

Comment on sex tourism in the era of COVID-19

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Teaser

This comment provides a critique on the authors' argument about the post-pandemic development of sex tourism. It acknowledges the need for more research on real-life experiences of sex tourism workers but argues that we need to differentiate between sex as a tourism product and as a motivation for travel.

This comment refers to the article 'Sex tourism, disease migration and COVID-19: lessons learnt and best practices moving forward' by Hillis et al. (2020).¹

I would like to thank the authors for their contribution. A discussion on sex tourism, impacts of COVID-19 and the post-pandemic realities of sex as a tourism product is welcomed and needed, given the non-existence of sex tourism at the moment² and unclear post-pandemic perspectives for its development. Although I agree with the authors that further research is needed to study the real-life experiences of COVID-19 on those within the sex tourism industry, we first need to focus more on the nature, context and realities of sex tourism in order to understand and anticipate the inevitable changes in the post-pandemic era.

First, we need to acknowledge there is a difference between sex tourism as a niche form of tourism, and sex as a potential part of tourist consumption and their behaviour³. Considering social distancing measures, border closures and imposed self-isolation, travelling for a very specific purpose to engage in a sexual act is highly unlikely. The 'test, treat and isolate' strategic approach already implemented in a number of countries is a general measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus among the community and help local authorities to deal with the pandemic. The access to an approved vaccine can potentially encourage the revival of international travel and tourism but not specifically to prioritise a distinctive niche of tourist activity such as sex tourism. Further research is needed to

explore the strategies for sex tourism recovery in those countries where sex tourism (as a specific market segment) plays a significant role in their tourism economies, but sex workers have no access to any government income support (e.g Thailand).⁴

Second, I fully support and endorse the perspective that further empirical research is needed to explore the adaptation of public health strategies in the post-pandemic era. It is inevitable that sex will again comprise a major part of tourist activity, but the current situation implies that significant changes need to take place to manage and control its promotion and resurgence, particularly in the countries in the developing world.

Author Contributions

The author is the sole contributor and drafted, edited and reviewed the entire manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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