

SEX TOURISM CRIMES ARE OVERLOOKED IN MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES



In Africa, several countries have become havens for sex tourism. From mature women to young executives or businessmen, many well-known destinations are regularly frequented by Western tourists in search of pleasure who are looking to satisfy their sexual desire or carry out practices which are punishable by imprisonment within their country of origin.

Very often, men are singled out when dealing with sex tourism. However, more and more Western women are visiting Africa in search of "young, strong and virile" men as well. Unfortunately, this practice is not limited to adults either. **In recent years, sex tourism has become increasingly oriented towards younger and younger children - sometimes as young as eight years old.**

The children involved in sex tourism have either been left to fend for themselves or are children encouraged to enter into prostitution by their parents, guardians or by prostitution ring gang members. Minors between the ages of 8 and 18 are sent to the hotel rooms of tourists who visit Africa to be able to act freely away from the judicial sanctions they could face within their country of origin. The main factors driving minors into this trade are hardship and poverty. In fact, in some African countries, the average population must survive on under 2 euros a day according to the World Bank.

Although it was announced this year that the poverty rate in Africa has finally begun to decline, the number of people living in poverty is still very high. It is for these reasons that certain young Africans enter into the world of prostitution. Unemployed for the most part, sex tourism is their only way out of poverty. Similarly, some parents encourage their children to loiter in "white" areas in the hopes that they will engage in remunerated sexual relations. These parents are willing to neglect the physical, mental and emotional consequences, so long as their children bring back enough money to feed the family.

In Africa, several countries have become key sex tourism destinations. In Senegal, Saly is a place of clandestine prostitution. This seaside resort welcomes a very large number of sex tourists and it is not uncommon to see young local men accompanied by mature Western women. "Saly is the rallying point for aging Westerners interested in partaking of the pleasures offered by young Senegalese - who are not always of legal age," a French tourist on vacation explained.

In South Africa, Cape Town is the preferred sex tourism destination especially for homosexual encounters.

In Banjul, Gambia, sexual tourism has mushroomed as well. Over 50% of Gambia's population is under the age of 18 and these youths live in very difficult conditions. Kribi in Cameroon is a seaside resort known for welcoming sex tourists. There, sexual favors cost next to nothing. For sexual intercourse with a minor, a Westerner will be expected to pay the insignificant sum of 15 euros according to the Cameroonian newspaper "Le Messenger". The "Grand Baie" in Mauritius is considered a place for debauchery by the Western bourgeoisie.

Marrakech, Morocco, also has a reputation for being a place for debauchery. A few years ago, a

French television network broadcasted a report which mentioned an 8-year-old girl who had been given around 150 euros to engage in sexual relations. Sex tourism also takes place in Nosy Be in Madagascar, Hammamet in Tunisia, Mombasa in Kenya, Kampala in Uganda, as well as many other destinations.

Despite signing charters prohibiting the entry of minors into the rooms of tourists, the hotels of several sex tourism capitals are constantly increasing the number of places for tourists to receive the visit of minors. More often than not, these children live in the hotel room of these tourists for the duration of their stay. Some Westerners are very regular in their visits.

In Africa, this subject is taboo since in general, tourists are treated like royalty. Nevertheless, attempts to defend these minors are being made by adults from suburban areas or by associations fighting against pedophile sex tourism, but especially by NGOs fighting against pedophilia.

In general, when Western tourists are arrested, they are not detained for very long and they are released very quickly by police officers willing to overlook the offenses of these tourists in exchange for a few bank notes. Corruption is rampant in several African countries, and a few bank notes proffered will suffice to have any charges of pedophilia dropped - this is also true of many other crimes.

Authorities are afraid of jeopardizing the tourism industry which plays such a large role in their country's economy; as a result, they prefer to remain silent despite the fact that the lives of minors are being endangered. For the time being, these practices are currently not among the most urgent issues being debated at the political level in the countries involved in the industry.

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