

The effect of sex tourism essay



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Tourism destinations abound throughout the world. Every year millions of visitors travel to a wide range of destinations and there are various factors that determine the choice of destination. These range from family pressures to independent, unscheduled travel (Um & Crompton, 1992). This study discusses one aspect of destination choice – tourists' image of a destination. More specifically, it identifies the effect sex tourism has on destination image.

The better the image of a destination, the greater the likelihood of tourists selecting that destination (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Birgit, 2001). Even though an image of a destination may not be based on fact, for example it could be misrepresentation in the media, tourists regularly use image, rather than factual information to decide where to travel (Um & Crompton, 1992; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000).

A tourist's image of a destination plays an integral role in comprehending the tourist destination selection process (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). When travellers are aware of positive images of a destination, they will decide to purchase a trip. Many researchers have examined the essence of destination image as an element in travel purchase (LaPage & Cormier, 1977; Um & Crompton, 1992; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Prideaux, Agrusa, Donlon & Curran, 2004). Due to a travel purchase, tourists regularly use the image rather than the factual information for deciding where to travel (LaPage & Cormier, 1977). Um & Crompton (1992) also stated that visitors often have limited knowledge about a destination and usually obtain information from media or their social groups, therefore image appears as a vital feature in destination selecting process. It can be mentioned that image is utilised

more as a substitute for the factual information in this circumstance. In other words, a destination's image is an essential factor in purchasing travel for individual. This is related to the individual travellers' decision making and satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Chon, 1990, as cited in Pike 2002). Furthermore, it is connected to perceived images of visitors' destination (Prideaux et al., 2004). In short, destination image has an influence on a visitor's travel decision-making, cognition, behaviour, satisfaction levels and remembrance of the experience at a destination (Jenkins, 1999). The image of destination is considered to be having many different facets, including numerous factors connected to cognitive, affective and overall image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez, 2001). Many components, such as motivation, sociodemographic characteristics and gathered touristic experiences have the ability to effect on destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004b). Generally, motivation relates to a need that forces a person to act in a particular way to meet the preferred satisfaction (Beerli & Martín, 2004b). Gartner (1993) mentioned that motives have a direct impact on the affective element of the image. In addition, individuals with different motivations evaluate a destination in similar methods if they are aware that the destination offers them with advantages (Beerli & Martín, 2004b). Therefore, motivation is one of major factors and influences on producing the image of tourist destination.

There are various reasons for travelling and sex acts as one of the significant travel motivations as well as a major component of international travel to tourist destination (Dabphet, 2005). World Tourism Organisation (2001, p. 44) defines sex tourism as “ trips organised from within the tourism sector,

or from outside this sector but using its structures and networks, with the primary purpose of effecting a commercial sexual relationship by the tourist with residents at the destination.” Even though sex tourism is able to increase the number of tourist arrivals on the destination, it negatively affects on the destination image. For example, Rittichainuwat, Qu and Mongkhonvanit (2008), who study the motivation of travellers on revisiting to Thailand, found that prostitution and sex would not be the main motivation for travellers to revisit the nation. It can be mentioned that sex tourism has a negative influence on revisiting the destination. The sex trade takes related obstacles such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) (Nuttavuthisit, 2007), thus the sex image could make tourists feel dangerous to visit, and then tourists would decide not travelling to the destination. Furthermore, Nuttavuthisit (2007) cited that the sexual image is capable of endangering crucial businesses in the destination. Accordingly, the erotic tourism is a key problem for the image of destinations.

As stated earlier, literature on image of destination has grown, while there is a little consideration offered to the sort of situations occurring in tourist destination, where undesirable image, such as sex tourism, has took place and took over from the favourite image. As a result of this, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the impacts of the sex tourism on the destination image. Because of the reputation of Thailand as the sexual destination, Thailand is selected as a case study to achieve the aim of the paper.

In order to understand how sex tourism affects destination image, it is important to first understand destination image theory. Followed by

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comprehending sex tourism is also realised in order to understand its impacts on the image of destination. Subsequently, using Thailand as a case study is to explore how sex tourism effects on destination image of a tourist and what the impacts that the sex tourism has on tourist destination are. Finally, discussion and conclusion are presented at the end of the paper, with further findings.

Destination Image Theory

To understand the image of destination theory, the definition and the formation is considered.

Definition of destination image

In the tourism research, numerous researchers mention that tourist destination image theory is broadly used in the previous studies, but it is not exactly defined (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Beerli & Martín, 2004b; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005; Martín & Bosque, 2008). Pearce (1988, p. 162) noted that “ image is one of those terms that will not go away, a term with vague and shifting meanings”. Distinctive definition of destination image has been provided by various authors. Hunt (1975) explained that images held by potential travellers are essential in the selecting process of destination, which they are capable of affecting the destination feasibility. Subsequently, images are defined as the sum of beliefs, impressions, perceptions and ideas that individual has of a destination (Crompton, 1979). Afterwards Echtner and Ritchie (1991, as cited in Marín & Bosque, 2008) suggested that image is the perceptions of a person’s destination traits and the entire impression, which are created by

the destination. Moreover, Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) proposed that images are a destination's impressions or perceptions held by travellers, who concern with the expected advantage or consumption values. In brief, image is entirety of beliefs, impressions, ideas, feelings and expectations, which is gathered towards a destination over time (Kim & Richardson, 2003).

According to these definitions of destination image, the similarity between them is that image is tied to tourists' perception, belief, idea, impression, feeling and expectation on a destination.

In this study, destination image is defined as a visitor's perception and impression of the destination. This is because an image is formed by the visitors' interpretation using the perception and emotion, and as a result of two intimately interrelated factors, which are the cognitive evaluation referring to the person's perceptions about the destination, and affective evaluation connecting to the feelings of individual towards the place. This leads to making a decision of tourists where to visit.

Destination image formation

To understand the image of destination, the formation of destination image is also recognised. The process of the image formation is defined as the improvement of a mental construct predicated on some impressions selected from the flood of impressions (Reynold, 1965). These chosen impressions are complicated, embroidered and ordered in mind of the individual (Reynold, 1965). Similarly, Court and Lupton (1997) noted that the tourist's perception on a destination is based upon the information, which is processed from numerous sources over time. Subsequently, this information is managed into

a mental conception that is significant to the individual, for example, destination image (Leisen, 2001).

There are several elements playing an integral role in the process of image formation. The first factor is the sources of information, which includes promotional text such as posters and travel brochures, the viewpoints of others such as family and friends, and the common media such as newspaper, magazines, television and books (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). In addition, the image will be influenced and adjusted based on first information and experience by actual visitation on the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

Gunn (1988) has put the effect and the role of these abundant information sources in destination image formation into context in the model of the travel experience's seven stages, which comprises of (1) amassing mental destination images, hence producing an organic image; (2) changing the preliminary image after gathering more information, thus creating an induced image; (3) making a decision on travelling to the destination; (4) travelling to the destination; (5) participating in the destination; (6) returning home from the destination, and (7) adjusting the image predicated on the experience in the destination.

In accordance with the model, image is differentiated between organic and induced image, which is formed in stage 1 and 2 respectively. The organic image is mainly predicated on non-commercial or non-touristic sources of information (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Examples of non-commercial sources of information are geography and history books, magazine articles, news

reports, television reports, education and viewpoints of relatives and friends (Leisen, 2001). Consequently, people, who have never travelled to a destination nor have looked for any commercial information, will probably have some sort of information accumulated in their remembrance (Leisen, 2001). An image might be incomplete at this stage, thus the tourist adds a small amount of information to the image in order to complete it (Leisen, 2001).

Another image suggested by Gunn (1988) is the induced image, which stems from tourism promotion controlled by organisations in tourism industry and depends on commercial sources of information, for instance, colourful travel brochures, information from travel agencies, travel television advertising and travel magazine articles. In short, the area of destination controls the organic image, whereas, marketing outcomes of the destination are in charge of the induced image. Additionally, the image occurring in the final stage has a tendency to be more complicated, realistic and differentiated in consequence of real visitation and experience at the destination (Chon, 1991).

In addition to the image formation of Gunn (1988), Gartner (1993) classified image into three forms. The first categorised image form is the cognitive image, which is based upon the physical attributes of the destination (Gartner, 1993). Secondly, the affective image is the emotional reaction to those physical traits (Gartner, 1993). The third form of image is the conation image, which is the transformation from the cognitive and affective images into whether the destination is valuable to visit (Gartner, 1993). This type of image is accepted from a theoretical viewpoint (Beerli & Martín, 2004a).

The following model was presented by Stern and Krakover (1993). The authors pointed out that the destination image formation is effected by the gleaned information from diverse sources and the personal characteristics of the person (Stern and Krakover, 1993). This is consistent with Gunn's work but builds on it by acknowledging the importance of personal characteristics. In accordance with the model, the characteristics of information and the person have an influence on the interrelations between the environment's perceived incentives (Stern and Krakover, 1993). This is the cause of a complex image (Stern and Krakover, 1993). Moreover, this process indicates the cognitive organisation filtering the perception (Beerli & Martín, 2004b).

Apart from information sources, personal characteristics or internal components of an individual are another factor influencing on the image formation, since, as Um and Crompton (1990) cited that even though individuals, who is not protected from external incentives, create beliefs about the destination characteristics, the character of beliefs will differ relying on the individuals' internal elements. Consequently, the image, which is made by the destination and the person's motivations, own needs, previous knowledge, preferences and other personal attributes, will shape the perceived image (Beerli & Martín, 2004a). According to this method, individuals establish their own mental illustration of the destination, which turns to build their own perceived pictures (Gartner, 1993).

This factor relates to consumer behaviour. From the viewpoint of consumer behaviour, personal elements connect to the individuals' social attributes such as gender, age, social class, education and family lifecycle, and the psychological nature, for example, values, motivations, lifestyle, personality

and preferences (Beerli & Martín, 2004a). Beerli and Martín (2004a) also emphasised that these personal features effect on cognitive organisation of perception of the individuals, hence the impression of the environment and the resulting illustration are also influenced. Many researchers mention that motivations impact on the image formation process and the destination choice (Um & Crompton, 1990; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). This is because motivations use a direct influence to effect on the affective element (Gartner, 1993). Moreover, Beerli and Martín (2004a) cited that affective images relate to the feelings stimulated by a destination, and individuals with distinct motives will estimate a place in similar methods if the perception satisfies the needs of individuals. Additionally, the affective feature is worth that people link to destinations based upon motivations (Gartner, 1993). Indeed, as the affective aspect has an impact on the overall image, motivations also directly or indirectly affect that overall picture (Beerli & Martín, 2004a). In addition to the motivation, past experience also affects the perceived image of the destination. In case of tourism, previous experience may be more significant than information gained from external sources because people have a tendency to add more weight on the past (Beerli & Martín, 2004a). Another reason is that when there is previous experience, the standards for decisions become stronger, while the need to obtain information is weakened (Beerli & Martín, 2004a).

As aforementioned, it is demonstrated in model from Baloglu and McCleary (1999). In accordance with this model, image is predominantly formed by two main components: stimulus elements and personal elements (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Stimulus factors are relevant to the external incentives,

physical object and past experience whereas personal factors refer to the socio and psychological characteristics of individual (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The image formation has cognitive and affective evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The cognitive evaluation relates to the knowledge or beliefs about attributes of a destination, while affective evaluation is connected to feelings (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Image is dependent on a cognitive assessment of objects and the affective reaction, which are produced as a function of the cognitive reaction (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In brief, an overall destination image is created as a result of cognitive and affective assessments of the destination. Many studies have found that various sources of information and past experience significantly affect on perceived image of a tourist destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Hsu, Wolfe & Kang, 2004). Similarly, the effects of social characteristics, such as sex, age and education, on the image of destination have been discovered in tourism context (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hui & Wan, 2003; Rittichainuwat, Qu & Mongkhonvanit, 2008).

Regrettably, empirical research on the effect of unwanted image such as sex tourism, which is one of the vital motives and is a crucial factor of international travel to tourist destination (Dabphet, 2005), on the image of destination has been limited. In relation to past theoretical study, perception is commonly combined with attention, activities of exposure and external incentives' interpretation (Martín & Bosque, 2008). Moreover, these activities stem from the attributes of incentives and the internal component of individuals (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2003 as cited in Martín & Bosque, 2008). In the tourism context, the destination image in the mind of tourist is

normally conducted based on stimuli process, which may be importantly affected by motivation. On the basis of this assumption, the impact of sex tourism, which is an unwanted image, on the perceived illustration of a destination is investigated in this study.

Importance of destination image

Based on the process of destination image creation, destination image is important for comprehending a tourist decision-making process. Various researchers agree that destination image is a significant aspect of decision-making process of a visitor in travel purchase (LaPage & Cormier, 1977; Um & Crompton, 1992; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez, 2001; Birgit, 2001; Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Prideaux, Agrusa, Donlon & Curran, 2004; Castro, Armario & Ruiz, 2007; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Birgit (2001) cited that when travellers perceive a positive image of a destination, the possibility of their choosing that place is raised. Moreover, it also affects the levels of visitor satisfaction on a destination (Chon, 1992, as cited in Jenkins, 1999; Kandampully & Suharatanto, 2000). In addition, numerous research has concluded that destination image has a major influence on the revisitation of tourists on the destination in the future (Bigné, Sánchez & Sánchez, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Accordingly, it can be pointed out that destination image is a key factor in effecting on the satisfaction and future behaviour of tourists. Fakeye and Crompton (1991, as cited in Vaughan, 2007) suggested that positive images are likely to make destinations affluent whereas negative images of destinations may never thrive. Significantly, visitors used the image more than the factual information in deciding where to visit (Tapachai & Waryszak, <https://assignbuster.com/the-effect-of-sex-tourism-essay/>

2000). Hence, understanding influences of the negative destination image is crucial for destinations in seeking the solution in order to reduce the undesirable image. This paper only focuses on sex tourism, which is the unwanted image of many destinations.

The role of sex in tourism industry

In order to understand how sex tourism affects the image of destination, the position of sex having in the tourism industry is recognised. In the tourism trade, sex is utilised both secretly and openly as a tool of promotion. In the work of Oppermann, McKinley and Chon (1998, p. 21), the authors discussed on the utilisation of sex to market destination, and investigated that tourism destination images are “ the sum of ideas and beliefs about the destination”. Moreover, they further pointed out that in spite of the great number of studies that have explored the image of tourism destination, the importance of sex as a variable has been unobserved (Oppermann, McKinley and Chon, 1998). However, marketers frequently use represented sexual information and images to advertise destinations. As a consequence, the words “ sun”, “ sand”, “ sea” and “ sex” may be employed collectively to form a destination image as the four Ss – sun, sand, sea and sex – destination or independently to explain a specific attribute of a destination. In a more delicate approach, appealing and little clothed female bodies may also be utilised to express a risqué image (Prideaux, 1995). A sex appeal is essential in this situation but still not clearly mentioned. The utilisation of images connoting to sex to draw visitors is not new. An example is that Pan Am put images of bare-breasted indigenous females, who beckon travellers to visit Hawaii, on promotional

brochures in the 1920s, while the women wore a neck-to-knee swimming costume (Prideaux et al., 2004).

From a tourism perspective, sexual action in destinations has an ability of being viewed from a wide range of viewpoints, which include between tourists who travel together to a place, visitors who look for short-term partners once at the place, and commercial services of sex that are available in the place (Prideaux et al., 2004). This study considers the commercial sex as a consequence and the development of destination on a reputation or image of commercial sexual actions.

The commercial sex industry's constitution and organisation are able to be explained as industrial and craft (Hubbard, 2003). Based on this sense, "industrial prostitution" illustrates that prostitution is organised along industry with investment in bars, brothels, similar institutions, and managed marketing and distribution (Hubbard, 2003). This prostitution's nature is very accessible and apparent, and also many nations including the Philippines and Thailand encourage prostitution of this environment. On the other hand, "craft prostitution" means lower level of official organisation where the staff works on an unofficial base such as from the street or via advertising sited on the media (Hubbard, 2003). For instance, Hubbard (2003) gives information about the craft prostitution along highways in the Central America's border zones. It can be mentioned that a destination where craft prostitution is its key form may have a sexual image, which is hidden behind other favourite images. To a great extent, the erotic experiences must be vigorously looked for by visitors either along street sides, through the media or in concealed statements and ideas.

In nations where prostitution is worked as a craft industry, self-employed prostitutes frequently look for potential customers in areas visited by travellers, such as streets and bars. In the pre-Castro era, Cuba was famous for organised industrial prostitution (Prideaux et al., 2004). Although the prostitution was illegal after the revolution in Cuba, many self-employed young females have entered the industry of craft prostitution and offered foreign males for “ date” in recent years (Prideaux et al., 2004). In this sense, a “ date” commonly implies as a commercial sexual encounter.

There is also a possibility of finding destinations where there is a confirmation of industrial prostitution, which is partly concealed and used as organised industry, even though it is operated as camouflaged industry with sex workers hidden as social ascots, massage therapists or even hairdressers. Sex industry of Vietnam is a typical example of this approach. There are numerous beer bars using as fronts for the work of a prostitute in Vietnamese erotic industry (Agrusa & Prideaux, 2002), whereas, massage therapy practices and bars in China sometimes works as fronts for appearances of prostitution in areas, which are frequently visited by domestic and international visitors (Prideaux et al., 2004).

In other countries, some nations give less emphasis to disguising the erotic industry, and the sex industry components have turned to be semi-legalised as common attractions of tourism, for example, Sydney, Las Vegas and Kings Cross, and Amsterdam (Prideaux et al., 2004). On the other hand, industrial prostitute works more obviously, while it is illegal in principle. Examples of this are the case of the Philippines and Thailand.

The popularity of movies and television programme including sexuality act as a factor of the action, and lead to the recognition of sexual attitudes, which are permissive when comparing to the more preserved attitude towards sex without marriage happening in Western culture and Islamic society (Prideaux et al., 2004). Hence sex or romance for tourists is part of the trip, which is discovered in a variety of impermanent relationships with hosts or other visitors and is fulfilled by utilising workers of commercial sex or is wanted but never completed. In accordance with these reasons, it is not surprising that industries of commercial sex are found in various destinations of tourist.

Definition and history of sex tourism

Sex tourism is not a new topic in the tourism industry. There is an increase in a number of academic literatures studying in this area (Cohen, 1971; Oppermann, 1999; Clift & Carter, 2000; Ryan & Hall, 2001). However, the study of sex tourism relating to image of destination is limited. Cohen (1971) was one of the initial researchers to bring this issue to the attention of tourism academic research and highlighted the essence of sex as an element, which should be recognised as a serious field of tourism study. Therefore, sex tourism and destination image are considered in this paper.

In order to understand and assess the impacts of sex tourism on the destination image, a clear perception of what sex tourism is required. Sex tourism is typically defined as tourism for commercial sex intentions (Oppermann, 1999). Subsequently, World Tourism Organisation (2001, p. 44) also gives a definition of sex tourism as “trips organised from within the tourism sector, or from outside this sector but using its structures and

networks, with the primary purpose of effecting a commercial sexual relationship by the tourist with residents at the destination.” Additionally, sex tourism is regularly related to organised tours, which offer the opportunity to use prostitution along with hotels and flights (Davidson, 2005). Nevertheless, sex tourism is much more enormous than the organised tours’ incident, and encompasses a wide range of activities and individuals, who travel with the overt purpose of purchasing sex, purchase sex by accident during holiday and take part in holiday romance with a native, but also offer them with meals, gifts and money (Davidson, 2005). In this approach, sex tourism incorporates a diversity of relations, which entails both “ straightforward cash-for-sex transactions” and “ a wider range of sexual economic exchanges than those conventionally implied by the term “ prostitution”” (Davidson & Taylor, 2005, p. 83). According to these sex tourism definitions, the similarity of sex tourism as mentioned is that the commercial sex is the main purpose of organised trips at the destination. Consequently, sex tourism in this study is defined as the sexual exploitation of a prostitute by an individual or the individuals travelling away from their home who takes part in sexual activities with the prostitutes. It generally entails some form of payment such as money, food and clothing. This is because the image of commercial sex in the mind of people relates to prostitution. According to Oppermann (1998), sex tourism is not able to be separated from prostitution. Furthermore, Leung (2003) points out in his work of sex tourism in Cambodia that the sex industry offers services to gratify one of the fundamental psychological needs of individuals, and prostitution is one of the oldest occupations in the sex industry. It is apparent that sex tourism connects to

the prostitution as consequence people perceive sex tourism as the prostitution.

In addition to the meaning of sex tourism, sex tourism's history is also recognised in order to evaluate its influences on the destination image. In many countries in Asia, the preliminary enlargement of the industry of commercial sex to service international tourists happened during the Vietnam War when a flood of American troops on Rest and Recreation Leave stayed in Thailand. In the period between 1962 and 1976, approximately 700, 000 American servicemen visited Thailand and spent in brothels, bars and hotels (Agrusa & Prideux, 2002). After the American military forces withdrew from Thailand in the early 1970s, the sex industry started looking for new customers both in Asia and Europe (Agrusa & Prideux, 2002). At that time, several entertainment businesses also believed tourism as a chance to expand the market. A boom time for the sex industry in Asia was in a twenty-year period from 1970 to 1990 (Dabphet, 2005). There was a continuing increase in a number of prostitutes in Asian nations. For example, the number of prostitutes in Vietnam rose from 300, 000 to 500, 000 by the end of the US phase of the Vietnam War in 1973 (Kolko, 1997). By 1993, about 100, 000 young women worked as a prostitute in Ho Chi Minh City alone, and then the number of prostitutes in this city grew more than at the Vietnam War's peak by 1996 (Kolko, 1997). Thus, new brothels, bars and hotels rapidly appeared in order to meet the request for prostitutes. An example of this is that the number of brothels, pubs and bars in Bangkok had risen to 977 in 1980 (Dabphet, 2005). Based on the history of sex tourism, many countries in Asia, such as Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand, become to

be a paradise of sex for foreign visitors. In short, international tourists perceive the sexual image of these destinations.

Impact of sex tourism on destination

Understanding the impacts of sex tourism on destination is crucial for comprehending tourist perception, which is relative to decision-making process of tourists where to visit. When visitors gain information about destination, they usually create their own mental image of the destination, and then make a decision where to travel. Tourists will decide to travel when they are aware of positive image of the destination (Tapachai & Waryzak, 2000). The impacts of sex tourism are capable of creating both positive and negative images of destination to tourists

Sex tourism positively affect on destination. Sex tourism can raise the number of tourist arrivals on the destination. For example, after the Italian magazine Viaggiarre stated that Cuba was the “paradise of sex tourism” in 1995, there was a 68% increase in tourist arrivals from Italy in the following year (Trumbull, 2001). The number of tourist arrivals connects to the revenue of the destination. It implies that when there is an increase in the number of visitor arrivals, the country revenue grows. In 1995, the tourism revenue of Cuba raised at 18.6% (Trumbull, 2001). In brief, sex tourism has a beneficial impact on destination in attracting more tourists to destination and improving the economy of destination.

Another positive effect of sex tourism is that for some people sex tourism leads to long-term relationships. This beneficial influence is seen when sex tourism is considered as noncommercial sex. The study of Pruitt and Lafont

(1995) about romance tourism in Jamaica demonstrated that domestic men and female travellers frequently had a benefit from their relationships. The female visitors from the Great Britain and Europe found companionships and love in romance tourism (Pruitt and Lafont, 1995). The researchers noted that female visitors could investigate new sex behaviour free from the restrictions of their own society (Pruitt and Lafont, 1995). Nonetheless, local men obtained not only status, companionships, love but also financial rewards. Furthermore, the researchers stated that a number of female tourists also return to the same destination in order to continue