seriously depressed after they were left by their Thai women. Really tragic stories. I guess these are guys who didn’t have any luck with finding love at home. Who didn’t have a girlfriend for several years.”

Staffan’s insight into foreign men’s suicides in Pattaya, into having bad luck in love, and into loneliness, makes me wonder if perhaps he is talking partly about his own experiences. But these dark topics about depression, suicides and men allegedly being cheated or left by Thai “girlfriends” do indeed appear, when certain bar conversations get deep enough.

Despite being younger than most other Swedish sex buyers, Staffan has also been on the look-out for a girlfriend. Some time ago he met a prostituted woman that grew up in the north-eastern Isan province. Staffan sticks to having only two beers this entire evening in the bar, because tomorrow he will be going to meet the “parents-in-law” in his “girlfriend’s” village.

If things work out, some Swedish men manage to hang on to the same girlfriend-for-hire for years. On several nights I manage to bump into the colourful man “Tor” in different bars and restaurants in Pattaya, usually those serving Swedish food. Tor is 63 and has a long, successful career in a certain sport behind him. He still works as a coach for Swedish children and teenagers participating in that sport.

For the past eight years, Tor has been returning to Pattaya to spend time with one specific girlfriend-for-hire, a woman called Nicki who is now a few years over 30. She is always accompanying Tor to the bars and restaurants. It’s difficult to say if any “feelings” are behind Tor’s decision to return to the same woman year after year, but Nicki at least does provide Tor with sexual pleasure. One evening, when we and several other Swedes are participating in a drinking game, Nicki pulls out since she doesn’t like the Turkish pepper shots.

“It’s just as well that she’s pulling out. If she gets too drunk she can’t suck my dick later,” says Tor.

“And she came. I think she came five times!” – “Max”

A paradise for men

On a Friday evening, 43-year-old “Max” from Luleå arrives at a bar in Pattaya where a few other Swedish men are already drinking beer and enjoying themselves. Max has a chest wet with sweat and has unbuttoned his black silk shirt halfway down to his belly, in an attempt to cool off. He just finished having sex with a young woman called Jenny, in his apartment down the street.

“Shit, I haven’t stopped sweating yet,” Max exclaims. “She’s one of the best girls I’ve ever fucked. She didn’t allow me to fuck her in the ass, but I didn’t mind. She’s got such a beautiful ass that I can

just lie in bed and look at it. You should have seen when she was on all fours, and I was doing her from behind. She’s thin on her upper body, but she’s got an African ass and big thighs, and it was making such a nice smacking sound. And she came. I think she came five times!”

Some of the other men laugh quietly. Max always says that he just had sex with one of the best girls ever. But he’s something of a hero to Staffan, the man in his late 30s with a special knowledge about suicide and loneliness.

“I can’t understand how you can fuck as much as you do, Max. If I get laid once a week I’m satisfied. You’re such a stud!”

Two days ago Max brought a different woman to the bar, someone he had picked up outside his local 7 Eleven shop. She was young and very attractive. Her sister, who is studying to become a teacher joined them in the bar and Max offered to pay for a threesome with both of the sisters, but they declined.

However, several “problems” have appeared. Max has a girlfriend, a Cambodian woman who was formerly selling sex and who Max stays with each time he returns to Thailand. The girlfriend left the city for five days to attend a wedding in Cambodia. Max immediately went looking for women selling sex on the same street he lives on and brought them back to his girlfriend’s apartment. He claims that both Jenny and the other young woman have fallen in love with him, because he gave them such a good time in bed. They know where he lives, and his girlfriend is returning home tomorrow.

Max could probably get a girlfriend in Sweden too. He’s good-looking and fit with swelling muscles and interesting tattoos all over his body. He’s got money – he runs his own construction company and receives 1,000 euros a week from the work his employees do for him.

But Max appears to be unable to stop buying sex. He tells me that he has spent 10,000 euros on women and nightlife during his first five weeks in the country, this summer of 2018, despite already having a girlfriend here. Something within him makes it impossible to be pleased with what he has. He’s constantly chasing after new women to buy sex from.

Even if the other Swedish men in the bar mutter that he only has himself to blame for his problem, that he’s stupid to bring prostituted women over to his own place, they show that they still *understand* why Max and other men can almost lose their minds here. Doing irrational things can be *excused*. This is, after all, Thailand!

“Welcome to Sin City, where everything is allowed,” was the first things I heard from the first Swedish sex tourist I met in Thailand.

We all leave the bar together and head to a nearby club in the LK Metro red-light district, where Max joins the women up on the strip stage. He is wearing his leather belt as a leash around his neck, and gets one of the women to drag him into a dark room in the back. 7,000 baht for another sex session.

“Sweden is an occupied country. We have received a million migrants in no time, and these people will never ever contribute anything.” – “Niklas”

The all-present prostitution industry in Thailand is also attractive for other men, who have long been engaged in sex tourism. “Niklas”, a 62-year-old grandfather from Gothenburg, is yet another Swede who has been coming to Thailand for years. He decided to go into early retirement and cut all ties to Sweden nine months ago, when he moved permanently to Pattaya. One big reason behind his move was the “suicidal migration policy” back home.

“Sweden is an occupied country,” he says. “We have received a million migrants in no time, and these people will never ever contribute anything. They are too poorly educated and outright stupid. It’s no secret that Arabs and Muslims are inbred, after having married their cousins for thousands of years. Who knows how many years I’ve got left to live, and I won’t spend them in Sweden, just going around being angry.”

Several other Swedish sex buyers in Thailand share such far-right and racist ideas, about their motherland having been invaded and destroyed by “useless Muslims”. One could argue

that it is ironic how some of them choose to migrate to a distant country, where they show little effort to adapt to local culture and customs, while not contributing anything – save for their money going to the local entertainment and prostitution industries.

But the reason why Niklas chose to go into “exile” to Thailand of all places, and specifically to the brothel-city Pattaya, is obvious.

“This is a paradise for men. This is the complete opposite of Sweden. Here you have a whole city with at least 100,000 beautiful, young and willing girls.”

Niklas has always enjoyed having sex with two women at the same time. In Thailand he has expanded to three women at the same time. He is well known for his foursomes among the other Swedish sex buyers, that he often meets in bars.

Niklas is also the person I meet who has the most experience of sex tourism in other countries. He tells stories about his many visits to Prague and Budapest, both fantastic places where the most important mission has always been to find beautiful prostituted women. In Budapest he stumbled upon a sex club where he could pick out two women and take an elevator up to a penthouse, where he could smoke cigars and drink champagne in a pool with the two naked beauties, before going into a bedroom. Niklas is an avid cigar smoker and spent 5,000 euros on prostitution in just a matter of days when visiting Cuba a few years ago.

Not all of the Swedish pensioners have such resources to spend on prostitution. On the contrary, some of the sex buyers I meet who moved to Thailand must be careful not to consume too much in bars, as it empties their wallets too quickly. But Niklas has a very generous pension after having had a well-paid job as a senior engineer, in one of Sweden’s biggest private companies.

His savings will last for a very long time in cheap Thailand, and Niklas intends to continue buying women in this “paradise” he has found.

“This is a paradise for men. This is the complete opposite of Sweden. Here you have a whole city with at least 100,000 beautiful, young and willing girls.” – “Niklas”

“I think it’s very fucking dumb to ever get a girlfriend here. Why would you, when there are so many other women to meet?”

As an observer from the outside, it’s also interesting to hear some of the Swedish men discuss practical problems related to age, that they must find solutions to. Impotence or problems with keeping an erection would spoil the biggest fun in this paradise for men. On several occasions the men discuss what combination of pills that work the best.

“If I take a Cialis as a foundation, I can feel a little something. Then I add a Viagra just before starting, and that really does the trick,” according to 60-year-old Tobias.

With both joy and envy in his voice, Tobias tells a story about a man called Lelle who used to frequently visit Pattaya. Despite being 80, Lelle didn’t face any erectile problems and would “fuck like a bunny” even with women 50 years younger than him. How incredibly lucky the rest of them are, that these pills have been invented to help those not so fortunate, says Tobias.

“Seriously though, I think that I would have been just as virile as Lelle, if I hadn’t gone to get a snip. God damn. After that I didn’t fuck for six years. And I cried for two of those years.”

What do you mean, Tobias, “got a snip”?

“I got sterilised, so that I wouldn’t have any more children. I’ve already got eight kids. After that I wasn’t horny or anything, anymore.”

Why didn’t you just use a condom instead?

“What! Do you think I’m the kind of person that would use a condom? I can count the number of condoms I have ever used on just one hand. And three of those I threw at the wall. What the hell, how can you fuck with a condom on?”

“If I take a Cialis as a foundation, I can feel a little something. Then I add a Viagra just before starting, and that really does the trick.” – “Tobias”

Something must also be said about the trans “ladyboy” scene in the Thai prostitution industry. The Swedish men often leave

an impression of being very masculine, macho and traditional-minded, which many times goes hand in hand with a preference for only heterosexual encounters. But several of the Swedish men actually admit to having paid for sexual services from people who were born as biological men.

As mentioned earlier, the great majority of the people in Thailand's prostitution industry are women and underage girls who were born as biological women and always identified with that gender. But an estimated 10 percent of the people selling sex are underage boys, young men and trans people. Many of the trans people identify themselves as trans women instead of as men. The local term for trans women in Thailand is *kathoey* – to the international crowd they are commonly known as “ladyboys”. Some of these people take hormones and go through surgery to get breasts and change their genitals, but it is also common to just do the breast implants. Others stay flat-chested until they can afford any of this. Western male tourists are more likely to buy sexual services from men and from trans people than the Asian male tourists are.

Tobias, the sterilised man from Gothenburg, explains one evening that he often finds the “ladyboys” sexier than what he calls real women, as the former are both taller and more curvaceous. He says that even if you would have an issue with seeing a second penis when a “ladyboy” undresses, it's an easy thing to pay for at least a blowjob.

“I would think that we have all got blowjobs from ladyboys. Everyone except for Niklas, he refuses because he doesn't like homosexuals.”

Tobias continues the conversation with Conny, about how it can often be tricky to tell whether a woman is a “real woman”, or not. One of Tobias's several sons came to visit him in Pattaya recently, together with a friend. Out and about in the nightlife they had drooled over an incredibly attractive stripper on a stage. Both had a shock, says Tobias while laughing, when they realised that she had a penis.

“Yep, it can be difficult to tell,” Conny says. “Many ladyboys will tape their dicks and balls up between their legs. I discovered that once when I had brought a girl home and we were about to go into

the shower. She did not tell me anything in advance. So, I only got a blowjob.”

Both Tobias and Conny seem aware of the trauma and problems that many people in prostitution can suffer from, sooner or later. They continue talking about how “ladyboys” can suffer from depression, how they can lose their libido due to the surgery, and how several end up committing suicide.

“They get psychological problems,” says Tobias. “But the whole reason why they go through their sex change is their constant desire for money. There are countless ladyboys here.”

Tobias and several other men argue that some of the “ladyboys” have adopted that identity not because it’s really who they are, but because it’s a more effective way to earn money in the prostitution industry. Despite their lack of insight into the identities and motivations of trans women, the Swedish sex-buyers are still surprisingly aware of the psychological problems that these and people in prostitution are suffering from.

But these discussions and this awareness doesn’t mean that the Swedish men will stop paying “ladyboys” and others for sexual services.

“The whole reason why they go through their sex change is their constant desire for money. There are countless ladyboys here.” – “Tobias”

Alcohol and laissez-faire

The singer is preparing songs on her computer for the background music, while the sound technician is rigging the microphones on the stage. Once a week, this Swedish-owned restaurant has a karaoke evening where a Thai woman sings for four hours. Only Western material, from the 1960s to the 1980s. She is about to start the show.

“Anders”, 47, sits down with a bang on one of the tall bar chairs next to me. He got drunk earlier today and managed to fall asleep in his hotel room, which made him miss a date he had at 6pm. The

prostituted woman in question gave him “the best fuck in his life” two days ago, at a sex club nearby. But he has managed to reach her, and she’s on her way back.

“Try some of this.”

He hands over a plastic bottle with orange juice. I take a sip, and it tastes bitter.

“It’s Viagra. One and a half pills. Usually half a pill does the trick but I’m still tired, so I need some extra to get working.”

Anders arrived to Thailand for the first time in 1990, when he was only 19. He immediately got hooked on the atmosphere and the beautiful women, and has been returning ever since. Countless times. He is one of the co-owners of the restaurant we are sitting in, and for that reason he always stays for free in one of the hotel rooms upstairs, that are also owned by the restaurant.

The woman from the sex club arrives. She appears to be somewhere around 35 years old. We order drinks and sit down together at one of the dinner tables. Anders leans over towards me.

“The whore looked more beautiful when I was drunk.”

A few minutes later it’s 8pm and the karaoke evening begins. The singer on the stage performs one rock classic after the other. Anders leans over again.

“This one usually never wears any underwear. So it’s all good to go, to stick a finger or two inside her.”

He lets his hand slip under the woman’s skirt. She doesn’t move a muscle in her face, as Anders starts fingering her under the table.

“Yep. I was right. Damn, now I’m starting to feel a little horny. And she’s starting to look better now when I’m getting drunk again.”

The singing continues. Anders is emptying his fourth bottle of Chang beer. He is pouring with sweat, and the woman from the sex club is wiping it off his face, throat and neck with a paper tissue.

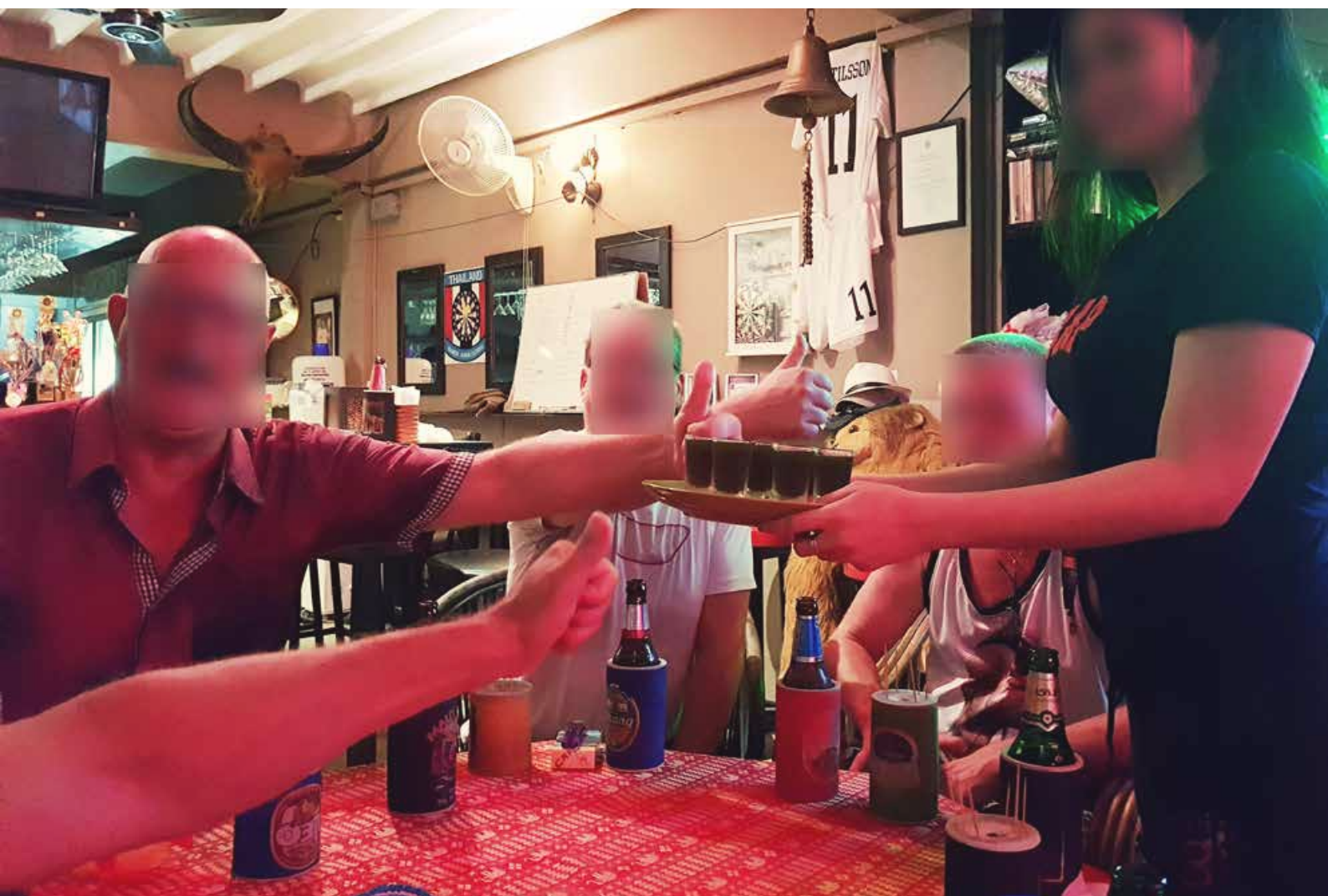
“It’s such a service. When we’re in the shower together she will wash my dick, my balls and my butt. That’s something a girl back home would never do.”

Two songs later, Anders take the woman up to his room.

“She's starting to look better now when I'm getting drunk again.” – “Anders”

It’s very easy to criticise Anders and other sex buyers, for treating women like merchandise, for breaking a lot of moral codes, and for almost regressing in age and becoming like teenagers again. At the same time, the very laissez-faire or “allowing atmosphere” in Thailand’s tourist areas contributes to why these and other sex buyers can so easily let go of the rules from their home countries, and act in a way that would be unthinkable in their own cultures. This is a phenomenon known from party and sex tourism in other parts of the world too. While it must be said again, it is almost exclusively men and not women, who end up buying sex in this allowing atmosphere.

The laissez-faire atmosphere in Thailand’s tourist spots exists partly because of the enormous amount of alcohol consumed by both sex-buying tourists and people in prostitution, all year round. One obvious impact of this is that it makes the consumers braver and more stupid at the same time.



Swedes often gather at bars and restaurants owned by their fellow countrymen, and while most activities there involve drinking, these establishments are just as involved in the prostitution industry as other places. Swedish men bring women in prostitution to restaurants, to eat a steak and consume alcohol right next to other Swedish tourists.

The laissez-faire atmosphere also exists because of how the rest of the drunk tourists contribute to a normalisation of the sex and prostitution industry in Thailand. If you visit the infamous red-light district Patpong in Bangkok, you will not only see sex-buyers, but also a lot of ordinary tourists, uncritically attracted to its market and bars – and reputation. The mechanism is very similar to the one that results in so many ordinary and curious tourists visiting the red-light district in Amsterdam, together with their children.

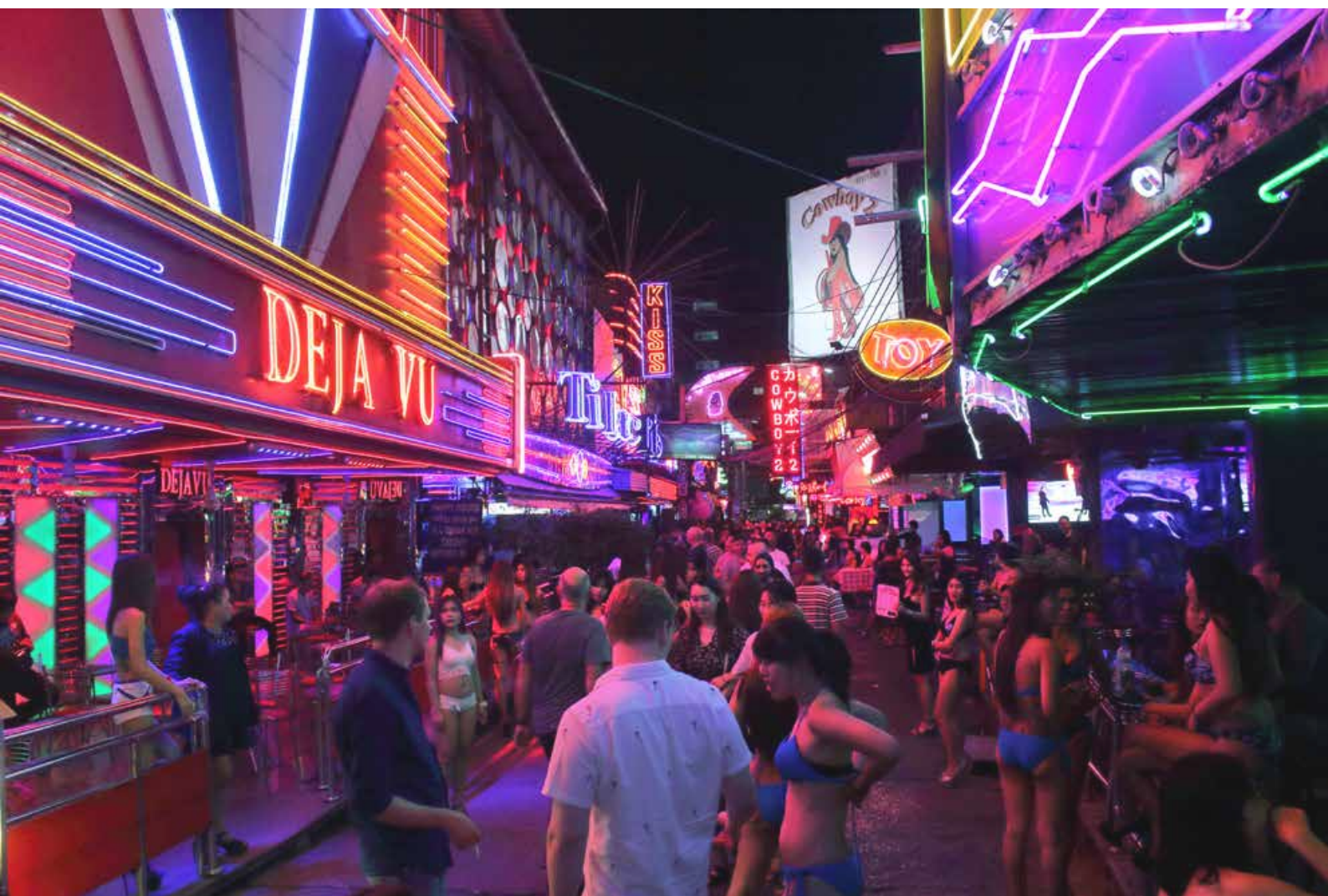
Night after night I walk down Bangla Road in Patong, Phuket, and see half-naked young women swirling around strip poles, or trying to catch sex-buyers on the street or in the bars. Everywhere, among them, are also ordinary tourists, attracted here because of curiosity or because they are visiting cheap bars and night clubs. I see drunk Western backpackers join strippers, dancing on their stages. I see Western families with young children drink soda in a bar, while an East European stripper is dancing behind a window a floor above their heads. Normalisation.

I see drunk Western backpackers join strippers, dancing on their stages. I see Western families with young children drink soda in a bar, while an East European stripper is dancing behind a window a floor above their heads.

The nightclub Illuzion, right on Bangla Road, is handing out free shots with candy liquor to all visitors entering the doors. Inside is a giant dance floor with DJs for the common people, but there are also VIP sections with luxury sex sellers from Eastern Europe, that you can only enter if you buy incredibly expensive

champagne or six litre bottles of Absolut Vodka. Young women in tiny and revealing clothes are found everywhere in corners and on the dancefloor, selling sexual services. But the party people, the backpackers, the hippies, and even the young women with feminist symbols on their t-shirts don't seem to mind. Visitors of all ages and all nationalities are attracted to drink and dance in the heart of the prostitution industry.

In late July, the Thai police forbade all sales of alcohol for two days and closed down all the venues along Bangla Road, because of a Buddhist religious day and to honour the King on his birthday. Everything on Bangla Road suddenly shut down at midnight, leaving tourists perplexed. A few minutes later I bumped into Anna and Maria, two young Swedish backpackers who had arrived in Phuket earlier that day. Once in Patong, they were heading straight for Bangla Road.



“We have really been looking forward to visiting Phuket, and Bangla has been the biggest reason. So we’re very disappointed that it’s closing so early,” says Anna.

Previously, they had visited the world’s biggest brothel city Pattaya with their parents, and went clubbing on the big prostitution lane, Walking Street. I ask them what they think about the atmosphere and the prostitution, in both these places.

“I would never judge the Thai woman standing there, selling herself, because I understand that there is a reason,” Maria says. “I only judge the man buying her. But at the same time... if all of this became illegal, where would all the people who work with this go? It would really fuck up the tourism and people’s way of getting an income.”

“If all of this became illegal, where would all the people who work with this go? It would really fuck up the tourism.” – Maria

I tell them about the fucking shows and the ping-pong shows in the alleys, which they had no idea existed. I tell them about the enormous sex industry going hand in hand with the tourism industry, and how this creates a sort of “allowing” view of the prostitution. Which in turn affects foreign men’s norms and makes it easier for them to slip inside the brothels, or behave in other inappropriate ways.

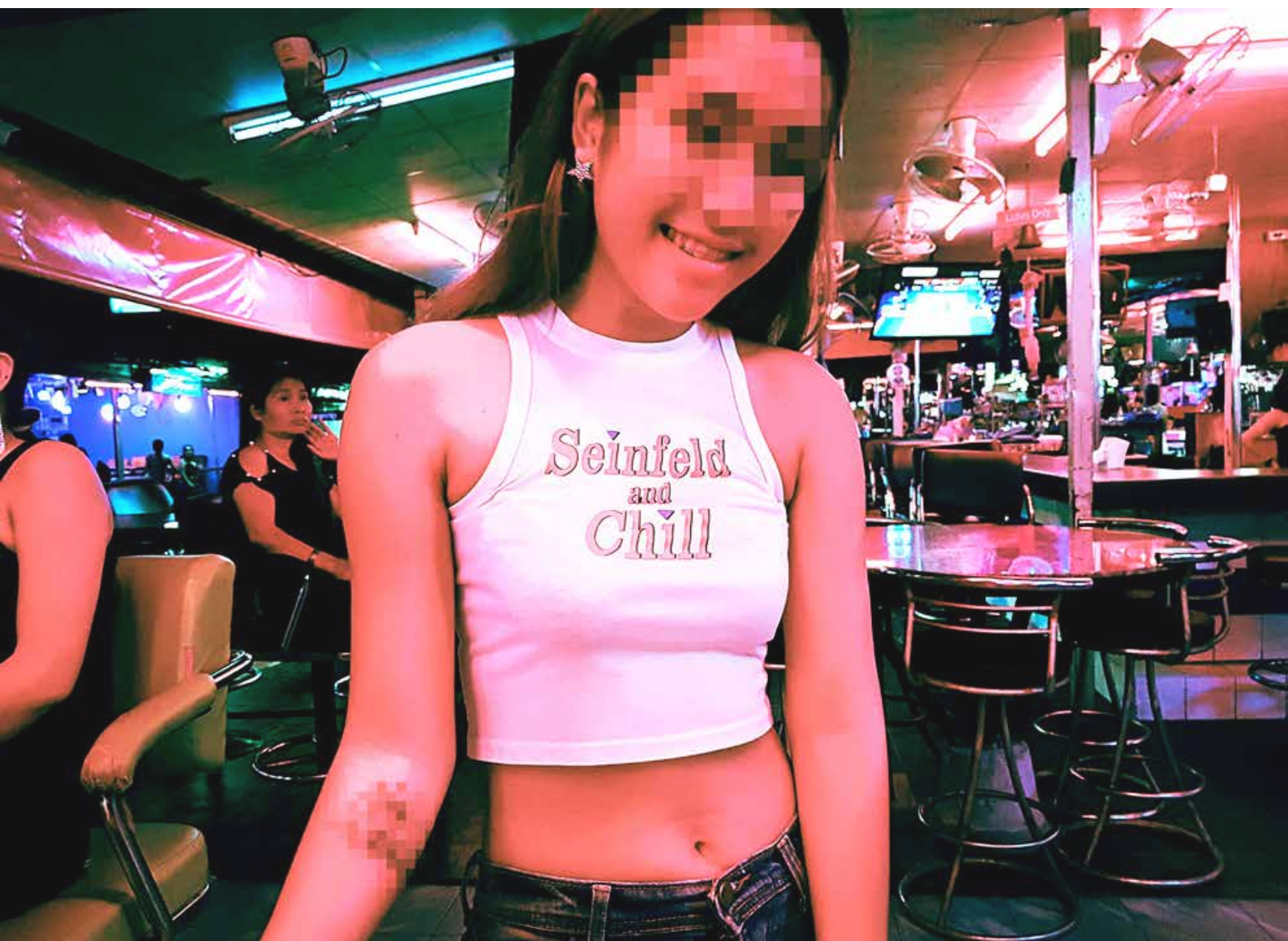
A heavily intoxicated German man in his 30s interrupts our conversation on the street. He asks us again and again why all the clubs on Bangla Road have closed down, and he drops his bag of cocaine on the street in bewilderment, when he finally understands that there will be no more drinking or strip dancing for the coming 48 hours. He then tries to charm Anna, saying she’s very pretty and that he “wants to fuck her”. As we leave Bangla Road, both of the young Swedish female backpackers are upset about the scene. Maria has gained a bigger understanding of the place and what it does to people.

“He should be ashamed of himself! In our countries such behaviour would be unthinkable. But it’s like this place hasn’t got any rules. No social codes. What the hell has happened?!”

Braces and pigtails

After a drinking game and a late night out, I’m walking the streets of Pattaya with Niklas the engineer who likes group sex, and his friend “Ludvig” from Stockholm. We have passed the Pattaya Night Market when they decide that we should have a final drink. We find an alley and a seedy bar, which has a minimal stage and a strip pole built into it.

The girl dancing on the stage has the Lolita look. She’s wearing teenage-style sneakers, tiny jeans shorts and a tiny white top, revealing her naked belly. She’s wearing glittery stars as earrings and has braces on her teeth, even though her teeth are perfect. Niklas and Ludvig immediately like her. They both buy her drinks and then play a couple of sessions of a traditional Thai game.



“I think she’s really pretty. The girls here are definitely not like the girls in Sweden,” says Ludvig, who is about 60 years old.

How old do you think she is, Ludvig?

“I would think something like 25, 27.”

I think she’s younger than that. She’s still got spots all over her face.

Ludvig becomes silent.

Finally, some comments on the question of age. While research by children’s rights organisations such as ECPAT International and investigations by law enforcement agencies show that the sexual exploitation of children by travelling sex offenders has decreased, spreading instead to other countries in the region, the problem still exists in Thailand.

None of the Swedish male sex-buyers that I met in Thailand expressed any open interest in approaching underage girls, or boys for that matter. But the visit to the alley with the Lolita bar girl and several other scenes made it clear, that several of the men have an interest in young women who are clearly in the legal grey zone. Some of the men who frequently use apps to get in touch with young women, also showed a clear interest in those who wrote that they are 19-20. Who might just as well be only 17 years old, since there are few or no verification mechanisms at all in the Thai prostitution apps.

Many Thai women are small and thin, and women in prostitution tend to put on girly or teenage affiliated clothes and looks, while still revealing their breasts. They can wear braces of different colours, even though there is no dental need for it, and they can have their hair in childish pigtails. All of this is done in an attempt to look younger, in order to attract more sex-buyers – which they often also succeed with.

“There have been different trends in how the girls dress, to try to look young,” says Anders, the 47-year-old who gave me Viagra-spiked orange juice. “Sometimes they are wearing braces even if they are in their 40s. Earlier, many of them were wearing big glasses, to look either like schoolgirls or like girls in the Japanese Lolita culture.”

Anders and several other Swedish men with a long background

of visiting Thailand express gratitude about how the paedophiles of the past are not as visible today, and say that they would ask to see ID every time they became unsure of a woman's age. It is well known among sex tourists that the Thai authorities have become stricter with enforcing the law – at least the one that makes it illegal to buy sex from girls under 18.

“I know that a lot of the hotels check the ID of girls you bring home, these days,” says “Lennart”, a middle-aged frequent Thailand visitor. “Many bar owners are also checking IDs of the girls there, because they want to avoid problems with the law. I have never heard of any Swede getting caught down here because they have been with anyone too young. But, I know that there are still some paedophiles hanging around here.”

Behind the neon façade in Europe

A closer look at two of Europe's hotspots for prostitution and sex tourism: Barcelona and Amsterdam.



The European Parliament adopted a new EU Directive in 2011 to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. The directive has binding legislation for all member states, aimed at effectively preventing trafficking, prosecuting criminals involved in the industry, and helping victims. An important aspect in the directive is that it takes a victim-centred approach.¹

While this EU legislation now exists regarding human trafficking, there is no single legislative approach in the EU to deal with prostitution. Member states have dealt with it via their own national parliaments, resulting in several different legislative models co-existing in the EU. Several member states have criminalised the sale of sex, handing out large fines and other penalties to people in prostitution caught selling sexual services.

Sweden became the first country in the world to instead criminalise the purchase of sexual services, and not the sale of it, through legislation introduced in 1999. Since then, countries such as France, Norway, Iceland and Ireland have adopted legislation that penalises the purchasers and not the sellers.

Central principles of The Swedish model

The model is based on a close to abolitionist approach, meant to criminalise prostitution-related activities, without criminalising people in prostitution. The fundamental idea is to punish the buyer and not the seller, as prostitution is a form of abuse derived from inequality, that should not exist in a modern society. Evaluations suggest that this model has successfully reduced the demand for prostitution and the problem of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.¹

1) Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality, pp. 8

1) https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/legislation-and-case-law-eu-legislation-criminal-law/directive-201136eu_en

Other member states in the EU have instead introduced legislation based on an entirely different approach. Countries such as Germany and the Netherlands have legalised prostitution and regulated it within certain frameworks, to let prostituted people work as ordinary professionals and tax-payers – although few end up paying these taxes. Reports from both independent sources and the governments themselves suggest that this approach has not reduced the problem of violence or of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Statistics from the EU suggests that at least 1 in 7 of all people in prostitution in Europe are victims of trafficking.² But this is at the very least. Other sources from national levels suggest that many more, possibly a majority of all people in the overall prostitution industry in Europe, are victims of sexual exploitation. And a great number of these people also match the criteria for having been victims of human trafficking.

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Commission, published its first working paper on trafficking in Europe in 2013. In its most recent paper from 2015, Eurostat concludes that 69 percent of all registered victims have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, the rest for labour exploitation. Around 95 percent of the victims intended for sexual exploitation have been female.³

2) Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality, pp. 6-7

3) https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/publications/trafficking-human-beings-eurostat-2015-edition_en, Trafficking in human beings, 2015, pp. 13

Amsterdam:

Legalised prostitution and human trafficking

Arguably, no other country in Europe is as famous for having both a large prostitution industry and a very liberal view on prostitution, as the Netherlands. And more specifically, the capital Amsterdam. Each year the city receives roughly 2.5 million tourists who come to enjoy the Dutch cuisine and beverages, the canals and of course the world-famous legal use of cannabis. Many of these tourists are also curious to take a look at De Wallen, the equally world-famous red-light district in Amsterdam where women in prostitution expose themselves in the open windows of brothels, wearing nothing more than underwear. People passing by are offered to enter the neon-lit doors for a standard 50 euro package known as “fuck and suck”.

Prostitution and brothels were formally legalised in the Netherlands in 2000, even if a culture of tolerance has long existed in Amsterdam. Today, around 25,000 people provide sexual services as a legal job licensed at the Chamber of Commerce, calling themselves sex-workers and paying tax to the state. Around 22,000 of these prostituted people are women. Registered so-called sex-workers can work independently from private houses, in bars and in clubs; they can work via escort agencies or rent a room and a window in a brothel. Dutch municipalities have estimated that about one third of all women and men that are selling sex, are doing this in the unlicensed and illegal sector of the prostitution industry.⁴

In Amsterdam, the city council cooperates with the police, with social workers, lawyers, healthcare clinics and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to make the prostitution industry a safe workplace. Heleen Driessen is a confidential counsellor for P&G292, a joint organisation of the public health service and

4) Prostitutie in Nederlandse gemeenten, 2014, pp. 16, 18

HVO-Querido, a social care NGO. She and her colleagues provide free medical and social assistance to prostituted people. She has 20 years of experience in the field and was previously part of a two-year international cooperative project with the Swedish police, even though the Dutch model is completely different from the Swedish model, where prostitution is illegal.

“We in the Netherlands prefer to see it as a normal profession, and we want the sex-workers to work in the safest place possible,” Driessen says. “Of course, as in every profession, in this profession you will also find vulnerable people. P&G292 reaches out to this group. But that does not mean that all sex-workers are at risk. We have the vision that sex-work will always exist, and no matter what you do as a country to forbid it or criminalise it, it will always be there. And we decided that given that situation it is better to provide a legalised and safe framework.”

Supporters of the Dutch model often argue that the more laws there are, and the more difficult it becomes to sell sex, the bigger the risk that prostituted people take their practice into the shadows, working from their private houses or in environments controlled by criminal syndicates. Driessen explains that it is for this reason that they want to keep the system transparent.

“We want to be able to see the sex-workers so that we can offer them assistance. Now, they can come to the centre where we provide them with healthcare, social care and with legal assistance, all free of charge. It will just make our job more difficult if we can’t see them.”

Over the years, the problem of human trafficking has become more and more apparent in the legalised Dutch prostitution. In an attempt to intervene against this, Amsterdam has introduced local rules that raised the required age of all people in prostitution from 18 to 21 or older. Prostituted people are also required to speak either German, Spanish, English or Dutch to be allowed to sell sex legally. The immediate consequence was, however, that prostituted people that could not fulfil these demands simply moved their business to another city, without such rules. Others stayed, moving into the hidden prostitution industry that still exists in the Netherlands.

A chain of municipal and civil society bodies cooperate in aiming at regular inspection of the legal prostitution industry in Amsterdam, and to try to detect human trafficking and hidden prostitution. Driessen argues that these very frequent checks by social workers, health workers and the police create a buffer, making sure that trafficking victims and minors are mostly kept out of the legal prostitution. Such crimes are indeed discovered each year, but the numbers are low and the minors sell sex outside the traditional establishments, like in a recent case with a 16 year old girl found to be selling sex in hotels and private homes. The minors sell themselves via apps, dating sites and ads in pornographic magazines.

“That is why I always prefer to see and allow prostitution in the open,” Driessen says. “It is really difficult to look behind people’s front doors.”

But today, the number of brothel windows with the most visible, easy-to-check form of prostitution in Amsterdam have been considerably reduced. Some 300 brothel windows remain. There are also considerably fewer sex clubs left. But no less than 7,000 prostituted people are still selling sex in Amsterdam, 92 percent of them being women.⁵

During recent years the number of licensed, traditional sex establishments such as brothel windows and sex clubs have decreased dramatically, both in Amsterdam and in the rest of the country. In the capital, one reason for this is that the municipality itself has bought up buildings on the red-light streets, in an effort to “clean up” the place. But the prostitution has not disappeared – instead other forms of it have increased, particularly the home-based one.⁶ Exactly the kind of prostitution that is more difficult to investigate.

The Dutch authorities have little insight into the unlicensed and illegal sector of the prostitution, where about one third of all women are selling sex. Inspections of this illegal sector, where human trafficking and exploitation of minors is indeed more likely, are to be carried out by the national police. Such

5) www.amsterdam.nl/zorgprofessionals/programmaprostitutie, Factsheet: Prostitution in Amsterdam, 2017

6) Prostitutie in Nederlandse gemeenten, pp. 16

inspections are very labour-intensive, and the national police has been encouraged to focus more on this task.⁷

“But human trafficking is no longer among the top five priorities for the police. It has changed to human smuggling now,” says Esta Steyn, Director of the campaign organisation Stop the Traffik Netherlands. “The police have not got enough money or time to spend on investigating cases related to human trafficking.”

The Dutch police invest too little time and too few resources into investigating crimes both in the illegal sector and the legal sector of the prostitution industry. While people on all sides can agree on that this is a problem, there are radically different opinions in the Netherlands about the country’s prostitution model. There is both a strong anti and pro lobby.

When the government legalised prostitution they gave permits to the people who were already involved in prostitution. And most of those prostitution businesses had been built with the help of criminals.

Esta Steyn belongs to neither and takes a neutral stance on prostitution, but is strongly opposed to sexual exploitation. She says that the legalisation did not rid the country of its problems. When the government legalised prostitution they gave permits to the people who were already involved in prostitution. And most of those prostitution businesses had been built with the help of criminals and black money.

“And, surprise surprise, the criminals who suddenly had legal permits did not go legal after their businesses became legal,” Steyn says. “That is one of the biggest flaws and a reason why the legislation of our prostitution has been almost a complete failure; the only thing that was accomplished is that there are now no minors in the legal sex industry. But none of the criminals moved away.”

With criminal influences still present in the prostitution industry, organised crime such as human trafficking persists.

7) Ibid., pp. 16, 18

Critics argue that the legalisation of the prostitution increases the demand – but also the trafficking, since there are too few people willing to sell sex voluntarily.

In September 2018 the Dutch Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence Against Children released a research report together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The report was said to reflect the first reliable estimate of the extent of trafficking in human beings in the Netherlands. It turned out, that the estimated number of victims of trafficking in the Netherlands is around 6,250 annually – about five times higher than the registered number of victims. For Dutch girls between 12 and 17 years of age, 257 out of 100,000 become victims. For persons of non-Dutch origin, 311 out of 100,000 become victims of trafficking.⁸

Critics argue that the legalisation of the prostitution increases the demand – but also the trafficking, since there are too few people willing to sell sex voluntarily.

There is also human trafficking behind the windows on the red-light streets, but you cannot spot it easily. And the trafficked persons will only seldom contact the police. According to Esta Steyn, today only about 5 percent of the women in Amsterdam’s red-light district are Dutch. The other ones are from Eastern Europe, from South America, where fewer people trust the police. This has led to a situation where very few traffickers are actually convicted.

“Fifty percent of the cases reported to the police are thrown out immediately, because of a lack of evidence,” Steyn says. “And in the cases where traffickers end up in court, 50 percent of them are acquitted, again because of a lack of evidence. So a minimum of the traffickers go to prison; it’s about 150 annually. Only even this is not true. Only 150 trafficking cases result in a conviction. That does not mean that 150 traffickers go to jail.”

8) www.dutchrapporteur.nl/current/news/reliable-estimate-reflects-true-numbers-of-victims-of-human-trafficking.aspx

Another problem that Steyn sees with the legalisation of prostitution is the extreme normalisation of a subject that should be a lot more politically loaded. Because everything else in the Netherlands is well regulated – the roads, the health system and schools all work well – many people assume that the prostitution industry also works well, as the government decided to regulate it. Steyn says that the legalisation also resulted in today’s enormous increase in sex tourism, both because of sexual desire and curiosity.

“Every day you see entire families with grandparents and kids in strollers visiting the red-light district. It’s just bizarre, because you have all these almost naked ladies also standing there, and men in different states of intoxication.”

The normalisation has most likely made it easier for Dutch men and male tourists alike to buy sex. Stop the Traffik Netherlands arranges workshops with open conversations with men about sex, as many men who buy sex have serious issues with women.

“They are very insecure and have this belief that a woman is supposed to provide sex and care for them,” Steyn says.

“Every day you see entire families with grandparents and kids in strollers visiting the red-light district. It’s just bizarre, because you have all these almost naked ladies also standing there, and men in different states of intoxication.”

Barcelona:

Sexual slavery in a top tourist destination

According to the United Nations, Spain ranks third in the world after Thailand and Puerto Rico, in the relative demand for prostitution.⁹ This extreme demand has developed a very large prostitution industry where an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 prostituted people are selling sexual services. There are close to 2,000 brothels operating in Spain and the prostitution industry generates an estimated revenue of USD 22 billion annually – the largest sum in Europe.¹⁰

Spain decriminalised prostitution in 1995 and the sale of sexual services has been tolerated ever since. Prostitution has, however, not been particularly regulated, and there are few specific national laws related to the industry. A person can be charged with procuring sex, but common prostitution is not a crime. It is illegal to exploit prostituted people, but it’s not illegal to own a brothel and let prostituted people sell sex there “independently” if everything looks voluntary on the paper. Nor do brothel owners require any special licenses, according to national legislation.

This means that people in prostitution are not protected by certain rights and legal benefits, as is the case in the Netherlands. Prostituted people can’t register as official “sex-workers” with the authorities, can’t pay taxes and thus receive tax refunds, and can’t receive state support if there is any misconduct where they sell sex, as is technically the case in the Netherlands.

It must be said though, that the Dutch prostitution industry remains highly dangerous for those engaged with selling sex in it, even if the industry has been regulated and the legal people in it have certain rights. Furthermore, far from every person in the

9) https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/04/19/inenglish/1492592427_325375.html

10) Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality, pp. 10

legal sector of the Dutch prostitution pays taxes, which means that they lose out from the legal benefits.

Sex tourists from Sweden and other countries also flock to Barcelona, embedded with the other tourists.

The prostitution industry has been getting more and more normalised in Spain ever since it was decriminalised. Today, it has reached a point where it's common for 20-year-old Spanish men to visit brothels. At the same time, this country has remained one of the most popular destinations in international tourism.

In 2017, Spain was the world's second most visited country, receiving 82 million tourists. The region Catalonia is most visited in Spain, and the Catalanian capital Barcelona receives a very large share of all those visitors. The prostitution industry has made Spain one of the top destinations for sex tourists, and their money helps to expand the industry and its revenue even further. Sex tourists from Sweden and other countries also flock to Barcelona, embedded with the other tourists.

Barcelona and a few other municipalities have partly regulated prostitution through local legislation that prohibits street prostitution. Since 2015, only the purchasers and not the sellers will be fined. But Maria Gavilán Rubio, a university professor and judge who belongs to the Association of Women Judges in Spain and specialises in criminal activity related to prostitution, says that such local initiatives are largely fruitless and even contra-productive.

“That kind of legislation is not found in the national penal code, and it's only found in determined zones in Barcelona, not in the whole city. I don't think it's enough, because apart from street prostitution there is also the motorised prostitution, and the people in flats. And the local legislation only moves the prostitution away and into the flats in greater numbers, which makes investigations more difficult.”

According to Gavilán Rubio, only Barcelona and a dozen other municipalities of the 8,000 municipalities in Spain have adopted such local legislations. In Barcelona, sex clubs must also have a

license to operate. But several clubs tend to get the licence that restaurants or gyms are required to have. If the police reveal the true nature behind the façade, the club might get shut down, but Gavilán Rubio explains that it can easily re-open two days later – attracting more customers.

“There have been cases now when the police close a club because it’s been revealed that there are no staff working there, so obviously it’s not a hotel or a gym. But if you don’t have very good reasons it’s difficult to keep it closed. Because prostitution is legal. And if the press writes about the place it will get a lot of attention, leading to a lot of people with little respect going there to buy sex the next day.”

Criminal activities and human trafficking are enormous problems in the prostitution industry. The latest yearly statistics published by the Spanish state shows how, in 2017, no less than 10,111 people were considered to be at risk of being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

A total of 422 victims of sexual exploitation were found, the most common victim being a Romanian woman between 33 and 37 years old, who came to Spain legally as an EU citizen. While this indeed sounds like a low number, it only reflects the cases which matched the definition of sexual exploitation by the Spanish authorities.

Similarly, 155 victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation were found in 2017, and the victim was most commonly a Nigerian woman between 18 and 22 years old, who was in Spain without the proper legal documents. A total of 392 traffickers belonging to 55 criminal organisations and groups were also arrested and charged in 2017.¹¹

Every year the authorities manage to reveal international criminal syndicates in Spain, many times run by Bulgarians, Romanians and Nigerians who traffic people from their own countries. A total of 4,430 victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation were identified between 2012 and 2016,

11) www.interior.gob.es/documents/10180/7146983/Balance_2017_Trata.pdf/153296b3-be9b-44be-921d-0b034f772a76, Prevención y lucha contra a trata de seres humanos en España, 2018, pp. 4, 6-8, 18

according to the Spanish interior ministry.¹² But such painstaking investigations require lots of money and time. The actual number of victims is most likely much higher.

Children being trafficked to become victims of sexual exploitation is another part of the prostitution industry. Specialist organisations like UNICEF talk about hundreds of child victims, coming from Eastern Europe, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. The Spanish authorities report only two dozen cases, since it is no easy feat to investigate the many allegations and hidden criminality in the vast world of prostitution.¹³

“What we need is a strategy against the trafficking, from the governmental delegation working with the violence against women,” Gavilán Rubio says. “There is the Guardia Civil and two special forces in the Spanish police already working specifically against trafficking in prostitution, and there are also special prosecutors, but the victims don’t have enough trust in the system today. We need to improve the protection of their rights, so that the victims are not re-victimised.”

One reason why there is not more political pressure on this problem is probably that the prostituted people are mostly immigrants.

Trafficking only became a crime in Spain’s penal code as late as 2010. The number of sentences against traffickers is growing, because of specialised police and special prosecutors. But the criminal exploitation can still survive due to the legal status of the industry, and the extreme demand for prostitution. For this reason, the Association of Women Judges in Spain want to see the Swedish model adopted in Spain.

But one reason why there is not more political pressure on this problem is probably that the prostituted people are mostly

12) https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/04/21/inenglish/1492756977_271906.html

13) They’re children, they’re victims. Situation in relation to child victims of human trafficking in Spain. UNICEF Spanish Committee, 2017, pp. 17, 19-20

immigrants. Not Spanish citizens. Another probable reason is that the prostitution industry generates a lot of revenue, since it is also an important attraction within the enormous tourism industry.

There are no official statistics in Spain about sex tourists and how they affect the local demand for prostitution. But sex tourists are known to be an integral part of the industry in Barcelona. It is also a fact that the once sleepy town of La Jonquera, which today has a great number of prostituted people and possibly the largest brothel in Europe, became what it is today due to its proximity to the border with France.

“The visitors are European tourists,” Gavilán Rubio says.

“There hasn’t been a formal study made about La Jonquera, but it has been estimated that the prostitution in the town generates 5 million euros daily.”

Comments by Swedish male sex tourists

While it is not known how many male tourists visit Amsterdam and Barcelona with the intention of buying sex, it is not difficult to see how men share information and exchange experiences with each other about their sexual exploitations there. The same goes for Swedish men.

One of the easiest places to find such discussions is at Flash-back, the biggest online forum in Scandinavia. The Swedish media group behind the site also runs another big discussion site, Travel Forum. At both these sites Swedish men share plenty of information about the prostitution in Amsterdam and Barcelona. Through their comments it is possible to identify a few mechanisms behind why they have bought sex abroad.

On the one hand, the studied men tend to see the prostitution as something slightly forbidden and therefore exciting. It provides them with an opportunity to live out their sexual fantasies. Several of them share long and detailed stories in the forums, about meeting big-breasted and tanned beauties that they had sex with in all possible ways while the Spanish sun was setting in front of them. Others talk about incredible sexual adventures with petite bodies in the red-lit alleys of Amsterdam. There, they have entered a landscape with white, black, Asian and Latino beauties in the windows, and they have picked a new ethnicity every day.

One middle-aged, frequent commenter tells a story about how he booked a wild night with a former porn star, from an East European country, who participated in a few hard-core pornographic movies in 2008. The woman was now selling sex as a so-called “independent luxury escort” in the Dutch capital, and he ordered a special session called a “Pornstar Experience”. The session lasted three hours and included most sexual acts, positions and climaxes that are common in pornographic movies. The former porn star performed fellatio and drooled saliva. She shoved a butt plug with a fox tail on up inside herself, and she would have anal sex for as long as the client wanted.

“To sum things up, a super attractive, intelligent, strong and confident girl,” the commentator writes. “Like having sex with a porn star straight from a movie. 800 euros was a lot of money, but it was worth every euro.” “A once in a lifetime experience,” he writes, while providing a few helpful links to the many curious readers.

Several of the studied men complain loudly about their girlfriends in Sweden wanting to have “slow and emotional sex”, as if they had “already been married for years”. Other men complain about how more and more Swedish women have been brainwashed by “feminist propaganda”, making them dress like men and not wanting to try out “daring” sexual behaviour in bed, which goes against their “biological instincts”. All of this, you don’t have to think of when being with a prostituted person.

“I love this hobby and I do it because it is forbidden, I feel jittery and get a kick out of it,” explains one commentator. “Not because I can’t get free sex with good looking ladies. It is all about the kick and about the hunt.”

Several of the studied men complain loudly about their girlfriends in Sweden wanting to have “slow and emotional sex”, as if they had “already been married for years”.

Other men in the forums seem to be looking exactly for that kind of “genuine closeness” that certain sex buyers feel that women owe them, when visiting a prostituted person.

One Swedish man writes a long story about his first time with a prostituted woman, in the red-light district in Amsterdam. She was a “goddess” that gave him the best fellatio of his entire life, staring at him with “lustful eyes”. He was in heaven. He took her from behind, she was moaning louder and louder, until she had an orgasm that made her “tremble like a leaf”. It took a full minute for her “to come to her senses”, then she thanked him, kissed him, and gave him an orgasm too. After, they were hugging and kissing for an extra free 15 minutes, and she thanked him again as he left.

“My view on prostitution has changed completely after this experience,” he writes. “I will definitely try it again in the near future. I would warmly recommend Amsterdam for anyone wanting to make a sex trip!”

Another man writes of a similar experience in Barcelona, when he also visited a prostituted woman for the first time. He went to the famous brothel house called Felina that he had found out about thanks to Flashback. There, he picked out a dark-haired lady from Latin America. The sex lasted for 15 minutes. Afterwards, they were laughing and hugging each other in the bed. “It felt more like I had brought home a gorgeous girl from a bar, instead of being in a brothel.” A new attempt to have sex did not work out, so they spent the remaining time cuddling and kissing each other in bed.

“When I was leaving she kissed me one last time and buttoned my shirt, almost like we were a real couple,” he writes. “It was a fantastic experience, the best I have had for a long time. When I reached my hotel I even felt that it was she that had fucked me, not the other way around!”

Some other commentators ridicule both these men, reminding them that the women were selling sex in the industry and that it was all just an act. But other men in the forums insist that they too have experienced prostituted women immediately falling in love with them, having fountain orgasms, and how escorts have stayed the whole night instead of just an hour, because of genuine romantic feelings.

“When I was leaving she kissed me one last time and buttoned my shirt, almost like we were a real couple,” he writes.

A third mechanism seems to sometimes be sheer pressure. Several younger commentators write about having been desperate to lose their virginity. About fumbling with their clothes in Amsterdam, not really knowing what to do with the naked women and having various sexual debut problems.

Others are single, lonely and have not had sex for several years.

They write about having longed so much for some female closeness again, and how disappointed they got when the sex was little else than a mechanical in-and-out.

Other men send them digital “pats on the back”. “It’s all about researching good places, and we can all get unlucky in the red light district. Better luck next time!”



บริษัท
BORVO

Summary and conclusions

A global and clearly gendered industry

Prostitution is a global problem involving at least 40 million people, and the great majority of these are women and underage girls. The great majority of those people purchasing sex are men.

Criminal networks and trafficking linked to prostitution

Prostitution is an extremely lucrative business and industry, often influenced or directly controlled by criminal syndicates. Human trafficking – to forcefully bring sex slaves into this industry – is a continuous problem. Children are also victims of this trafficking, and the purpose is the same – to make them sex slaves, ready to be bought and exploited by male sex offenders.

Swedish sex buyers are often sex tourists

Sweden was the first country in the world to adopt a close-to abolitionist legislation against prostitution, criminalising the sex-buyers but not the people selling sex. Swedish men, who for whatever reason want to buy sex, face a much easier situation doing so abroad. Male sex buyers from Sweden and other countries blend in with the crowds at the world's most popular tourist destinations, becoming "sex tourists". Sex offenders looking to exploit children are also found in these crowds.

Thailand is one of the top destinations for international tourists. Barcelona and Amsterdam are similarly among the top tourist destinations in the world. All three places are also infamous for having very large and/or easy-to-access prostitution industries, where a sex buyer will not be bothered by the police.

Men from all backgrounds buy sex, but they have some attitudes in common

Through undercover field work in Thailand, the author of this report managed to meet with several Swedish male sex tourists. The men that are included in the report were between their late 30s to early 70s, came from different social classes and had different educational backgrounds.

The report captures the attitudes and illusions among the Swedish sex buyers that the author met, regarding the prostitution industry, the people selling sex and the people buying sex. These attitudes are often based on stereotypical opinions and views, on racism, ethnic chauvinism, sexism and on an unequal way of looking at women versus men.

Mechanisms behind buying sex abroad

None of the studied Swedish men seemingly had any moral qualms about buying sex. But by presenting their ways of acting and reasoning, this report identifies several different mechanisms behind why they have bought sex abroad.

Going local: Some men justified exploiting people in the prostitution industry by referring to their understanding of how the local culture in Thailand works.

The good-hearted helper: Other men justified their behaviour with an alleged belief that they are helping the people in prostitution, through buying sex – as it’s all about the money and the people in question must support themselves and their families.

Looking for a “girlfriend experience”: Certain Swedish sex-buyers seemed to have had less luck in finding intimacy and relationships at home, or chose not to engage in this. But they were single and lonely. They wanted to find closeness or a “girlfriend experience”, even if they could still change between several different women depending on which one they were most interested in exploiting.

A last bastion of antifeminism – being in charge: Other men did not necessarily experience the same bad luck in intimacy, and

seemingly wanted to act on sexual fantasies. But it seems that these men too felt some sort of emptiness and distress in their lives that they wanted to replace with sex and dominance over someone. The same kind of behaviour could also be seen with the men who had their own “girlfriends”. Several of them also seemingly took the role play for truth, and thought that they gave the prostituted women great sexual pleasure, and that the women quickly developed actual feelings for them.

This report has also referred to how Swedish male sex buyers talk about prostitution in Amsterdam and Barcelona, and how different mechanisms behind their behaviour can be seen there as well. Some men want to experience a “forbidden thing” that allows them to live out their sexual fantasies. Other men are looking for what they think can be genuine closeness with a prostituted person. And other men still are visiting prostituted people because they haven’t had sex for years, or because they want to lose their virginity and can’t see an easier way of meeting women.

Prostitution as emotional outlet and avoidance strategy

The observations in this report largely confirm the conclusions from academic research and also from the experience in the KAST projects in Stockholm and Gothenburg, where male sex buyers are helped to change their behaviour.

The majority of the studied Swedish men in Thailand had previously been in relationships with or married to Swedish women, but usually came to Thailand as single men. Several of them were seemingly drawn towards prostitution because they were sexually frustrated, while others wanted to live out erotic fantasies. But few of them seemed willing to get too close to their feelings, precisely the kind of behaviour that one of the social workers with KAST mentioned. Except for those men who had been able to build what they referred to as long-term “relationships”, the other men could at most stretch to engaging in “girlfriend experiences” or to renting girls for a period of time, in order to create a fictional “relationship” with prostituted women, but without any feelings in the picture.

Another KAST staff member said that sex buying men manage

to sexualise other strong and painful feelings in their lives. It certainly appeared as if several of the studied sex tourists were carrying heavy baggage with difficult experiences from their past. Instead of trying to solve these problems, the men bought sex to vent their feelings there, as an outlet. What united all of the studied Swedish men was also that they were trying to get something new into their lives. Intimacy, sexual dominance, recognition of masculinity perhaps.

Leaving moral codes at home

Even if a few men hinted that they had bought sex abroad before, none of them appeared to act in a way in Thailand that they would stick to if they were back in Sweden. By going abroad they were able to leave their normal contexts behind, which meant that they could liberate themselves from moral codes and yield to temptation. They went through a mental somersault, which in turn led them to victimise other people. This also confirms what the clinical psychologist at PrevenTell in Stockholm explained, about what happens in the minds of certain men when they leave one context for another.

While this is true, all of the studied men at the same time turned out to be surprisingly aware of how poverty was the main factor behind why people end up in the Thai prostitution industry. They were also surprisingly aware of and could discuss the very dark backside of Thai prostitution, where people in prostitution are suffering from psychological problems, which can lead to depression and ultimately to suicide. This suggests that the Swedish sex buyers could still feel empathy for victims and exploited people – but this wasn’t a big enough reason to stop them from procuring sex from the same kind of people.

This double standard could suggest that the men have also been seriously desensitised by the prostitution industry. But not so desensitised that a few of them could not discuss the dark backside of how also sex buyers can be harmed by the prostitution industry, as the conversation about suicide among sex buyers with the youngest man shows.

Sexual exploitation of children and toeing the line

None of the Swedish men in Thailand expressed an interest in sexually exploiting children, but did on several occasions approach young women in the “grey zone”, who could easily have been under 18. International organisations, local authorities and law enforcement agencies in Thailand speak of a reduced problem of travelling offenders sexually exploiting children, but warn that the problem still exists.

How regular tourism makes life easier for travelling sex buyers

None of this could take place as openly and relaxed as it does, had it not been for the enormous consumption of alcohol and the normalisation of prostitution in Thailand. This is caused by the tourism industry in itself, which seems to turn a blind eye, or at least accepting eye, to the fact that sex tourism is an integral part of the tourism in Thailand.

The limited reach of travel agencies' measures

Swedish travel agencies and their affiliated hotels have been taking measures against sexual exploitation of children in Thailand for 20 years, educating hotel staff and insisting on checking the IDs of night-time guests. These hotels also require sex tourists to pay for an extra room for extra night-time guests. But the great majority of the close to half a million Swedes annually visiting Thailand, go there on their own without the help of travel agencies. Many of them also stay at cheaper hotels that seldom or never follow the same security policies as the more expensive ones.

Demand and inequality driving factors

These factors point to a development where Swedish men can and will continue to buy sex abroad, in every country where the conditions allow it. Ultimately, it is this behaviour and the demand they

share for prostitution, together with other men, that is the biggest reason why the prostitution industry continues to exist. Men's demand also controls the way that human trafficking functions. Even if the victims in Thailand are mostly economically or socially vulnerable people from the poor layers of society, it is the demand by the richer men to exploit them that forces them into prostitution. Thus, prostitution is the ultimate consequence of a society's inequality.

Recommendations

Sex buyers

Many people who are buying sex will deny that they are in need of help. But help is needed, to prevent injury both to oneself and to other people. KAST, Köpare av sexuella tjänster, is a municipal project in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå, that provides professional assistance to individuals buying sex and with compulsive and/or hyper sexual behaviour. In Stockholm, assistance is also offered by PrevenTell.

Read more about **KAST in Stockholm**:

www.stockholm.se/Fristaende-webbplatser/Kontaktdataas/Fackforvaltningar/Socialforvaltningen/KAST/

Read more about **KAST in Gothenburg**:

<http://goteborg.se/wps/portal/enhetssida/kast-kopare-av-sexuella-tjanster/>

Read more about PrevenTell: <http://preventell.se/>

Tourists

Sex tourism and foreign exploitation of prostituted people is de facto allowed and flourishing in Thailand, Amsterdam and Barcelona, and one big reason contributing to this is the tourism industry. The normalisation of environments with prostitution enables sex buyers to act more openly and relaxed. Do not visit a bar or a neighbourhood where you know that prostitution is going on.

Be sure to protest against sexual offences, objectification, sexism (often mixed with racism) and other behaviour you might see, that can further normalise sexual exploitation. Report suspected cases of sex buying and exploitation to both the local police authorities and to the Swedish police. Facts and crime cases are fundamental in police work both in Sweden and abroad. As a tourist you can also demand that the travel agencies don't contribute to sexual exploitation in any way.

ECPAT International is a non-governmental, international children’s rights organisation combatting sexual exploitation of children. They can provide information about their field of work, and can send information on sexual exploitation of children to law enforcement agencies both nationally and internationally. See www.ecpat.org

Resekurage is another initiative to collect information in tourism about sexual exploitation of children. Tourists and travellers are encouraged to report suspected cases of exploitation to local police stations, to the Swedish police or to international law enforcement agencies. See www.resekurage.se

Seven useful trips for travellers are also found on **Childsafe’s** webpage. See <http://thinkchildsafe.org/7-tips-for-travelers/>

Travel agencies and hotels

Good work has been done for years by travel agencies and hotels, in cooperation with ECPAT International and **The Code**, to enable measures against sexual exploitation of children. But there is also a great need to take further and deeper measures to prevent sexual exploitation of all people, regardless of who they are and whether they are under or above 18. Travel agencies and hotels must expand their responsibility, so that they make sure that they don’t contribute to any form of sexual exploitation.

Even if it’s not necessarily visible when a prostituted person is a victim of force, the travel agency or the hotel must have a responsibility to be watchful and react against all exploitation.

Travellers and hotel guests must frequently be informed about the policy against sexual exploitation of other people, and also of any adopted policies against human trafficking. Travel agencies should also encourage their customers to report any suspected cases of procurement of sex and exploitation, among the guests and among the staff.

Government and civil society

Local and national governments in Thailand, the Netherlands and Spain must focus on preventing the demand for sexual services according to obligations to prevent sexual exploitation. All three governments should follow the recommendations in the United Nations Protocol to suppress human trafficking, by adopting and

strengthening their legislations and by strengthening cultural, educational and social measures, in order to discourage exploitation of especially women and children.¹

Local and national governments in Thailand, the Netherlands and Spain should end the culture of impunity in their respective countries, and make sure that current laws are respected and implemented against sex buyers and the prostitution industry.

The government and concerned authorities in Sweden should expand their work to prevent Swedish men’s engagement in prostitution, both at home and abroad, and to discourage Swedish men from exploiting other people. The Swedish government should deepen the cooperation with Thai authorities on national and local levels, especially in areas where Swedish men are known to be buying sex.

Tourists are travelling more independently and finding their own hotels, relying on themselves instead of traditional travel agencies. International organisations and organisations in the Swedish civil society working against both sex tourism and sexual exploitation of children must adapt to this development, and expand educational efforts and training in The Code to newer and cheaper hotel establishments catering to independently travelling tourists. Trainings must address the fact that people of different backgrounds and ages can be victims of prostitution.

1) https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/united_nations_protocol_on_thb_en_4.pdf, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, United Nations, 2000, pp. 6

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Appendix I: Measures by Swedish travel agencies and hotels against sex tourism

According to the governmental Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, no less than 464,000 Swedes went to Thailand in 2017.¹ The Land of Smiles remains one of the most popular destinations for Swedish tourists, with or without any intent to buy sexual services from prostituted people.

Thailand has become a second home for many Swedes. This also means that, for years, a decreasing number of travellers have been using traditional charter packages from Swedish travel agencies. Most visitors to Thailand are self-confident enough to book their own tickets and accommodation.

But several tens of thousands of Swedes still pay for package deals, travelling to Thailand via travel agencies and staying at their affiliated hotels. Scandals involving sex tourism and exploitation at the hotels can be damaging for business. This, together with successful lobbying by organisations working to prevent sexual exploitation especially of children, has led several travel agencies into taking measures.

Travel agencies and their affiliated hotels in Thailand and other countries often cooperate with ECPAT International, and send their hotel and tourism staff members to receive training in ECPAT's "Code of Conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism" (generally known as "The Code"). This is a set of principles first developed by ECPAT Sweden in 1998, in cooperation with Scandinavian tour operators and the World Tourism Organization. To prevent sexual exploitation of children, hotels are to incorporate six criteria into its operations:

- 1) To establish an ethical policy regarding commercial sexual exploitation of children.
- 2) To train the personnel in the country of origin and travel destinations.
- 3) To introduce a clause in contracts with suppliers, stating the common repudiation of commercial sexual exploitation of children.
- 4) To provide information to travellers by means of catalogues, brochures, in-flight films, ticket slips, web sites, etc.
- 5) To provide information to local "key persons" at the destinations.
- 6) To report annually.²

1) www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se, keyword: "Svenskars resande"

2) www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Code_of_Conduct_ENG.pdf,

Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, pp. 16

Today, ECPAT's The Code is a well-known quality certificate among larger hotel chains in Thailand and elsewhere.

TUI Sweden and Ving

One of the leading travel agencies sending Swedish tourists to Thailand is TUI Sweden (formerly known as "Fritidsresor"), which is a part of the TUI Group, the largest travel company in the world. TUI Sweden started cooperating with ECPAT International from the company's inception. In a written reply, the agency's sustainability department says:

"In 1997, TUI (formerly "Fritidsresor") was the only charter travel agency to develop a cooperation with ECPAT and to later co-develop the Code of Conduct for the travel industry. As the first company in the world, Fritidsresor signed The Code in 1998 and later introduced The Code into the training for all staff members in all travel destinations."

TUI Group has also adopted its own code with a list of principles that its suppliers must accept and follow. This code does not contain an official policy against general sex tourism, but mentions the prohibition of suppliers trafficking other people. There is also a long section about children's protection from sexual exploitation, and how suppliers shall:

- 1) implement preventative measures and procedures to ensure that children are protected from tourism-related sexual exploitation and all potential forms of abuse;
- 2) be able to demonstrate how children are protected from tourism-related sexual exploitation or other possible abuse, exploitation and harassment by their business;
- 3) train relevant employees on the protection of minors from tourism-related sexual exploitation including how to report incidents to the local authorities; and
- 4) report any incidents and shall raise awareness of any identified risks to child safety involving guests and/or employees on or near the premises to local authorities.³

TUI sends its Swedish charter guests to 130 different affiliated hotels, but the company will not say how many paying guests they have yearly. They demand that all affiliated hotels follow TUI's code and they also regularly send their own staff members at destinations to training based on ECPAT's The Code. Their contracted hotels must adhere to the supplier Code of Conduct and are encouraged to use The Code training. TUI's sustainability demands also cover the prohibition of trafficking of children, and the company also has a Modern Slavery Statement.

3) www.tuigroup.com/damfiles/default/meta/einkaufsbedingungen/Lieferantenkodex_EN-4d44f88d93289dc24d0cb3b7d559f014.pdf, Supplier Code of Conduct: Guidance for suppliers to the TUI AG Group

Another leading Swedish travel agency is Ving, which is owned by the British travel company Thomas Cook Group. Ving has specialised in charter tourism for many years and its peaks in business are reached during the winter months in Sweden. Around 27,000 Swedes travelled with Ving to Thailand from late 2016 to early 2017. One fourth of these guests stay in the three concept hotels on Phuket island; two of these are the Sunwing Hotels for families with children, while the third is a Sunprime Hotel for adults only. Ving also has more than 150 other hotels for other guests, contracted directly via the company or via third party suppliers.

Ving and its concept hotels in Thailand do not have an official policy against general sex tourism, but Sofia Wallén, head of corporate responsibility with Thomas Cook Northern Europe, says that the company rejects sex tourism.

“We also started cooperating with ECPAT in the late 1990s and signed The Code. Since then we have worked according to the six criteria in The Code. The prohibition of sexual exploitation of children has been a clause in our hotel contracts since the late 1990s, and we inform guests about our work and educate our staff. A great deal of our guests are families with children, so we have long worked with child protection. In 2017 the Thomas Cook Group also adopted our own policy for child protection.”

Both the Sunwing hotels and the Sunprime hotel also have a regulation that only people who are registered guests are allowed to stay in the rooms. According to Sofia Wallén, if a guest was to ask Ving if he could bring a friend, a girlfriend or a prostituted person for that matter, to his room overnight, the hotel would say no. If a guest wants to stay the night in the hotel they need a reservation and to be registered as guest at the hotel. If night staff for see anything suspicious they also can ask to see an individual’s keycard to their room.

“But it’s very rare that we have any such problems,” Wallén says. “If you visit Thailand to buy sexual services, you simply do not pick our hotel. We have managed to inform people that much. There are a lot of other hotels to stay at instead, that are not working with this question at all.”

The Code training

In July 2018 I also participated as an observer at one of ECPAT International’s training sessions in The Code, in Phuket Town on the island with the same name. The one-day training takes place in the large Phokeethra hotel operated by Novotel, the largest hotel chain on Phuket. Of the 30 or so participants, four women are staff members from the two Sunwing hotels owned by Ving. The rest are employed by Novotel, who also see a lot of Swedish guests staying in their hotels. The participants work with security, housekeeping and customer relations at the hotels.

Kate, the anonymous ECPAT member that I met earlier in Bangkok, is the one assigned to provide the training in The Code. ECPAT has managed to get a two-year project funded by the government of the Netherlands, to expand their training. The participating hotels are mostly those with four or five stars, sending several more of their staff members when the tourism sector is in the low-season.

“But we also hope to expand the training to cheaper hotels with one to three stars, to budget motels, and even to Thai taxi drivers and tour guides,” Kate says.

Kate begins the training by showing a fictional short documentary about a young boy who ends up in the prostitution industry in Pattaya. The boy runs away from home and sleeps on the streets and on Pattaya beach, stealing food and money to survive. He teams up with some older boys and ends up in the criminal underworld, where people quickly make sure he is sold to sex buyers. In the end, the boy visits a hotel room where an old Western man undresses him, caresses him, puts a diaper on him and proceeds to rape him.

Kate lectures about the International Child Convention, about commercial and sexual exploitation of children, sex tourism and trafficking. She shows a map over eastern Asia, with lots of arrows pointing out which countries are sources of, transits for, and destinations for child trafficking routes. Thailand qualifies as a place for all three categories. It is furthermore a country where there is an internal demand for sexual exploitation of children.

In the coffee break I speak with employees from both Novotel and Ving. They all confirm what the Swedish travel agencies have also said. The most concrete measure that is taken against sex tourism, is that guests indeed must pay for an extra, second room if they bring someone with them. Some people do.

I meet Miss Nipaporn, who works as a guest relations manager at one of the Sunwing hotels, under a Swedish director. Most of their guests are families with children, but there are also some male solo travellers. Miss Nipaporn can only remember two cases where Swedish male guests brought underage girls with them back to the hotel. In both cases the men were stopped at the reception, because of the hotel’s other policy: demanding to see the ID of the women, to verify that they are over 18.

“It’s a more common problem that German men want to bring underage girls back to their hotel rooms,” Nipaporn says. “On the other hand, it happens frequently that Swedish men want to take women above 18 to their rooms.”

Appendix II: Mekanismer bakom svensk sexturism i Thailand

This is the chapter “Mechanisms behind Swedish sex tourism in Thailand” in Swedish with original quotes from the men interviewed.

Den berömda party- och prostitutionsgatan Bangla Road i Patong Beach, ett resortsamhälle på ön Phuket, kantas av flera hundra större och mindre nöjeslokaler. Besökarna trängs i de mest populära barerna, där de pratar med prostituerade bartjejer, lyssnar på musik och ser strippor uppträda på små dansscener. Längs med hela gatan kränger försäljare helt öppet cigaretter från den svarta marknaden och illegala droger som marijuana och kokain. Andra människor kommer fram till dig med små plastlaminerade skyltar i händerna, och försöker övertyga dig om att följa efter dem bort till de mer ljusskygga lokalerna, ner för Banglas sidogränder. Där det finns det illegala så kallade ” knullshower” och de ökända ”ping-pong-showerna”, där kvinnor trycker upp bordtennisbollar, rep, rakblad, frukt och levande djur i sina vaginor, sedan trycker ut dem igen. Azllt framför en publik.

Och, Bangla Road kantas förstås av hundratals och åter hundratals lättklädda prostituerade människor. Kvinnor som står stilla och kvinnor som går omkring och livesänder filmer av sig själva på nätet, som potentiella sexköpare kan titta på.

– När du kommer till Thailand för första gången så får du lätt en chock över alla tjejer här. Men thailändarna har inte samma syn på sex som vi har. De ser inte ner på tjejerna som jobbar i barer och ute på gatorna. Visst, prostitution är ju förbjudet enligt lag här. Men den thailändska polisen ser det inte så, de ser det som en affärssuppgörelse mellan två vuxna människor, precis som alla andra, säger “Henrik”, en man i 50-årsåldern som kommer från södra Sverige.

Henrik anlände till Patong igår. Han har tappat räkningen på hur många gånger han har varit i Thailand under åren, men tror att det är ungefär 40 gånger. Han kan lätt bli nostalgisk när han talar om “den gamla goda tiden” på Bangla Road, när det fanns betydligt fler sidogränder där det hände hedonistiska saker.

– Nu är det rejält uppstädat och det finns inte samma charm längre. Och det kan låta konstigt, men jag tycker bartjejererna var ärligare förr också. Förr satte du dig i en bar, du träffade en tjej, ni pratade, du frågade om hon vill ha en drink. Det var du som bestämde själv. Men nu kan du knappt gå in i en bar utan att bordellmamman direkt fiskar drinkar till sig själv och alla andra. Vad fan är det för beteende?

Som nämndes i metodkapitlet så har jag, författaren, haft en rad möten med svenska sexköpare i Thailand, när jag arbetat under falsk identitet och låtsats vara en sexköpande turist även jag. Under tre veckor träffade jag svenska män i restauranger, i vanliga barer, i

red light-barer och i strippklubbar i Bangkok, i Pattaya och på Phuket. Mitt uppdrag var att identifiera mekanismerna bakom varför männen valt att söka upp prostituerade personer för att köpa sexuella tjänster.

Det visade sig att det finns flera olika mekanismer bakom de svenska männens sexköp, och de påverkas vanligtvis också av flera mekanismer samtidigt. Bortsett från det hade männen jag träffade få saker gemensamt. De kom från olika delar av Sverige, några av dem från städer och andra från byar eller mindre samhällen. Deras åldrar sträckte sig från slutet av 30-årsåldern till början av 70-årsåldern. De hade olika socio-ekonomiska bakgrunder och olika utbildningsbakgrunder. Vissa hade studerat vid universitet medan andra alltid hade sysslat med manuellt arbete.

En sak som många av dessa män hade gemensamt var att de tidigare hade varit i relationer eller äktenskap med svenska kvinnor, men inte längre. De var vanligtvis singlar när de först anlände till Thailand. Det enda som alla av dem hade gemensamt var att de var födda i Sverige, och att de alla ansåg att kvinnorna som säljer sex stod till deras förfogande.

Kultur och tradition

Allt började med en lång, svettig promenad från centrala Pattaya bort till Jomtien Beach, fem eller sex kilometer härifrån. Solen stekte och efter att "Mats" och hans vän hade promenerat i nästan två timmar tog de en vilopaus, och stannade till i en massagesalong för en helkroppsbehandling. Den unga kvinnan i salongen bad Mats att ta av sig kläderna, inklusive hans kalsonger. Mats visste inte vad han kunde förvänta sig, men kvinnan gav honom en utmärkt massage som även inkluderade han skinkor och skrev. Mats fick erektion. Hon bad honom att vända sig om på rygg och pekade på hans erigerade penis. Extra massage?

– I det läget var det svinsvårt att säga nej. Och på den vägen var det, hur jag började upptäcka hur det fungerade på många massageställen. Många är förklädda bordeller. Du får följa med upp till ett rum, du får en oljemassage i 15–20 minuter, sedan kommer ett fullt knull.

Jag stöter på 47-åriga Mats från Göteborg en kväll ute i centrala Pattaya, när han har stannat till för att dricka några öl i en bar. Sex år har passerat sedan han fick sin första "happy ending" i massagebordellen. Sedan dess har han återvänt till Thailand så ofta som möjligt. Han blev omedelbart förälskad i den thailändska maten, i det fina vädret och de billiga priserna, men allra mest i det billiga sexet. Innan han började resa till Thailand så brukade Mats besöka de spanska Kanarieöarna för att ta semester. Men att köpa sex där skulle kosta honom 120 Euro varje gång, och han kunde inte veta om kvinnan i fråga skulle "sticka en kniv i honom". Här i Thailand kan du få hela paketet tryggt och säkert och endast betala 30–40 Euro.

– Mina polare hemma började kalla mig för en sextorsk. Ja, hur lätt som helst. Jag har aldrig förnekat prostitution i sig. Det är en affärstransaktion mellan två människor, ungefär som att jag skulle köpa ett kilo fläskkött.

Personer som Mats upprepar ofta vad andra försvarare av prostitutionen brukar säga: att merparten av alla thailändare har en "annan syn på sex". De påstår att prostitutionen är mycket mer accepterad i Thailand än vad som är fallet i ett land som Sverige. Mats har därför "anpassat sig" till vad han hävdar är den lokala kulturen och försvarar sig själv och sitt agerande med samma mentalitet han menar dominerar i det thailändska samhället.

Men å andra sidan, frågar han, vad kännetecknar egentligen prostitution? Vad räknas egentligen som sexuella tjänster? Mats drar sig till minnes hur han läste i tidningen för ett tag sedan, hur polisen hade gjort ett tillslag mot olika thailändska massagesalonger i Stockholm, där kunderna fick "happy endings" mot en extra slant. En av de thailändska kvinnorna som nu hade åtalats för att driva en bordell förnekade anklagelserna och förklarade i en intervju, att hon helt enkelt hade erbjudit "massage av penis", vilket hon inte räknade som en sexuell tjänst.

– Att ge penismassage är sexuellt i Sverige, men inte här i Thailand. Thailändska män går för att få samma massage här nere. Det är ett helt annat synsätt på sex och våra svenska kvinnor har väldigt svårt att förstå det.

Mats faller alltså in i den kategori av sexköpare som hävdar att de bara anpassat sig till den lokala kulturen och det lokala tänkandet. Mats anser att det är fullt acceptabelt att köpa sex, eftersom han ser det som helt naturligt och normaliserat att kvinnor i Thailand att sälja sexuella tjänster. Vissa sådana tjänster ska inte ens räknas som prostitution. Det är förstås ett argument som lätt kan avfärdas, eftersom Mats och andra män fortfarande betalar för alla tjänsterna – vilket är precis vad prostitution handlar om.

Han trycker in en stor portion med snus under läppen och dricker en klunk öl. Mats kan enkelt framstå som en stereotypisk machoman, som omfamnar en ultramaskulin identitet och konservativa värderingar om könsroller. Det har varit enkelt för honom att "anpassa sig" i Thailand. Men han hävdar också att han tack vare de återkommande resorna till Thailand har förändrat några av hans tidigare värderingar.

– Tidigare var jag världens största homofob. Jag kunde inte tåla bögar, de var förbannade jävla avskum som skulle dö. Men så kom jag ner hit och såg en ladyboy efter den andra, och vad fan skulle jag säga? Du är inte naturlig, gå och dö? Det sättet att tänka blev ännu svårare efter att jag drack öl med dem och upptäckte att, vad fan, det här är ju människor. Deras enda synd är att de har skaffat plasttuttar och vill bli damer. Ladyboys och transsexuella är så mycket mer accepterade här än de skulle vara om du hade placerat dem på Avenyn.

För nästan ett år sedan förälskade sig Mats också i en "bartjej", som han först betalade för att ha sex med. Nu kallar han henne för sin permanenta flickvän. Det här har skapat slitningar mellan Mats och flera av hans familjemedlemmar, som har haft svårt att acceptera hans val av partner. Hans mor frågade honom genast hur mycket han hade betalat för sin flickvän när de först träffades, vilket ledde till ett stort gräl. Mats säger att, visst, det är väldigt enkelt att hitta en flickvän i Thailand, eftersom kvinnorna här alla vill ha bättre liv.

– Jag vet att det samma gäller min flickvän, men så fungerar alla människor. Jag hade också hoppats att det kom fram en 50-årig kärring på Avenyn och bad mig knulla henne en gång i veckan, så skulle jag få det ena och det andra. Klart som fan jag hade hoppat det direkt.

Mats har sökt svenskt visum för att eventuellt få med sig flickvännen hem så att hon kan bo hos honom i Göteborg. Han sa till henne när han ansökte, att han bara skulle kräva en enda sak av henne: att hon tar hand om halva hemmet och han den andra halvan. Hon svarade: "Om jag kommer till Sverige så arbetar du, och jag tar hand om ditt hem".

Det här är en fördel som Mats tidigt upptäckte i Thailand, när han betalade prostituerade kvinnor för att stanna honom längre än bara en timme: den nya servicen du får som en man. Mats säger att det är något som kommer med den traditionella könsrollen för thailändska kvinnor, som är helt annorlunda från hur det fungerar i Sverige.

– Thaitjejer är som svenska tjejer brukade vara fram till för 50, 60 år sedan. Om jag är törstig så behöver jag inte gå och hämta ett glas vatten själv, hon hämtar det åt mig. Och jag tror det här lockar en jävla massa svenska män. För vem fan vill inte bli behandlad som en kung? Jag har ett par vänner hemma som är kraftigt vänster och de hade säkert kunnat kalla mig en mansgris. Men det är deras kultur, det här är min kultur.

Mats har njutit av de personliga fördelar som kommit med mer traditionella könsroller. Nu är det här något han vill ta med sig hem för att ha permanent, även i Sverige. Han säger att jämställdhet mellan män och kvinnor inte nödvändigtvis är en dålig sak, men att Sverige är ett så fruktansvärt politiskt korrekt land, att folk där inte kan se att det finns andra former av relationer, i andra länder.

Han hänvisar till dokumentärfilmen "Thailandsdrömmar" som kom 2016, där dokumentärfilmarna Renzo Aneröd and Hanna Aneröd undersöker varför flera av Renzos manliga släktingar har valt att migrera till Thailand, där de hittat partners. Männerna i fråga saknade känslorna från den kärnfamilj de själva hade vuxit upp i, i "det gamla Sverige". Asiatiska kvinnor uppfostras till att passa in i en mycket mer traditionell roll i hemmet än vad som idag är fallet med svenska kvinnor. Mats kan känna igen sig själv i filmen.

– Jag vill inte bara bli behandlad som en man, utan jag vill ha ett förhållande där hon ska göra allt för mig och jag ska göra allt för henne. Min förra svenska fru satt bara och frågade när jag skulle städa köket, städa vardagsrummet, och frågade när jag skulle ut och köpa nya saker till henne. Det är den kulturen jag inte stod ut med.

Den godhjärtade hjälparen

En tidig kväll i augusti är jag ute och promenerar i Pattaya för att leta reda på en svenskägd restaurang, där det tydligen serveras utsökt mat från hemlandet. Stället visar dock vara helt tomt på svenska besökare. Jag fortsätter min promenad och ett par gator söderut stöter jag på en liten, sliten thailändsk restaurang där några äldre västerländska män sitter i plaststolar och dricker iskall öl.

”Hugo” är en av dem. Han är 71 år gammal och pensionerades från sitt jobb som sjukhustekniker för fem år sedan. Hugo säger att han ”var” från Stockholm. Var?

– Ja, var. Jag har sålt allting och har ingenting kvar hemma. Jag bor här nu och kommer aldrig att åka tillbaka till Sverige igen. Det finns bara muslimer där nu, de vill inte ha några gamla människor längre. Det enda jag behöver från Sverige är mitt snus, så jag brukar be folk som ska åka till Thailand att ta med sig lite.

Hugo säger att han lever ett bra liv här i Pattaya, han har en ”thaidam” här också. Han kom till Thailand första gången 1996 under en affärsresa och återvände sedan många gånger. Det var maten, det soliga vädret och allra mest kvinnorna som gjorde att han började älska platsen så mycket, att han till sist bestämde sig för att utvandra hit.

– Damerna i Sverige tycker att vi som åker hit är för jävliga, och att vi är snuskhumrar. Men alla är ju inte lika, va. Här i Thailand ser man på det på ett annat sätt. Hemma är de ju horor, men här är de mer som sällskapsdamer. De ser annorlunda på det och accepterar det.

Hugo är ännu en man som försvarar prostitutionen med argumentet att lokalbefolkningen är helt okej med det. Medan det i själva verket även finns motstånd mot prostitutionen och en betydligt mer komplicerad syn på situationen, i det thailändska samhället.

Genom åren har Hugo betalat ett flertal thailändska kvinnor för att ge honom långvariga sexuella tjänster. Han anser att den kvinna han är med nu är hans permanenta flickvän. Det stör honom inte att hon befann sig i prostitutionsindustrin första gången de möttes. Precis som många andra kvinnor som säljer sex så kommer Hugos flickvän från den fattiga Isanprovinsen i nordöstra Thailand. Hon är där nu för att hälsa på familjen under några dagar. Hugo stannade hemma.

– Alla thaidamer vill bli ihop med en ”farang”, en västerlänning, som kan försörjer dem och se till att det även kan gå lite pengar till familjen. Allt handlar om pengar och att skaffa sig ett bättre liv.

Och Hugo hjälpte gärna sin flickvän och hennes föräldrar finansiellt, redan när han fortfarande betalade henne för att få sex. Han har förblivit en ”hjälpare” även efter att förhållandet, som tidigare byggde på betalning, har utvecklats till något mer långsiktigt.

”Den godhjärtade hjälparen” är en roll som många sexköpare i Thailand identifierar sig med. Alla svenska män jag träffar är fullständigt medvetna om att kvinnorna som säljer sex kommer från fattiga familjer, och att de inte anslöt sig till prostitutionsindustrin av nyfikenhet. På samma gång uttrycker flera av de svenska männen en övertygelse om att de ”hjälp” kvinnorna, när de betalar dem för sexuella tjänster. De måste ju tjäna pengar genom att sälja sex ändå, så männen gör dem faktiskt en tjänst genom att bli deras kunder!

Vid ett tillfälle tillbringar jag en hel kväll ute i Pattaya tillsammans med ”Marcus”, en 47-åring från Stockholm. Han arbetar deltid som musiker och spelar och turnerar med en välkänd musikgrupp som släppte flera låtar som blev kommersiella storsäljare, i mitten av 1990-talet. Marcus är en av originalmedlemmarna i bandet. Han är i Thailand under två veckor och har varit här många gånger förr.

Vi börjar kvällen i en svenskägd bar, där vi dricker sex shots med vodka innan vi beger oss mot det närbelägna red light-området LK Metro. Marcus föredrar att gå hit framför andra platser. Det finns förstås gott om sexklubbar längst det berömda Walking Street här i Pattaya, men han tycker att det finns för många arabiska och indiska män där. Marcus väljer ut en sexklubb där kvinnorna bär både sina namn och serienummer på små lappar som hänger från snören runt halsen eller från deras små kläder. Om en sexköpare är för full för att läsa eller minnas deras namn, så kan han förhoppningsvis åtminstone se numret.

Inne i sexklubben börjar Marcus först suga på en ung strippas nakna bröst, innan han fortsätter med att berätta en historia om när han tog med sig "en ung gatflicka" ut för en lyxigt äventyr i Bangkok.

– Vi gick till den där kända restaurangen med en takterrass, som är med i filmen Baksmällan 2. Där var fullt med rika affärsmän från Kina, Japan och Korea. Priserna i det här stället var helt galna och trots att vi beställde bara två små förrätter så kostade det mig 9000 Baht. Nästan 250 Euro. Tjejen jag hade med mig kom från landsbygden i Isan. Hon satt bara och stirrade på priserna i menyn, sedan sa hon att en hel måltid med förrätt och efterrätt kostade lika mycket pengar som hennes familj kunde leva på i två år. De jobbade i skogen med att utvinna kåda ur gummiträd.

Marcus tyckte synd om kvinnan, som kom från en sådan fattig bakgrund, och ville visa henne en ny värld genom besöket till lyxrestaurangen. Det är oklart om hon uppskattade denna gest, men Marcus hoppades det. Han såg också till att ge henne ett ganska generöst arvode för de sexuella tjänster han gav henne, vilket var pengar han hoppades delvis skulle skickas till hennes föräldrar.

"Den godhjärtade hjälparen" har ingenting emot finansiella kostnader eller att ge gåvor. Men han kräver fortfarande sex tillbaka.

Några av männen har även väldigt höga tankar om sig själva som ett kollektiv och kan hävda att de hjälper kvinnorna enbart på grund av att de är svenskar. På något sätt anses det garantera att de prostituerade kvinnor behandlas bättre, än om de skulle tillbringa tid med icke-västerländska män.

Göteborgaren "Tobias", en lång man strax över 60 år gammal, berättar för mig en kväll i Pattaya att de thailändska kvinnorna är jättegglade över att så många svenska och skandinaviska män besöker Thailand.

– Eftersom vi är snälla och trevliga mot dem, medan det finns andra som är elaka istället: indier och araber. Thailändskorna hatar dem och det är därför vi västerlänningar inte gillar dem heller. Indierna skickar alltid ut bara en kille och bestämmer träff med en tjej, men sedan väntar tre andra jävla indier på rummet och så knullar de henne allihop. För bara 1000 Baht. Hon kommer inte undan. Så jävla äckliga är de, det är så vidrigt att det inte finns ord. Det skulle aldrig vi svenskar eller nordbor göra! Vi har en annan respekt.

Rasistiska uttryck och generaliseringar är mycket utbredda bland de svenska sexköparna. Kommentarer som denna från Tobias visar hur vissa av de svenska männen anser att deras

utnyttjande av kvinnorna är helt oskyldigt, och till och med godhjärtat, jämfört med de asiatiska männens utnyttjande. Från ett rasistiskt perspektiv så behandlar svenska och skandinaviska män de thailändska kvinnorna bättre och med mer respekt, än vad indiska och arabiska män någonsin kan göra.

Att hyra en flickvän

“Conny” får ett nytt meddelande varannan minut på de olika appar och dejtingsajter han använder på sin telefon för att tala med olika thailändska prostituerade kvinnor. Tider, Line, ThaiLove, ThaiCupid, listan kan göras lång. Allt man behöver göra är att registrera en profil på någon av sajterna, säger han. Innan man vet ordet av så har 300 kvinnor skickat meddelanden till dig.

– Här är en av dem. Jag likade henne idag och hon har skrivit direkt: ”What you doing? You want to meet me?” Men inte fan är hon 20 år heller. Hon är väl 26. Här är en annan tjej, som jobbar på en bar här i närheten. Jag brukar skriva till henne om jag behöver blåsa av mig, på dagtid.

Det blir allt vanligare att Conny och andra utländska män använder olika appar och dejtingsajter för att arrangera möten med kvinnor. Det är samma slags appar som socialarbetaren i kvinnohärbarget på Phuket varnade för. Apparna gör det ännu lättare att köpa sex och ännu lättar för somliga män att utnyttja flickor som är under 18.

Conny är nära 50 och kommer från en liten stad i Mellansverige. Han har kommit hit till Thailand ett par gånger om året sedan fem år tillbaka, och hans största intresse här är sexet. Den första kvinnan han betalade för att gå med honom till hans hotellrum, när han kom hit den här gången, var den unga städerskan på hotellet där han bor. Det var den första dagen i landet. Nu tycker Conny att städerskan har blivit lite för efterhängsen för att få hans uppmärksamhet igen.

Men på sin andra dag tillbaka i Thailand så åkte Conny för att träffa en prostituerad kvinna i staden Khon Kaen, i den fattiga Isanprovinsen. Han fick först kontakt med henne via en dejtingsajt för ett år sedan och kallar henne för sin ”flickvän”. Förra gången han var i Thailand så tog han henne med sig på en fem dagar lång nöjesresa till en paradiso. Men inför det här Thailandsbesöket så hade han också kommit i kontakt med en väldigt söt 19-åring kvinna som heter May, via samma dejtingsajt. Så han lämnade sin ”flickvän”, flög ner till Bangkok och träffade May, som tog med sig sina familjemedlemmar till mötet. Det visade sig dock att May var mycket tystare i verkliga livet än vad hon varit på Internet. Efter bara en dag så började hon också fråga Conny om han kunde sticka till henne en slant för att hjälpa till med renoveringen av hennes familjs restaurang.

– Hon försökte utnyttja mig. Jag hade redan betalat alla hotellkostnader för oss och för familjen. Så jag ljög ihop en historia om att jag behövde hjälpa en vän och åkte tillbaka till flickvännen i Khon Kaen.

I sitt verkliga liv är Conny långt ifrån någon playboy som kan byta kärlekspartners lika ofta som andra människor byter underkläder. Han är en medelålders, flintskallig och överviktig man, som lever ett ensamt singelliv hemma i Sverige. Här i Thailand fyller han sina dagar med så mycket sex och så många kvinnor som möjligt, för att gottgöra ensamheten där hemma.

Conny och många andra män är ute efter vad som brukar kallas en "flickvänsupplevelse". De försöker skapa fiktiva, oftast kortvariga "förhållanden" med prostituerade kvinnor. Forskning har visat att både yngre och äldre män letar reda på sådana "flickvänner" under besök i Thailand. I vissa fall gör de det bara som en skoj sak, och när det rör sig om en kvinna med ungefär samma ålder kan männen då också hävda att de inte ens har rört sig om prostitution. Att de inte "betalat" en kvinna för sexuella tjänster och sällskap utan istället "gett" saker till henne.

Andra gånger så letar männen efter en efter en "hyresflickvän", för att fylla en tomhet i deras liv. De kan ha varit singlar under en lång tid, de kan leva ensamma utan något stadigt, kvinnligt sällskap. De kan lida av alla dessa saker och ha ett dåligt självförtroende.

Conny är definitivt på jakt efter en "flickvänsupplevelse" med några av de kvinnor han betalar, och han försöker hitta en hyresflickvän. Han vill inte bara ha dem för deras sexuella tjänster. Han vill tillbringa dagar och nätter med dem, och tala om samhället, historia och Thailands förflutna. Men han förklarar att han blivit frustrerad och besviken, över hur "outbildade" de unga, prostituerade kvinnorna från Isans fattiga landsbygd är.

– De bryr sig bara om mobiltelefonen, jobbet, pengarna och gatan utanför. Det är deras hela värld.

Inte något bra flickvänsmaterial.

På en onsdagskväll kommer Conny i sällskap med en ny kvinna till en bar där några svenska män har samlats för att dricka och prata. Kvinnan har tandställning och är förmodligen 27, 28 år. Conny kom i kontakt med henne dagen innan, via appen Tinder. Hon är helt tyst och jag kan inte höra henne säga ett enda ord under hela kvällen.

Några timmar senare har vi alla gått en strippklubb för att se barbröstade kvinnor dansa uppe på en scen och närma sig potentiella sexköpare. Connys Tinder dejt ser inte ut att tycka om miljön. Det är högljutt, alkoholen flödar och hon har gott om konkurrens från andra kvinnor. Kanske skulle hon föredra att gå tillbaka till Connys hotellrum för att sälja de sexuella tjänsterna, så att hon kan ge sig av sedan. Hon lutar sitt huvud mot hans lår börjar klämma på hans lår.

Tobias, den äldre mannen från Göteborg, har också följt med till klubben.

– Aha, kolla där. Jag tror att hon gillar dig, Conny.

– Nej, det handlar bara om pengar, svarar Conny och gnider tummen mot topparna av hans pekfinger och långfinger.

– Nej, nej, jag har ett gott öga för sånt här. Hon tycker verkligen om dig, säger Tobias.

– Jaså, tror du det? Ja det kanske stämmer, säger Conny, nu med ett brett leende på läpparna.

Kanske är det här det flickvänsmaterial han har gått och letat efter. Hon tycker kanske faktiskt om honom, trots att hon bara är med Conny för att han betalar henne, och trots att de inte har sagt ett enda ord till varandra under hela kvällen.

Det måste sägas att gott om svenska män har träffat lokala kvinnor som kanske aldrig har sålt sex, när de har varit och semestrat i Thailand. Många svenska män har också inlett förhållanden med dessa kvinnor, som ibland även har flyttat till Sverige där de gift sig med de svenska männen och bildat familjer med barn. Andra gånger har svenska män framgångsrikt hittat en ny flickvän eller fru via thailändska dejtingsajter, som dokumentären *Thailandsdrömmar* visar.

Sådana framgångshistorier är välkända bland de svenska sexköparna i Thailand. De som söker en "flickvänsupplevelse" eller något slags längre "förhållande" vill uppleva samma framgångshistoria. Det är därför vissa sexköpare kan varna för att de "kärlekskranka" svenska män som letar efter flickvänner i Thailand måste ta hand om sig själva. De måste vara försiktiga så att de inte blir lurade och "får sin känslor trampade på". Särskilt i fall där det också finns tecken på depression med i bilden.

Det finns gott om historier om utländska män som begått självmord i Thailand, ofta på spektakulära vis. Ett flertal webbsidor har skapats för att dokumentera alla självmord, där gräsligt bild- och filmmaterial visar de livlösa kropparna av män från Sverige och andra länder. Anledningarna till självmorden kan vara många: växande skulder, dödliga sjukdomar, alkoholism. Men utländska män begår också självmord på grund av prostitutionsindustrin.

I en svenskägd bar i centrala Pattaya träffar jag en man som vi kan kalla "Staffan". Trots att han är bara i slutet av 30-årsåldern så har Staffan köpt sex i årtal. Han agerar och tänker på samma sätt som de betydligt äldre svenska sexköpare han dricker öl med i baren. Staffan berättar för mig att vissa män försöker finna sann kärlek och förhållanden när de kommit till Thailand. Vissa män blir i sin tur helt krossade, när deras "förhållanden" sedan faller i bitar och de inser att ingenting någonsin var på riktigt. Thailändska medier rapporterar regelbundet om hur utländska män tar livet av sig själva, samtidigt som de ofta nämner hur det finns betydligt yngre thailändska "flickvänner" eller "pojkvänner" med i bilden. Vissa sätt att begå självmord är mer kända än andra, bland sexköparna.

– Det finns något som kallas "Pattaya Dive". Det innebär att du checkar in på sjuttonde våningen i ett hotell och sedan dyker ut från balkongen, till parkeringen nedanför. Jag har träffat flera killar här som har blivit allvarligt deprimerade efter att deras thaitjejer har lämnat dem. Riktigt tragiska berättelser. Jag antar att det är killar som inte har lyckats hitta någon kärlek där hemma, som inte haft en flickvän på flera år.

Staffans insikt i utländska mäns självmord i Pattaya, i ensamhet och i hur det är att inte ha någon tur i kärlek, får mig att undra om han kanske delvis talar om sina egna erfarenheter. Men sådana mörka samtalsämnen om depression, självmord och om män som tydligen ska ha

lurats eller lämnats av thailändska "flickvänner" dyker också upp, när vissa barkonversationer blir tillräckligt djupa.

Trots att han är yngre än de flesta andra sexköparna så är även Staffan på jakt efter en flickvän att hyra. För en tid sedan träffade han en prostituerad kvinna som växte upp i Isanprovinsen i nordost. Staffan nöjer sig med att dricka bara två öl i baren ikväll, eftersom han ska åka och träffa "svärföräldrarna" i "flickvännens" hemby imorgon.

Om förutsättningarna är de rätta, så håller somliga svenska män också fast vid en enda hyresflickvän under årtal. Flera kvällar stöter jag ihop med den färgstarka mannen "Tor", i olika restauranger och barer i Pattaya. Vanligtvis de ställen som serverar svensk mat. Tor är 63 år gammal och har en lång, framgångsrik karriär i en särskild idrott bakom sig. Han arbetar fortfarande som tränare åt svenska barn och tonåringar i denna idrott.

Under de senaste åtta åren har Tor återvänt till Pattaya för att tillbringa tid med en specifik hyresflickvän, en kvinna som kallas Nicki som nu är några år över 30. Nicki följer alltid med Tor till alla barer och restauranger. Det är svårt att säga om några "känslor" ligger bakom Tors beslut att återvända till samma kvinna år efter år, men Nicki ger i alla fall Tor sexuell njutning. En kväll när vi och andra svenskar sitter och deltar i en drinktävling så drar sig Nicki ut, eftersom hon inte tycker om att dricka turkisk peppar-shots.

– Det är lika bra att hon drar sig ur, om hon blir för full kan hon inte suga min kuk senare i natt, säger Tor.

Ett paradiset för män

En fredagskväll anländer 43-åriga "Max" från Luleå till en bar i Pattaya där några andra svenska män redan sitter och dricker öl och roar sig själva. Max bröst glänser av svett och han har knäppt upp sin svarta silkesskjorta halvvägs ner till magen, i ett försök att svalka sig. Han blev just klar med att ha sex med en ung kvinna som kallas Jenny, i hans lägenhet en bit ner för gatan.

– Fan, jag har inte slutat att svettas ännu. Hon är nåt av det bästa jag har satt på. Jag fick inte stoppa in den i röven på henne, men det gjorde inget. Hon har en så jävla fin röv att jag bara kan ligga där och titta på den. Ni skulle ha sett när hon ställde sig på alla fyra och spände upp den där röven, och jag tog henne bakifrån. Hon är smal på överkroppen men har en afrikansk röv och stora lår, och det klatschade så jävla gott. Och så kom hon. Jag tror hon kom fem gånger!

Några av de andra männen skrattar försiktigt. Max brukar alltid säga att han just har haft sex med en av de bästa tjejerna någonsin. Men han är samtidigt något av en hjälte för Staffan, mannen i slutet av 30-årsåldern med en särskild kunskap om självmord och ensamhet.

– Jag kan inte förstå hur du kan hålla på och knulla så mycket, Max. Om jag knullar en gång i veckan så är jag nöjd. Du måste ju vara skapt som en hingst!

Två dagar tidigare tog Max med sig en annan kvinna till den här baren, någon han hade plockat upp utanför hans lokala Seven Eleven-butik. Hon var ung och mycket attraktiv. Hennes syster som studerar till lärare anslöt i baren under kvällen och Max erbjöd sig att betala för en trekant med båda systrarna, men de tackade nej.

Nu har emellertid stora "problem" dykt upp. Max har en flickvän, en kambodjansk kvinna som tidigare har sålt sex och som Max brukar bo hos varje gång han återvänder till Thailand. Flickvännen har lämnat Pattaya för fem dagar, för att delta i en bröllopsfest hemma i Kambodja. Max gav sig genast ut för att hitta kvinnor som säljer sex på samma gata där han själv bor, och tog med dem hem till flickvännens lägenhet. Han hävdar att både Jenny och den andra unga kvinnan har förälskat sig i honom, eftersom han gav dem sådan njutning i sängen. De vet var han bor – och flickvännen kommer hem imorgon.

Max skulle förmodligen även kunna skaffa sig en flickvän i Sverige. Han ser bra ut, är vältränad med svällande muskler och har intressanta tatueringar över hela kroppen. Han har pengar, eftersom han driver ett byggföretag och tar emot 10 000 kronor på kontot varje vecka, från det arbete som hans anställda utför åt honom.

Men Max verkar oförmögen att kunna sluta köpa sex. Han berättar för mig att han brände 100 000 kronor på kvinnor och nattlivet under hans första fem veckor i landet, den här sommaren 2018. Trots att han redan har en "flickvän" här. Någonting inuti honom gör att han omöjligen kan vara nöjd med allt det han redan har. Han jagar konstant efter nya kvinnor att köpa sex av.

Även om de andra svenska männen i barnen muttrar att han bara har sig själv att skylla för sina problem, att han är dum i huvudet som tar med sig prostituerade kvinnor till sitt eget ställe, så kan de ändå visa en förståelse för hur Max och andra män nästan mister förståndet här nere. Att göra irrationella saker kan ursäktas. Det här är ju trots allt Thailand!

– Välkommen till Sin City, där allt är tillåtet, var den första saken jag hörde från den första svenska sexturisten som jag mötte i Thailand.

Vi lämnar allihop baren och går tillsammans till en närbelägen klubb i red light-området LK Metro, där Max klättrar upp till kvinnorna uppe på strippscenen. Han bär sitt läderskärp som ett koppel runt halsen och får en av kvinnorna att dra honom med sig in i ett mörklagt rum längre bak i lokalen. 7000 thailändska Baht för ännu en omgång sex.

Den överallt närvarande prostitutionsindustrin i Thailand är också attraktiv för andra män, som länge har sysslat med sexturism. "Niklas", en 62-årig farfar från Göteborg, är ännu en svensk man som har åkt till Thailand i årtal. Han bestämde sig för att gå i förtidspension och kapa alla band till Sverige för nio månader sedan, när han flyttade till Pattaya permanent. En stor anledning bakom detta beslut var det han kallar en "suicidal invandringspolitik" där hemma.

– Sverige har blivit ett ockuperat land. Vi har tagit emot en miljon invandrare på ingen tid alls, och de människorna kommer aldrig någonsin att tillföra någonting till Sverige. De är för dåligt utbildade och för jävla korkade. Man ska inte hymla med att araber och muslimer är inavlade,

eftersom de i tusentals år har gift sig med sina kusiner. Fan vet hur många år jag har kvar av mitt liv, och jag tänker inte gå och reta mig på att bo i Sverige under de åren.

Flera andar svenska sexköpare i Thailand delar sådana högerradikala och rasistiska idéer, om att deras hemland har invaderats och förstörts av värdelösa muslimer. Det är inte svårt att se ironin i att flera av själva bestämt sig för att flytta till ett annat, avlägset land, utan att visa minsta intresse för att anpassa sig till den lokala kulturen och sedvänjor, medan de inte bidrar med någonting alls till det thailändska samhället – bortsett från att de spenderar sina pengar på lokala nöjen och på prostitutionsindustrin.

Men anledningen till varför Niklas valde att gå i "exil" till Thailand av alla ställen, och specifikt till bordellstaden Pattaya, är helt uppenbar.

– Det här är ett paradys för män. Det här är den totala motsatsen till Sverige. Här har du en hel stad där det finns minst 100 000 vackra, unga och villiga kvinnor.

Niklas har alltid tyckt om att ha sex med två kvinnor på samma gång. I Thailand har han uppgraderat detta till att ha sex med tre kvinnor på samma gång. Han är välkänd för sina fyrkanter bland de andra svenska sexköparna, som han ofta träffar ute i barer.

Niklas är också den person jag träffar, som har mest erfarenhet av sexturism även i andra länder. Han berättar historier om sina många besök till Prag och Budapest, två fantastiska platser där det viktigaste uppdraget alltid har varit att träffa vackra och prostituerade kvinnor. I Budapest stötte han av en slump på en sexklubb där han kunde välja ut två kvinnor och ta en hiss upp till en takvåning, där han kunde röka cigarr och dricka champagne i en pool med de två nakna skönhetserna, innan de gick in i ett sovrum. Niklas är en entusiastisk cigarrökare och spenderade 50 000 kronor på att köpa sex under bara några dagar, när han besökte Kuba för några år sedan.

Inte alla svenska pensionärer har just så stora resurser att lägga på prostitution. Tvärtom så måste några av de sexköpare som har flyttat till Thailand vara försiktiga med att inte tömma sina plånböcker för fort i barerna. Men Niklas har en mycket generös pension efter att ha arbetat som chefsingenjör i ett av Sveriges största, privata företag. Hans pengar kommer att räcka under en väldigt lång tid i billiga Thailand, och Niklas avser att fortsätta med att köpa kvinnor i detta "paradis" han har funnit.

– Jag tycker det är så jävla korkat att skaffa flickvän här. Varför ska du göra det, när här finns så många andra kvinnor att träffa?

Som en observatör från utsidan är det även intressant att höra vissa av dessa svenska män diskutera praktiska problem relaterade till deras ålder, som de måste hitta lösningar på. Impotens eller problem med att behålla erektionen skulle förstöra det största nöjet i detta paradys för män. Vid flera tillfällen diskuterar männen vilka kombinationer av piller som fungerar bäst.

– Om jag tar en Cialis så ligger den som en grund, då känner jag någonting. Sedan tar jag en Viagra innan jag ska till, då jävlar blir det åka av vet du, enligt 60-åriga Tobias.

Med både glädje och avund i rösten berättar Tobias en historia om en man som heter Lelle, som brukade komma till Pattaya förut. Trots att han var 80 år gammal hade Lelle inga som helst problem att få erektion på naturlig väg, och han ” knullade som en kanin ” med kvinnor som kunde vara 50 år yngre än honom. Vilken otrolig tur vi andra har, att de här pillren har uppfunnits så att vi som inte har samma flax kan få hjälp, säger Tobias.

– Men allvarligt talat, jag tror att jag hade varit lika viril som Lelle om jag inte hade gått och klippt mig. Fy fan. Efter det så knullade jag inte på sex år. Och jag grät under två av de åren.

Vad menar du, Tobias, med att du ”klippte dig”?

– Jag steriliserade mig, så att jag inte skulle få fler barn. Jag har ju åtta ungar redan. Sen så var jag inte kåt eller någonting längre.

Varför använde du inte bara en kondom istället?

– Va! Tror du att jag använder kondom! Jag kan räkna antalet kondomer jag någonsin använt på min ena hand. Tre av dem har jag kastat in i en tapet. Jävla skit, hur fan kan man knulla med kondom?

Sist men inte minst måste någonting också sägas om transscenen med ”ladyboys” i den thailändska prostitutionsindustrin. De svenska männen ger ofta intryck av att vara oerhört maskulina, macho och traditionsbundna, vilket ofta går hand i hand med en preferens för bara heterosexuella möten. Men ett flertal av de svenska männen erkänner faktiskt att de också har betalat för sexuella tjänster från personer som föddes som biologiska män.

Som nämnts tidigare, så utgörs en mycket stor del av de prostituerade personerna i den thailändska sexindustrin av minderåriga flickor och cis-kvinnor, vilket innebär de som föddes som biologiska kvinnor och som ända sedan dess har identifierat sig med den könsidentiteten. Men uppskattningsvis tio procent av alla personer som säljer sex i Thailand är minderåriga pojkar, unga män och transpersoner. Många av dessa transpersoner identifierar sig själv som transkvinnor istället för som män. Den lokala termen för transkvinnor i Thailand är kathoey – för omvärlden är de mer kända som ”ladyboys”. Några av dessa tar hormoner och genomgår operationer för att få bröst och för att förändra deras genitalier, men det är också vanligt att de bara skaffar bröstimplantat. Andra har platta bröstorgar fram till att de kan ha råd att genomföra några av dessa förändringar. Västerländska manliga turister köper mycket oftare sex från män och från transpersoner än vad asiatiska manliga turister gör.

Tobias, den steriliserade mannen från Göteborg, förklarar en kväll att han ofta tycker att ”ladyboys” är sexigare än vad han kallar riktiga kvinnor, eftersom de förra är både längre och kurvigare. Han säger, att även om du har problem med att se en penis när en ”ladyboy” tar av sig kläderna, så är det enkelt att åtminstone betala för en avsugning.

– Jag tror att vi alla har fått avsugningar av ladyboys. Alla förutom Niklas, han vägrar eftersom han inte tycker om bögar.

Tobias fortsätter konversationen med Conny, om hur det ofta kan vara svårt att avgöra om en kvinna är en "riktig kvinna", eller inte. En av Tobias söner kom nyligen och besökte honom i Pattaya, tillsammans med en vän. När de var ute i nattlivet hade de båda suttit och dreglat över en oerhört attraktiv strippa uppe på en scen. Båda två hade fått en chock, säger Tobias med ett skratt, när de insåg att strippan hade en penis.

– Jepp, det kan vara svårt att avgöra. Många ladyboys tejpar ju upp kulorna och kuken mellan benen. Jag upptäckte det en gång när jag hade tagit hem en tjej och vi skulle gå in i duschen. Hon sa ingenting till mig innan. Så det blev ju bara en avsugning. säger Conny.

Både Tobias och Conny verkar medvetna om att de trauman och problem som många personer i prostitutionsindustrin kan lida av, förr eller senare. De fortsätter tala om hur "ladyboys" kan lida av depression, hur de kan förlora sin sexlust efter operationer, och hur somliga av dem begår självmord.

– Det sätter sig i psyket på dem, förstår du. Men anledningen till att de gör om sig till kvinnor är ju den här ständiga jakten på pengar. Jag menar, det vimlar ju av ladyboys här, säger Tobias.

Han och flera andra män menar att vissa "ladyboys" har antagit sin identitet på grund av att det gör det lättare att tjäna mer pengar i prostitutionsindustrin, inte på grund av att de är transkvinnor på riktigt. Trots deras bristande insyn i identiteterna och motivationerna hos transkvinnorna, så är flera av de svenska sexköparna förvånansvärt medvetna om de psykologiska problem som dessa och andra personer i prostitutionen lider av.

Men de här diskussionerna och den här medvetenheten betyder inte att de svenska männen slutar betala "ladyboys" och andra för sexuella tjänster.

Alkohol och laissez-faire

Sångerskan står och förbereder låtar på sin laptop till bakgrundsmusiken, medan ljudteknikern rigger mikrofonerna uppe på scenen. En gång i veckan arrangerar den här svenskägda restaurangen en karaokekväll där en thailändsk kvinna sjunger i fyra timmar. Bara västerländsk material, från 1960-talet till 1980-talet. Hon ska strax börja showen.

"Anders", 47, slår sig ner med en duns på en av de höga barstolarna bredvid mig. Han blev full tidigare idag och lyckades somna på sitt hotellrum, vilket gjorde att han missade en dejt han hade klockan sex. Den prostituerade kvinnan i fråga gav honom "det bästa knullet i hela hans liv" för två dagar sedan, på en sexklubb här i närheten. Men han har lyckats få tag i henne och hon är på sin väg tillbaka nu.

– Prova det här.

Han sträcker över en plastflaska med apelsinjuice. Jag tar en liten klunk, det smakar bittert.

– Det är Viagra. En och en halv tablett. Egentligen räcker det med en halv tablett men jag är fortfarande trött, så jag behöver lite extra för att komma igång.

Anders besökte Thailand första gången 1990, när han var bara 19 år. Han fastnade genast för atmosfären och för de vackra kvinnorna, och har återvänt ända sedan dess. Oräkneliga gånger. Han är en delägare av den här restaurangen som vi sitter i. Restaurangen äger även hotellrummen på ovanvåningen, vilket betyder att han alltid bor gratis varje gång han kommer hit.

Den prostituerade kvinnan som Anders träffade två dagar tidigare kommer tillbaka. Hon ser ut att vara omkring 35 år gammal. Vi beställer drinkar och sätter oss ner alla tre vid ett av matborden. Anders vänder sig mot mig.

– Horan såg vackrare ut när jag var full.

Några minuter senare är klockan åtta och karaokekvällen börjar. Sångerskan uppe på scenen river av den ena rockklassikern efter den andra. Anders vänder sig mot mig igen.

– Hon den här brukar inte ha några trosor på sig. Så det är bara att stoppa in några fingrar.

Han stoppar upp handen under kvinnans kjol och fortsätter att föra upp den mellan hennes ben. Hon rör inte på en muskel i ansiktet, när Anders börjar fingra henne under bordet.

– Ja, jag hade rätt. Fan, nu börjar jag bli lite kåt. Och hon börjar se bättre ut nu när jag blir full igen.

Karaokeshowen fortsätter på scenen. Anders tömmer sig fjärde flaska Chang Beer. Han dryper av svett och kvinnan från sexklubben torkar hans ansikte, hals och nacke med en pappersservett.

– Det är en sån jävla service. När vi går in i duschen så tvättar hon kuken, kulorna, rumpan. Det skulle aldrig en tjej hemma aldrig göra.

Två låtar senare tar Anders med sig kvinnan en våning upp, till sitt hotellrum.

Det är oerhört enkelt att kritisera Anders och andra sexköpare för att behandla kvinnor som handelsvaror, för att bryta mot alla anständiga och moraliska uppförandekoder, och för att nästan backa i åldern och förvandlas till tonåringar igen. Men på samma gång så bidrar känslan av laissez-faire, eller den väldigt ”tillåtande atmosfären” i Thailands turistområden till varför dessa och andra sexköpare så enkelt kan frångå alla regler som finns i deras hemländer, och bete sig på sätt som vore otänkbara i deras egna kulturer. Det här är ett fenomen som är känt från party- och sexturismen även i andra delar av världen. Men samtidigt måste det ännu en gång sägas, att det nästan uteslutande är män som köper sex i den här slags tillåtande atmosfären. Kvinnor låter bli.

Laissez-faire-atmosfären i Thailands turistzoner existerar delvis på grund av den enorma konsumtionen av alkohol, av både sexköpande turister och av personerna som säljer sex. En uppenbar konsekvens av detta är att de som konsumerar alkoholen blir både modigare och dummare på samma gång. Svenskar samlas ofta i barer och restauranger som ägs av deras landsmän, och medan aktiviteterna där för det mesta är alkoholrelaterade, så är dessa platser lika involverade i prostitutionsindustrin som andra är. Svenska män tar med sig prostituerade

kvinnor till restaurangerna, för att äta en stek och dricka alkohol, precis bredvid andra svenska turister.

Laissez-faire-atmosfären existerar också på grund av att de andra, berusade turisterna bidrar till en normalisering av sexindustrin i Thailand. Alla som besöker det berömda red light-området Patpong in Bangkok kommer inte bara att se sexköpare, utan även en hel massa andra turister, som inte köper sex men som också helt okritiskt attraherats till platsen på grund av utomhusmarknaden, barerna och framför allt ryktet.

Natt efter natt går jag ner för Bangla Road i Patong, på Phuket, och ser halvnakna unga kvinnor slingra sig runt strippstänger, eller i färd med att försöka hitta sexköpare ute på gatan eller inne i barerna. Överallt, mitt ibland dem, finns också helt vanliga turister, som lockats hit antingen av nyfikenhet eller för att de ska besöka nattklubbarna som ligger på samma gata. Jag kan se västerländska, fulla backpackers klättra upp på scenerna och dansa bredvid stripporna. Jag kan se västerländska familjer med små barn sitta och dricka läsk i en bar, medan en östeuropeisk strippa dansar bakom ett glasfönster en våning ovanför deras huvuden. Normalisering.

Nattklubben Illuzion som ligger mitt på Bangla Road delar ut gratis shots med godissmak till alla besökare. På insidan finns det ett gigantiskt dansgolv med DJs, för alla vanliga människor. Men det finns även VIP-sektioner med så kallade "lyxprostituerade" kvinnor från Östeuropa, dit man bara kan komma om man först köper oerhört dyra flaskor med sex liter Absolut Vodka. Unga kvinnor i små och avslöjande kläder står överallt i klubbens hörn och på dansgolvet, och säljer sexuella tjänster. Men partyfolket, alla backpackers, utländska hippies och till och med de unga utländska kvinnorna med feministsymboler på sina t-shirts, ser inte ut att bry sig. Besökare av alla åldrar och alla nationaliteter lockas till att dricka och dansa, mitt i hjärtat av prostitutionsindustrin.

I slutet av juli förbjöd den thailändska polisen all alkoholförsäljning under två dagar och stängde ner alla barer och klubbar på Bangla Road, på grund av en buddhistisk helgdag och för att hylla kungen på hans födelsedag. Allt på Bangla Road stängdes plötsligt ner vid midnatt, vilket gjorde alla turister mycket perplexa. Några minuter senare stötte jag på Anna och Maria, två unga svenska backpackers som hade anlänt till Phuket tidigare samma dag. När de kommit fram till Patong var deras första mål att besöka Bangla Road.

– Vi har verkligen sett fram emot att besöka Phuket och Bangla har varit den största anledningen till det. Så vi är väldigt besvikna över att det har stängts så tidigt, säger Anna.

Innan Phuket så hade Anna och Maria besökt världens största bordellstad Pattaya tillsammans med sina föräldrar. Där gick de två unga kvinnorna ut och festade på den stora prostitutionsgatan Walking Street. Jag frågar dem vad de tänker om atmosfären och om prostitutionen, på båda dessa platser.

– Jag dömer aldrig thaikvinnan som står där och säljer sig, för jag förstår varför hon gör det. Jag dömer bara mannen som köper henne. Men samtidigt... Om allt det här blev olagligt, vart ska alla människor ta vägen som idag jobbar med det här? Det kommer att fucka turismen och inkomstkällorna för alla, säger Maria.

Jag berättar för dem om ” knullshowerna ” och ” ping-pong-showerna ” nere i Banglas gränder, som Anna och Maria inte alls kände till sedan tidigare. Jag berättar för dem om hur den enorma sexindustrin går hand i hand med turistindustrin, och hur detta skapar en tillåtande syn på prostitutionen. Vilket i sin tur påverkar utländska mäns normer och gör det lättare för dem att besöka bordeller, eller bete sig på andra olämpliga sätt.

En kraftigt berusad tysk man i 30-årsåldern avbryter vårt samtal på gatan. Han frågar oss igen och igen varför alla klubbar på Bangla Road har stängt, och han får en sådan chock att han tappar sin påse med kokain på gatan, när han till sist förstår att det inte kommer att serveras alkohol eller finnas någon strippdans under de kommande 48 timmarna. Han försöker då smickra Anna, genom att säga att hon är mycket söt och att han ” vill knulla henne ”. När vi lämnar Bangla Road är de två unga, kvinnliga resenärerna från Sverige upprörda över scenen. Maria har fått en större förståelse kring platsen och vad den gör med människor.

– Han borde skämmas! I våra egna länder skulle sådant där beteende vara otänkbart. Men det är som att det här stället inga har några regler. Inga sociala koder. Vad fan har hänt!

Gråzonen

Efter att ha deltagit i en drinktävling går jag, Niklas från Göteborg som tycker om gruppsex och hans vän ” Ludvig ” från Stockholm ute på Pattayas gator en sen natt. Vi har passerat Pattayas nattmarknad när de båda sexköparna bestämmer sig för att vi ska ta en sista drink innan det är dags att sova. Inne i gyttret av gränder bredvid nattmarknaden hittar vi en risig bar, som har en minimal scen och en strippstång konstruerad innanför bardisken.

Tjejen som dansar uppe på den minimala scenen har ett Lolitautseende. Hon bär tonårsaktiva sneakers på fötterna, pyttesmå jeansshorts och en pytteliten, vit top, som visar hennes nakna mage. Hon har glittriga stjärnor som örhängen och bär en tandställning, trots att hennes tänder ser helt raka och perfekta ut. Niklas och Ludvig tycker omedelbart om henne. De köper båda två drinkar till henne efter dansen och spelar några omgångar av ett thailändskt traditionellt sällskapsspel.

– Jag tycker hon är jättesöt. Flickorna här är verkligen inte som de svenska flickorna, säger Ludvig, som är omkring 60 år gammal.

Hur gammal tror du att hon är, Ludvig?

– Jag tror hon är 25, 27 år nånting.

Jag tror att hon är yngre än så. Hon har ju fortfarande finnar i hela ansiktet?

Ludvig tystnar.

Till sist, några kommentarer gällande frågan om åldern. Medan forskning av barnrättsorganisationer som ECPAT International och undersökningar av polismyndigheter

visar att resande sexförbrytares övergrepp mot barn har minskat, och spridit sig till andra länder i Sydostasien, så finns problemet fortfarande kvar i Thailand.

Inga av de svenska manliga sexköpare jag träffade i Thailand uttryckte något öppet intresse av att närma sig minderåriga flickor, eller pojkar för den delen. Men besöket hos Lolita-bartjejen i gränden och flera andra scener visade tydligt att flera av männen var intresserade av unga kvinnor som helt klart kunde befinna sig i en juridisk gråzon. Några av männen använde ofta appar för att komma i kontakt med unga kvinnor och visade tydligt intresse för de som skrev i sina profiler att de är 19-20 år gamla. Vilket lika gärna kan betyda att de egentligen bara är 17 år gamla, eftersom få eller inga verifikationsmekanismer finns i de thailändska prostitutionsapparna.

Många thailändska kvinnor är små och smala, och de som säljer sex bär ofta flickaktiga eller tonårsaktiga kläder, samtidigt som de avslöjar konturerna av sina bröst. De kan ha tandställningar med olika färger, även om de inte har något behov för det, och de kan ha sitt hår uppsatt i flickaktiga tofsar. Allt detta görs i försök att se yngre ut, för att locka till sig fler sexköpare – vilket de ofta också lyckas med.

– Det har dykt upp olika trender i hur tjejerna klär sig, för att försöka se unga ut. Ibland bär de tandställning även om de är i 40-årsåldern. Förr så bar många av dem stora glasögon, för att antingen se ut som skolflickor eller för att försöka lika flickorna i den japanska Lolitakulturen, säger Anders, 47-åringen som bjöd mig på Viagraspetsad apelsinjuice.

Han och flera andra män som länge har besökt Thailand kunde uttrycka tacksamhet över att pedofilerna från förr inte är lika synliga idag. De sa även att de brukar be om att få titta på en kvinnas ID-kort varje gång de är osäkra på hennes ålder. Det är välkänt bland sexturister att de thailändska myndigheterna har blivit striktare när det gäller att följa lagen – åtminstone den som gör det olagligt att köpa sex av flickor under 18.

– Jag vet att många hotell kollar ID på tjejerna du tar med dig hem, nu för tiden. Många barägare kollar också ID på tjejerna som hänger där, eftersom de vill undvika problem med lagen. Jag har aldrig hört att någon svensk har åkt fast här nere för att ha varit med någon för ung. Men jag vet att det fortfarande finns några pedofiler som hänger här, säger "Lennart", en medelålders värmlänning som ofta besöker Thailand.



Detta är en rapport från nätverket Schyst resande, som jobbar för hållbart resande – både privat och i tjänsten.
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