

Child Prostitution and Sex Tourism

COSTA RICA

A research paper prepared for ECPAT
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INTRODUCTION

Costa Rica is widely perceived as Latin America's most stable and affluent democracy. This relative judgment should not deflect from the fact that the country's economy has been under serious pressure since the late 1970s. Costa Rica's manufacturing industries have always been heavily dependent on foreign investment and its welfare state and much of its industrial infrastructure was financed through foreign loans.

Export earnings from the coffee and bananas industries should have allowed Costa Rica to support this debt, but in 1978 coffee prices collapsed and the following year oil prices rocketed. By 1981, Costa Rica's national foreign debt had reached US\$4 billion, and it became the first country to suspend repayments on international loans.

In the early 1980s, inflation dramatically reduced real wages and under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the government embarked on a sustained programme of austerity measures, dismantling much of the welfare provision that had previously distinguished Costa Rica from its Latin American neighbours (Barry, 1991).

Today, Costa Rica's international debt stands at around US\$3.5 billion, real wages remain stagnant and 10% of the country's 2.9 million people are living in absolute poverty. This is a country which desperately needs foreign exchange revenue, and like many other countries in the same position it has developed its tourist industry in pursuit of hard currency. Tourism has now overtaken the banana industry as Costa Rica's most important source of foreign exchange.

Though the Government and tourist authorities like to highlight the development of so-called Eco-tourism (the country won an award for its 'exemplary support' of ecologically responsible tourism in 1992 - Baker, 1993), Costa Rica actually hosts large numbers of dedicated, seasoned North American and European sex tourists.

Meanwhile, it seems probable that many of the male tourists who are ostensibly drawn to Costa Rica for other reasons (surfing, water sports, ecotourism, etc.), as well as some of the 30,000 US citizens who have retired to Costa Rica, also sexually exploit local women and children during the course of their stay.

A few statistics baldly explain why many Costa Rican women and children are so vulnerable to this form of exploitation. In addition to the fact that 10% of Costa Ricans live in absolute poverty, it is the case that 40% of female adolescents do not attend school and 28% of youths between the ages of 12 and 19 work as domestics for below poverty level wages (Agustin Castro, 1994).

Furthermore, despite the fact that children are legally sexual minors until the age of 18, some 25% of Costa Rican mothers have their first child between the ages of 15 and 18; and 41% of births are to single mothers (Barry, 1991). There is also a serious drug problem in Costa Rica, which both reflects and compounds the misery associated with poverty. For many women and children, this is an economic and social context in which the only thing they can hope to sell, barter or exchange is their own bodies and sexuality.

This report looks at the different ways in which Costa Rican women and children are sexually exploited and at the identity and motivations of the men who purchase sexual access to them. It is based on seven days of fieldwork in San Jose, Puerto Limon and Cahuita, and is particularly concerned with links between tourism and sexual exploitation.

Before moving on to substantive issues, some methodological issues are briefly discussed, and these should be borne in mind throughout the rest of the report.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Fieldwork in Costa Rica was undertaken by Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor in August 1995 and the data upon which this report is based has two key limitations. First, it was collected over a very short period of time, and second, it was collected during low season.

Since we had only seven days and nights in which to work, there were many 'leads' which we were unable to pursue and many places we were unable to visit, and because it was low season the sample of sex tourists available to observe and interview was very small. Only 10 in-depth interviews (one hour plus) and six short interviews (less than one hour) with sex tourists and 'sexpatriates' were achieved.

We attempted to compensate for this in a number of ways:

- by interviewing prostitutes and others working in the formally organised sex industry;
- by interviewing Costa Ricans and North Americans working in the tourist trade;
- by visiting slum areas and interviewing women and children living in them;
- by obtaining data from other sources, in particular, newspaper cuttings about child sexual exploitation.

It was also possible to consider and compare the interview material from sex tourists and sexpatriates in Costa Rica against that obtained from a far greater sample of such men collected on research trips to Thailand and Cuba, which we believe makes the analysis provided below more reliable, despite being based on a relatively small sample.

However, the reader should keep the following three points in mind when assessing the information provided in this report:

1. The fact that it was low season when we visited meant that expatriates were more visible and more accessible for interview than they would be in high season. In one sense, we believe that this was fortuitous, since sexual exploitation by such men in economically underdeveloped countries is generally under-researched even though it is widely suspected that there are many preferential child abusers among their ranks.

In another sense, however, it meant that our data was skewed, highlighting sexual exploitation by this group more clearly than that perpetrated by tourists. Information about tourists to the Caribbean coast's practice of taking very young 'girlfriends', for example, was provided by local people and the girls themselves and could not be fleshed out by interview material from men who personally admitted to such activities.

Likewise, our sample of 'situational' sex tourists was inadequate, and we feel able to advance only generalisations on the basis of it because we have interviewed larger numbers of such men elsewhere in the world.

2. Most of the evidence on organised child prostitution that is presented in this report comes from secondary sources: it is based on news reports of police raids, trials and research by other organisations, references for which are provided at the end of this report.

3. In any country in the world, it is virtually impossible to obtain reliable data on the numbers of people working as prostitutes. Even where prostitution is legal and official data is collected, official figures will not include children or illegal migrants working as prostitutes, and in countries which host sex tourists there are also many women and children who exchange sexual access to their persons for money or goods, yet do not define themselves as prostitutes.

Moreover, many adults and children use prostitution as a temporary solution to economic problems and thus move in and out of the prostitution 'labour market', so that even if it were possible to obtain a 'snap shot' figure of the numbers of people working as prostitutes at any given moment in time, it would not necessarily reflect the true number of people who are vulnerable to this form of sexual exploitation.

It is still more difficult to obtain reliable data on the numbers of men (and women) who use prostitutes or enter into other sexually exploitative relationships.

Our research was concerned to discover the forms which the sexual exploitation of children can take in Costa Rica and to explore the motivations and attitudes of Western men who practice sex tourism there.

It did not attempt to measure the scale of the problem of child prostitution in Costa Rica, nor to produce numerical data on the numbers of sex tourists and expatriates involved in the sexual exploitation of children there. Other sources suggest that prostitution is a major economic sector in Costa Rica. It is estimated, for example, that there are more than 300 brothels in San Jose alone (Gonzalez Mora, 1995).

If we assumed that each brothel organised the sexual 'labour' of 10 females - a very conservative estimate - this would mean that around 3,000 women and girls are formally employed as prostitutes in a city with an official population of only 278,373 people; in other words, that some 1.1% of San Jose's entire population may be being prostituted in brothels.

As a percentage of San Jose's population of females between the ages of, say, 15 and 30, this figure would look even more disturbing, and if it were possible to add the number of women and girls who are prostituted by small time pimps and those who prostitute themselves independently, then the percentage of women and girls in Costa Rica who are sexually exploited at some point in their lives would look quite staggering.

This, alongside our own observations and interviews, makes us confident about claiming that prostitution in general is a sizeable phenomenon in Costa Rica.

So far as the sexual exploitation of children is concerned we cannot with certainty advance any claims about the numbers involved. All we can say with confidence is that it happens and that there are tourists and expatriates who are guilty of sexually exploiting and sexually abusing children in Costa Rica. We believe that this, in itself, should be enough to prompt concern and action.

Notes on terminology

The report sometimes refers to Costa Ricans as 'Ticans', a term used by many local people and tourists.

Where the term 'underage' is used, it refers to those deemed sexual minors in Costa Rica, i.e. under 18 year olds.

Costa Rica's currency is the colon, and is referred to with a 'c' in this report. The exchange rate at the time of our research was 177c to one US dollar.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN COSTA RICA

In Costa Rica, men are presented with opportunities to purchase sexual access to women and children in several different ways and sexual exploitation thus takes a variety of forms, each of which involves the exploited party in different types of relationships with her or his exploiter or exploiters. Three distinct modes of organising sexual access are outlined here.

1. Independent Prostitution

The women and children in Costa Rica who prostitute themselves independently are not a homogeneous group either in terms of the conditions of their work or the material benefits they derive from it. Rather there is a continuum of experience, with relatively successful, self assured adult women who may charge men up to US\$100 per night for sexual services at one pole, and drug addicted children who, from the age of eight upwards, exchange sexual access to their bodies for less than 500c (US\$2.50) at the other.

There are a number of bars and casinos in San Jose from which successful independent prostitutes work. The best known of these is a bar which caters primarily to tourists. A guidebook written by a sex tourist for sex tourists describes it as 'certainly the best bar in all of San Jose for American men' (Cassirer, 1992:75). The bar benefits financially from prostitution by charging men an entrance fee of 500c and selling drinks and food (as well as clothing and gifts from a small shop) at hugely inflated prices, rather than by directly organising the work of prostitutes.

Other venues favoured by more successful independent prostitutes are the casinos in smart hotels owned by large, international conglomerates. The women who solicit in such places are generally in their early twenties and they are smartly dressed and look well fed. Not all work as prostitutes full time. A few have an income from another form of employment and use prostitution only as a means of topping it up as and when necessary.

The degree of control that such women exercise over transactions with clients is directly related to how much they are in need of money. The less desperate they are for cash, the greater their choice in relation to when to work and for how long, what price to accept, what to provide in exchange for a given sum.

Because they have not entered into any contractual obligations to a third party employer, it is economic compulsion alone which controls the details of their work. If they are doing well, they can afford to turn down the advances of men who, for whatever reason, they do not want to do business with.

Only a minority of autonomous prostitutes are in a position to charge US\$100 per night, or enjoy this type of control, however. Maria, a woman we interviewed in Puerto Limon, is probably more typical of independent adult prostitutes in Costa Rica.

Maria is 45 and has six grown up children and a three year old grandchild who lives with her. Her husband was paralysed in an accident ten years ago and receives a pension of 8,000c (about US\$45) per month. Unless Maria prostitutes herself, this pension is the household's only income since she can find no other paid work.

Like many women and teenagers in a similar position, Maria solicits five or six nights a week in a bar in the centre of Limon which has rooms for hourly rent upstairs. If she is successful in attracting a client, she pays the bar 200c for use of a room.

Independent prostitutes working in this way end up with as little as 800c once they have paid rent on the room. On Tuesdays, Filipino, Jamaican and Argentinean ships dock in Puerto Limon and sailors come ashore. Prostitute women and children aged from 11 and 12 upwards then flock to the bars near the docks in order to sell themselves to the sailors. Children generally offer 'blow jobs' for 300c, adult women try to persuade men to pay 2,000c for penetrative sex.

Although a certain number of tourists stop in Limon for a few days on their way through to the popular tourist beach towns of Cahuita and Puerto Viejo, the majority of clients of these women and children are local men and sailors. The situation of women and children who independently prostitute themselves in places such as the slum areas of San Jose is equally bleak.

We visited one such area known as Los Cuadros. In this shanty town, mothers (many of whom are themselves only 13 or 14 years old) struggle to look after babies and young children in cramped and rotting hovels known as

rancheros, many of which are without any form of sanitation. Households of five people and more are lucky to have one bedroom and two beds.

Although Costa Rican children are formally entitled to free education up to the age of 18, there are no schools in this *barrio*, and the nearest primary school is some four or five kilometers away. Mothers told us that they did not take their children to this school because they did not have the money to buy shoes or decent clothing for themselves or their children and were ashamed to leave the *barrio*.

In good weather children 'hang out' on the roadside outside their homes. In the rainy season, when the *rancheros* are surrounded by sewage-filled mud, they crowd inside where the rainwater pours onto dirt floors through gaps in the corrugated iron roofs.

The incidence of sexual and physical abuse within the family is believed to be high in such areas and young girls are often desperate to escape from their parents. Three of the women we interviewed in Los Cuadros said that at a young age they had run away from parental abuse with their boyfriends. They had then become pregnant and their boyfriends had left them so that, at the age of 13, they had found themselves single mothers.

There are only three possible sources of income for girls in this situation - prostitution, domestic work which often also entails sexual exploitation (see below) and selling lottery tickets. Many women and girls from the *rancheros* combine all three: selling lottery tickets for a pathetic commission to men and women like themselves who draw comfort from the dream that fate will suddenly deliver them from poverty (this despite knowing that the cheap lottery is invariably being worked as a scam further up the line); working as maids for as many hours per week as they can find at an hourly rate of between 150 and 200c, and going on the streets of Los Cuadros at night to sell sexual access for as little as 300c.

Their clients are local men and prostitutes exercise so little control within the transaction that few of them can even insist on the use of condoms. Girls are frequently impregnated by their clients as well as exposed to the risk of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It is not uncommon to find women who, by the age of 18, already have three children, one or two of whom have been sired by clients.

We have been describing the kind of independent prostitution which takes the form of explicit and fairly narrowly defined contractual exchanges (i.e., x colones in return for x services or x hours of access to the person). But sex tourists and expatriates do not always secure sexual access to Costa Rican women and children by entering into overt commercial transactions. They can also obtain this access by picking a 'girlfriend' from the ranks of teenage girls and adult women who are willing to enter into non-contractual relationships with foreign men living or holidaying in Costa Rica.

Such relationships are modelled along the lines of non-commercial, romantic relationships and although the girl or woman usually hopes to secure some material benefit from the sex tourist (which could be marriage and thus a way out of Costa Rica, or could be simply gifts and/or money), she will rarely explicitly negotiate or demand any such benefit. The man may spend a night, a week, a month, possibly longer with the woman or girl, and the 'payment' he provides her is entirely at his whim.

Some men lavish gifts upon their 'girlfriends', others give money, some give nothing more than a few drinks at a bar.

Those who are sexually exploited in this way do not typically view themselves as prostitutes, nor are they generally considered to be prostitutes by tourists or by their fellow Costa Ricans, who make a linguistic distinction between *putas* and Zorro's .

The term *putas* is applied to brothel and street prostitutes, whilst *zorras*, which literally translates as 'fox', is used in much the same way as the term *jinitera* is used in Cuba, namely to refer to girls and women who enter into less explicitly contractual sexual arrangements with tourists.

As ever, the degree of control that a woman or girl exercises within such a relationship correlates with the degree of her economic desperation. It seems probable that even during high season, the supply of *zorras* outstrips the demand for them, and that their bargaining position is therefore always weak.

Meanwhile, since many sex tourists value such arrangements precisely because they are non-contractual, it will always be difficult for the 'girlfriend' to clearly set the terms of the transaction except through resort to

subterfuge and her ability to manipulate a 'boyfriend' to her own advantage will thus largely depend on her age, experience and wit.

Numerous zorras are to be found at the beach and surfing holiday destinations on both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts. We visited one such place - a small town named Cahuita on the Caribbean coast. Cahuita has an official population of 3,000 and like other such towns it is completely economically dependent on tourism.¹

During the high season, the town throngs with tourists, and girls from the surrounding region congregate in its bars and its one main disco in search of European or North American 'boyfriends'. It is clearly understood by locals and tourists alike that the majority of these zorras hope to get money or gifts from tourists and that many have dependent children whom they seek to support in this way.

A large proportion of zorras are believed to be under the age of 18 and some are as young as 12 years old. Despite the fact this makes them sexual minors, the Costa Ricans we interviewed said that a girl who has reached physical maturity (often demonstrated in the fact she had given birth) is generally seen as an adult by local people, even if she is only 12 or 13 years old, and thus child zorras are neither viewed as prostitutes or as children.

A 23 year old woman in Cahuita who told us that she herself had had numerous relationships with tourists over the past ten years and hoped one day to find an American or Canadian who would marry her commented:

A lot of old men come here looking for young girls. Girls of 12 and 13 have Italian and American boyfriends...

Girls of my age and younger get married to men of 60. One girl married a man of 70...

No-one cares about age in Costa Rica, if it's an old man with a very young girl, that's just normal.

Age difference doesn't matter.

As well as picking up zorras in beach resorts and towns, foreign men make use of the personal columns in Costa Rican English language newspapers to find themselves 'girlfriends' and wives. The following advertisement is fairly typical:

Single, white male (divorced 8 years) planning to move to Costa Rica in the next few months. I would like to meet a marriage minded woman between the ages of 20 and 30 who is very attractive: trim and speaks some/good English. I am considered handsome: age 47; weigh 195 lbs, and 5ft 11in, tall. Send letter with recent color photo... (*The Tico Times*, August 11, 1995).

2. Direct Forms of Third Party Involvement

Not all prostitutes work independently. Many enter into some kind of employment relation with a third party who directly organises and controls their work. 'Free choice' adult prostitution is legal in Costa Rica and the country has a well developed, organised sex industry within which sexual access is fully and explicitly commodified. Costa Rican law seeks to regulate and control prostitution as an industry, especially as regards the age of both clients and prostitutes, who must be over 18 years of age.

Providing a brothel-keeper employs women of 18 or over and hires doormen to check the age of customers before allowing them entry, it is therefore legal to run highly visible brothels, openly recruiting women to work in them and freely advertising their 'services' and there are some brothels and massage parlours in San Jose which operate within this legal framework. We visited one such establishment in San Jose's red light district and interviewed its doorman and manager.

It is situated in a two-storey building. On the ground floor is a darkened bar with music and television screens showing pornographic videos and behind this is a room that is not open to customers which serves as a kind of common room for the 'girls'. Upstairs are a number of small cubicle-like rooms in which men are 'serviced'. Three doormen stand on the street outside, touting for business, checking the ID of younger looking clients and taking entrance fees (400c per person).

The brothel is open from 2 p.m. to 2 a.m. daily and prostitutes generally work as many 12 hour shifts per week as management requires or allow them. There are 25 prostitutes working on each shift and they are paid on a per piece basis rather than receiving an hourly wage from their employer. In this way they are 'incentivised' to compete with each other to solicit custom from the men drinking at the bar.

Once a customer has selected a woman, he must pay the bar 800c to take her upstairs and pay the woman 2,000c for a half hour 'session'. The doormen estimate that somewhere between 350 and 500 men visit daily and labour costs are low (only the five bar staff, the doormen and the manager are on a regular wage and the most highly paid of these receives only 16,000c per week), so the brothel represents a relatively lucrative business.

Its owner is clearly doing well (he owns two other similar establishments) and his manager claims that it would not be worth risking this business by breaking the law to allow under-age prostitutes to work in the brothel.

Despite the porn videos, small upstairs rooms and large throughput of clients, this brothel is almost a 'classy' establishment by comparison with other legally run brothels in San Jose, some of which issue clients with numbered tickets on arrival and seat them in rows to wait for their number to be called, at which point they go to a cubicle to spend no more than 15 minutes with the prostitute who has called them. A supervisor will go and call them out if they attempt to overstay this time limit. Whether they be 'classy' or 'tacky' however, it seems that the owners of successful and visible brothels do have a certain incentive to keep within the law as regards the age of the prostitutes they exploit. The police do sometimes run checks on the age and immigration status² of prostitutes working in such establishments, and prosecution could lead to the establishment being closed down for a period of time, thus interfering with the stream of income from it.

Not all brothels are either so visible or so commercially successful. Many are disguised as massage parlours, hairdressers, bars or hotels (Gonzalez Mora, 1995) and it is in these more concealed establishments that child prostitutes and illegal migrants are more likely to be found, as a number of police raids on night clubs and bars in San Jose over the past two years has shown. It is also known that there are bars which covertly organise child prostitution for a tourist market and even produce catalogues of child prostitutes for their clients (Agustin Castro, 1994).

It seems reasonable to assume that owners of visible but unsuccessful brothels are more likely to break the laws surrounding under-age prostitution since they have less at risk. The closure of a bar or brothel with a poor turnover is not so great a threat and legal sanctions against individuals who are caught organising the sexual exploitation of children can hardly be described as a deterrent. A bar owner arrested in 1994 for running a child prostitution ring involving 17 children (to whom he was also supplying glue) recently paid just 10,000c to ensure his freedom (Prensa Libre, 1995).

Some brothels rely primarily on business from tourists and expatriates living in Costa Rica. One brothel is reckoned by its manager to serve a clientele that is 80% tourists and to get repeat business from foreign men. Although there are sex tourists who explicitly prefer and repeatedly seek out seamy, dirty brothels, they are in a distinct minority and the less visible, seedier brothels in poorer areas of San Jose and other cities and tourist spots therefore rely predominantly upon local custom (in port towns, such brothels also serve sailors).

Prices, and so 'business' turnover, vary accordingly and this has implications for the prostitution 'labour market'. It is more difficult for under-age girls to find work in the 'classier' brothels that cater to foreign demand, so the fact that some adult women prostitutes earn relatively good money in such establishments does not strengthen younger girls' bargaining position.

It follows from all this that prostitutes who enter into direct or indirect employment relations with brothel, bar, parlour, hotel or night-club owner are not a homogeneous group in terms of the conditions of their work or the financial benefits they derive from it.

There is, effectively, a two tier labour market within the organised sex industry with a small 'elite' group of women aged between 18 and 24 who service wealthier clients and enjoy relatively good earnings (although by European and North American standards their work is extremely demanding in terms of the number of men they must service each day) and a much larger group of prostitutes who are intensively exploited both economically and sexually. This latter group includes under-age girls as well as older women and those in their late teens and early twenties who are either less conventionally attractive or less well dressed or simply less fortunate than those who work in the brothels that cater primarily to tourist demand.

Some prostitutes are financially and sexually exploited by a pimp who organises and controls their 'labour' rather than by a brothel, bar or massage parlour owner or a hotelier. Such arrangements are more informal and the degree of exploitation suffered by the prostitute varies upon the whim of the pimp and/or the extent to which he is able to control and manipulate her/him. In Costa Rica, as elsewhere in the world, there are men who abuse their economic and social power over wives and/or daughters to force them into prostitution.

One married prostitute in Limon told us that her husband, a crack addict, sometimes wakes her in the night in order to 'give' her to a client he has brought home. While she is 'servicing' the client her husband is out spending the pre-paid price of access to her body. Such stories are not uncommon.

Crack dealers also exercise a great deal of power over the addicts that depend on them for a supply of drugs, many of whom are children. One crack addicted child prostitute told us that her dealer gives her a single 'rock' of crack (with a street value of 500c) if she grants sexual access to men that the dealer takes her to. The men pay the dealer rather than the child and it seems likely that they pay him a good deal more than he has paid for the drugs he gives the child.

Jose, a young man currently undergoing drug rehabilitation in Puerto Limon, told a similar story. He is 25 years old. He had been addicted to glue, heroine, cocaine and later crack since the age of eight; in other words, for 17 years. At first he lived in a slum district of Limon with his parents, but from the age of 12 he had been living on the streets. He was sexually abused by drug dealers who also 'sold' him to other men and later he prostituted himself independently to support his habit.

He told us that most of the clients of drug addicted children are local men or sailors. He believed that local demand for young boys arises because homosexuality is heavily stigmatised in Costa Rica, so 'respectable' Costa Rican men prefer to pick up boys from the street and take them somewhere discreet to use them rather than to enter into open homosexual relationships with their social and/or age equals.

Jose claimed that street children are also sometimes sexually exploited by tourists and expatriates (sometimes over a period of days or weeks) who pay pimps to procure them. It seems highly probable that foreign men would require the services of a pimp to secure access to street and slum children, for even sex tourists with a predilection for 'low-life' value their own personal safety and no tourist would feel that this was assured in an area such as Los Cuadros, for example.

There is, however, some evidence that expatriate paedophiles with 'good' connections in Costa Rica can organise their own child prostitution and pornography rings and this may also be drug related with the expatriate exploiting the child's dependence on crack in order to draw him or her into a relationship within which the adult can act as pimp.

A Costa Rican organisation, Unidad Preventiva del Delito, has uncovered one paedophile network based from property in Puntarenas owned by two Americans and in the space of only three months between September and November 1992, police in Puntarenas uncovered five similar establishments where minors were taken for sex (Aguilar, 1994).

3. Indirect Forms of Third Party Involvement

As well as third parties who directly organise the work of prostitutes in brothels, there are a number of ways in which third parties benefit financially from various forms of sexual exploitation without becoming directly involved in arranging the details of sexual transactions.

There are numerous mail order bride, dating and escort agencies which profit from various types of prostitution without actually setting the price or limits of the prostitute-client exchange. Such agencies often advertise in the Tico Times, an English language newspaper aimed at expatriates and tourists. The following is one example of such adverts:

DREAMGIRLS!...

Beautiful, sweet, loving, traditional, nice Costa Rican girls all ages, interested in meeting & corresponding with nice older guys, all ages. If you are serious about finding a Costa Rican dream girl, we can make your dream come true. We have incredible references

(Tico Times, August 11, 1995).

Sometimes there are several layers of individuals and companies which are parasitic on a group of prostitutes' sexual exploitation. The foreign owner of a San Jose bar does business with a US based company selling 'erotic holidays' to Costa Rica. He allows the company to use his Internet address in exchange for a commission and passes details of the clients who contact him on to a Costa Rican run company which then arranges sexual access to Costa Rican women for them (Mora, 1995).

Agencies which recruit and supply domestic servants often represent another form of indirect third party involvement in sexual exploitation, especially the exploitation of children. Domestic service is a major form of female and child employment in Costa Rica. In 1992, 28% of youths between the ages of 12 and 19 were working as domestics.

Domestic work is not regulated in terms of hours or wages and what little legislation there is is ignored by employers and agencies (Agustin Castro, 1994). Historical and contemporary evidence shows that domestic servants are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse by males in the households in which they work and this certainly appears to be the case in Costa Rica. The attitude of Costa Rican men towards such women was well captured by a taxi driver who told us that the girls from Los Cuadros who work as domestics charge 150c per hour and for this sum will 'clean for you, sleep with you or rob you if you don't keep your eye on them'.

The system of domestic service is also a means through which foreigners obtain sexual access to girls and boys. Regular tourists to Costa Rica do not always stay in hotels but often prefer to rent private apartments, as do the many American and Canadian retirees in Costa Rica.

Tourists and expatriates generally favour apartments in purpose built complexes that are owned by a landlord or agency which provides property services, such as the maintenance of buildings, swimming pools, gardens and security. Such agencies also typically provide each apartment with a maid and this service is often a thinly veiled form of procuring.

Sex tourists tell of agencies which invite them to select a 'maid' by looking through folders of colour photographs of the girls on offer and tell them they can change their maid for a small fee. Meanwhile, the system of 'maiding' makes various forms of sexual abuse into very low risk crimes.

Such abuse takes place within the privacy of the abuser's own home and children who are financially dependent on an on-going basis to the same man (or agency) are unlikely to put their job at risk by denouncing their abusers (Agustin Castro, 1994).

TYPES OF DEMAND FOR SEXUAL ACCESS TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN

1. Local demand

There is substantial local demand for both adult women and child prostitutes in Costa Rica. We were unable to interview Costa Rican clients, and can therefore only analyse this demand through reference to information provided by prostitutes and our more general observation of attitudes towards class, gender and sexuality in Costa Rica. On the basis of this, we would suggest that three factors may be particularly significant to any explanation of local demand for child prostitutes.

To begin with there are cost considerations. Because 'classier' brothels in San Jose's red light district are relatively expensive, this type of prostitution is outside the reach of most working class and poor Costa Rican men who could not afford to pay \$100 a night to the independent prostitutes who work from the smarter, tourist-oriented bars and casinos. Low rent brothels (which are more likely to employ under-age prostitutes) and independent street prostitutes (including children from the age of nine upwards) in poorer districts represent a cheaper alternative.

It is not only working class and poor Costa Rican men who frequent prostitutes however. Wealthy Costa Ricans are to be found in better class brothels. It seems likely that local demand for prostitutes, just as much as tourist demand, is strongly related to popular attitudes towards gender and sexuality and to the set of ideas embodied in the concept of machismo.

For macho men the world over, penetrating or being fellated by multiples of females is seen as affirmative of masculinity, and prostitution provides an unchallenging, quick route to this kind of affirmation.

Though Costa Rica is a more secular country than most of its Latin American neighbours, around 90% of its population is officially Roman Catholic and the distinction between 'Madonnas' and 'whores' that is promulgated by Catholicism (as well as being central to many other religions) still appears to inform the Costa Rican imagination.

A song taught to school children captures the essence of what is expected of wives and mothers:

I want to get married to a lady in the city
Someone who knows how to sweep
Who knows how to clean
Who knows how to open the door so I can go out to work
And who knows how to cook rice
pudding.

'Whores', on the other hand, provide opportunities for the indiscriminate, anonymous, serial expression of 'manhood'. Although we have no systematic evidence to support this view, we would suggest that it is the indiscriminate nature of such clients' sexuality which provides a second possible explanation for local demand for child prostitutes.

Accounts of clients' attitudes and behaviour provided by both adult and child prostitutes suggest that many men quite simply do not care whom they have sexual intercourse with. It is the activity, rather than its object, which is valued.

Support for this hypothesis also comes from observation of prostitutes in poorer areas, for most are far from any idealised vision of nubility or radiant, youthful beauty. Indeed, they are more likely to be unhealthy, shabbily dressed and dirty, sometimes drugged, sometimes rotten-toothed, with bodies that bear the marks of an inadequate diet and premature pregnancies.

It seems unlikely that such girls and women are prized for their conventional desirability as sexual objects. It is possible that their clients attach sexual value to these visible signs of powerlessness in the same way that some Western clients prefer and seek out women they consider to be 'degraded' but it is equally possible that the age, looks and condition of the prostitute is a matter of indifference to them.

Finally, it seems probable that local demand for child prostitutes is explicable through reference to popular attitudes both towards age in general, and towards street children and slum dwellers in particular. Childhood is a social construct and it appears that in Costa Rica, so far as females are concerned, it is widely assumed to be a condition which ends with the onset of puberty. A girl becomes a 'woman', and thus 'fair game', as soon as she

reaches puberty, which means that the legal distinction between adult and under-age prostitutes is not a socially meaningful one to many Costa Rican men.

Furthermore, there are Costa Ricans who appear to believe that street children and girls from the *rancheros* are somehow less than fully human. Their poverty and lack of social status makes them 'Others', marginal beings who are not worthy of the same respect or care as 'respectable' Ticans. It seems reasonable to assume that such attitudes would further serve to disinhibit men so far as the sexual exploitation of children is concerned.

2. Sailors

In major port towns, such as Limon, sailors represent a substantial portion of the demand for commercial sex, and child prostitutes as well as adults report that they regularly 'service' Jamaican, Filipino and Argentinean sailors. Again, we were unable to interview such clients but assume that cost as much as any specific sexual preference for children is a factor which contributes to this type of demand.

3. North American Retirees

It is estimated that more than 30,000 Americans and several thousand more Canadians have retired to Costa Rica (Baker, 1994), renting or buying property in which they live on a more or less permanent basis (Tico Times, July 1995). Many of the single men amongst their ranks could be described as 'sex-pats' - expatriates who have elected to retire to Costa Rica not just because of the climate, tax advantages, cost of living etc. but also because it offers them easy and cheap sexual access to their preferred sexual objects. Some secure this access by placing advertisements like the one cited above, some visit brothels, bars and casinos, some pick up *zorras*, some sexually abuse the maids in their employ. Some no doubt combine all four methods of sexual exploitation.

We interviewed four such men, three Americans and one Canadian, who had either already retired to San Jose, or were there making preparations to do so. All were men who would widely be perceived as 'respectable' and upright citizens. They were widowed or divorced, with grown up children and included a retired American fireman, a semi-retired Canadian health spa operator and two men who were retired from the US services. Their reasons for wishing to retire to Costa Rica were similar. To begin with, they were dissatisfied with their financial and social situation back home.

The Americans had all retired first to Florida, but felt that the cost of living and tax situation there forced them to adopt a lifestyle that was somehow 'beneath' them.

They resented the loss of economic power that retirement implied and its consequences for their own social identity and all, including the Canadian, clearly felt this keenly in relation to their 'racialised' identity. Without prompting, each of them talked resentfully about 'immigrants' in their home country 'taking over'.

For the Canadian, it was the Hong Kong Chinese in Vancouver who were usurping him, for the Americans, it was 'Hispanics', especially Miami Cubans - 'You can find more people who speak English here in Costa Rica than you can in Florida', one remarked bitterly. In North America, they perceived themselves as less economically and socially powerful than groups that they believe to be their 'natural inferiors'.

In Latin America, however, they enjoy a standard of living which very visibly sets them apart from these 'Others' and restores the 'proper' racialised order. Instead of driving past them in smart cars or buying membership to golf clubs that they cannot afford to join, their 'racial inferiors' wait on them as servants and lackeys.

Over and over again, these men told us that 'you have to remember this is a third world country' and they clearly found the contrast between their own wealth and lifestyle and the poverty endured by most of the people around them extremely pleasing.

As well as fleeing from a sense of their own economic and 'racialised' decline, these men wished to escape the consequences of retirement and ageing for their sexual and gender identity. Bob, a man in his early sixties who is retired from the US Navy, made this very clear. He told us that he had moved to San Jose because he is 'in love with Costa Rica'. It is 'paradise' for men, he is constantly surrounded by 'beautiful women':

Tican girls are crazy for sex, you wouldn't believe it. Sex is the national pass time in Costa Rica... They want it all the time, even in the afternoon, you go to see a girl and she's crazy for it.

Of course, I'm not as young as I was, I can't do it four times a day anymore, getting on you see, but it's fantastic...

I know I can have any woman I want, any time of day or night. Where else in the world could a guy like me say that?

He was reluctant to acknowledge any relationship between his economic power and the 'sexual' interest that the girls he beds display, telling us that whilst in the navy he had 'fucked all the whores in the world', but now he would not pay for sex. 'I don't know why', he said, 'but I just can't bring myself to pay for it'.

In the next breath, he told us that he currently has two 'girlfriends', one of whom is a woman in her twenties who migrated to Costa Rica from the Dominican Republic to work as a prostitute. 'She's a hooker. Can you believe that? But she's a wonderful woman'.

She has a six year old child to support back in the Dominican Republic and so because Bob is a big hearted guy, he always slips her a little something when he sees her -'Only 500 colones or so, it's nothing to me, only 20 dollars, but it helps her out with the kiddy'.

The second 'girlfriend' is a Costa Rican girl ('only a young thing'- he was evasive about exactly how young) who also has a baby to support. Again, she does not ask him for payment, rather he gives her money because he is *gallant* and 'likes to help'.

Similar self serving, racist stereotypes about Latin American female sexuality were pronounced as 'truths' by the other retirees. The Canadian, for example, who had previously owned an apartment in Rio de Janeiro, assured us that it is *really* true that Brazilian 'girls' love sex and are more 'friendly', 'happy' and 'outgoing' than Western women.

Although these men were not ashamed to say that they had used prostitutes in the past, they now needed to deny the commercial nature of their sexual encounters. Attributing hypersexual lustiness to Latino females clearly helps them to achieve this end.

Although these men visited brothels in San Jose occasionally, they did not want to rely on brothel based prostitution as their sole means of attaining sexual access, for where in the past, fucking brothel 'whores' might have been an affirmation of masculinity, old age held for them the spectre of becoming the kind of man who is forced to use prostitutes because no other woman will have him and thus an expression of powerlessness, rather than of power. They therefore now prefer looser arrangements within which they can construct themselves as genuinely wanted.

Although newspaper reports and interviews with prostitutes suggest that there are North American retirees in Costa Rica who are preferential abusers of prepubertal children, none of the four men we interviewed would be clinically defined as paedophile. This does not mean that they do not sexually exploit under-age girls. Dick (a retiree from the US services) gave us to understand that he regularly does precisely this.

Dick rents an apartment in an area of San Jose, for which he pays US\$500 per month. A maid is included in the price who, in his words, 'does everything, I mean *everything*, for me'. She is 15 years old. Dick thinks that 'her family is probably pretty damn poor', but knows nothing else about her since he speaks no Spanish and she speaks very little English.

But there is also reason to suspect that the lower end of the age range of the 'girlfriends' such men pick may be as young as 14 or 15. We say this partly because informants in Cahuita spoke of men in their 60s and even 70s coming looking for teenage girls, and partly because of the particular way in which the men we interviewed seemed to wish to construct themselves as men and as sexual beings.

All of them described themselves as having 'traditional' views on gender and wanted to see themselves as 'gentlemen'. Bob was quoted above as saying that he liked 'to help' his 'girlfriends' and it is obviously easier for them to tell themselves that the money they give to their sexual partners is 'help' not 'payment' if the girl in question exhibits a certain degree of vulnerability and neediness.

Bob found it more difficult to maintain the fiction of his role as desired benefactor in relation to the more confident and successful adult prostitute than he did in relation to the younger Costa Rican girl, for example.

4. Other Expatriates

Retirees are not the only large group of North American expatriates living in Costa Rica. There are American and Canadian professionals living and working here, and because Costa Rican law is designed to encourage foreign investment (unlike many other Latin American countries, it is not necessary to have a Costa Rican business partner and the first US\$70,000 of earnings is exempt from tax, for example)

There are also North Americans running small businesses here (indeed, expatriates running such ventures are estimated to contribute around US\$150 million to the Costa Rican economy, Baker, 1994). Many of these businesses are linked to the tourist industry, and this is of particular significance for the issue of sexual exploitation.

Like many sex tourists to Thailand, sex tourists to Costa Rica fantasise about buying a bar and setting up business in their 'exotic paradise'. Some manage *to* turn this dream into reality and several of the bars in San Jose which cater to sex tourists are owned and run by former sex tourists.

There is a bar owned by an American who has lovingly recreated a small but intensely patriotic and militaristic slice of middle America in the centre of San Jose. Meanwhile, there are foreigners who own hotels, bars, restaurants and water sports and surf schools on the Caribbean and the Pacific coasts, some of whom are also former sex tourists.

Such expatriates are not only provided with opportunities to sexually abuse the young girls who maid for them (something which local women in Limon say is common practice) but also opportunities to become involved in the organisation of both adult and child prostitution, as the examples of paedophile rings in Puntarenos and San Jose cited above show.

In Limon, we interviewed a Canadian expatriate named Ted, who is probably not typical of such businessmen in the sense that he is something of a business failure, yet whose attitudes and sexual practices are nonetheless helpful to our understanding of men who sexually exploit children, since they fit well with both the accounts of expatriates provided by prostitutes and with men of a similar ilk that were interviewed in Cuba.

Ted is a 52 year old French Canadian who has been living in Costa Rica for five years. He told us the following life story. In the 1970s he ran what was, according to him, an extremely successful, profitable and well regarded restaurant in Montreal.

In 1979 he was arrested for possession of a small quantity of heroin whilst on a visit to Thailand and imprisoned for two years. In prison, he ran what was again, according to him, a very successful and profitable heroin racket, supplying other prisoners with the drug. Unfortunately, he himself became addicted during the course of this and he returned to Canada in 1982 as a junkie.

His account of the next eight or nine years was somewhat confused, and appeared to contain much travelling and dealing as well as continuing to run his (immensely successful, of course) restaurant.

It was also during this period (the 1980s) that he started 'dating' a girl of 14 who is now 24 years old and to whom he is now married. In 1989 they took a package holiday to Costa Rica and he liked it so much he decided to emigrate and set up business here. He rented a bar in Cahuita from which, being a 'hip' kind of guy, he sold tourists wholefoods, fresh fruit juices and cocktails.

It should go without saying that this business was immediately a huge success, the bar being the 'hippest' place in town and attracting so much custom that local traders were soon consumed with envy and resentment and finally, after four and a half years, they drove him out of town. He now lives alone (his wife has left him, taking their children with her) as a 'recluse' in a beach house somewhere between Cahuita and Limon.

Like many North American expatriates living in Costa Rica, Ted has a serious alcohol and drug problem (a single issue of the English Language newspaper, *The Tico Times*, carries in it four advertisements for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and two for Narcotics Anonymous in San Jose alone).

He also gives every impression of being clinically paranoid, and switched from garrulous *bon homie* to aggressive hostility in a matter of seconds during our conversations with him.

Moreover, the story he told us about being 'driven out of business' by 'envious locals' in Cahuita was contradicted by several other interviewees in Cahuita, all of whom knew him and provided a rather different account of events. More important, telling and depressing about Ted are his motives for living in Costa Rica.

To begin with, Ted lives here because in Costa Rica he can see himself as 'somebody'. He is immensely narcissistic. In his own view, he is not only a great businessman but an immensely knowledgeable intellectual and a fascinating, charming lover.

He repeatedly expressed a kind of rage against Canada, a society that failed to acknowledge and pay tribute to his charms and capacities or to affirm his own idealised view of himself - Canada is 'gone to shit', a man 'gets no recognition' there, everyone is 'jealous' of him and plotting his downfall, people have 'no imagination' there and do not value 'his experience'. This overlaps with an intense interest in his own power and relative worth, for Ted obsessively positions himself in relation to other men. Although he tells you that he left Canada to escape the 'competitive dog eat dog' mentality of the 'guys' there, he himself is competitive about absolutely everything even the extent to which he can control and master his own drug addiction-'Most junkies, they can't keep anything together. I've never been that way. I can always function'.

By contrast, in Costa Rica ('a third world country', as Ted kept repeating), people 'listen' to him, they are interested in him, they understand that 'experience is as important as qualifications'. Costa Rica also fulfils a kind of (Wild West fantasy for Ted. He boasts of 'friends' in Limon who are crack addicts, pimps, drug runners, even murderers.

As we sat with him in a bar one time, he summoned an ex-convict crack addicted shoe-shine man over to sit with us, telling us that this was his friend and that he knew the streets -'Ask him anything you want', he invited us though the man was his to command.

Indeed, he was proprietorial about whole areas of Limon and about other people's experience of poverty, as though this was something that was somehow within his gift:

I'll show you poverty, I'll show you the *real* Costa Rica. I'll take you to a shanty town where grandmothers and their grandchild are crack heads...

If you want to learn, come with me, if you want to really understand this place, I'll show you.

I'll show you things you won't even believe... You'll be safe with me, we'll be walking down streets full of crack heads, there'll be junkies and pushers and pimps, and they'll be calling out to us, 'Hey *Gringo*', because *gringos* don't walk those streets.

If you've got the balls... if you're not chicken... I can show you a real story.

This 52 year old man could not easily sustain such a romanticised view himself as a 'ballsy', wise and superior being whilst walking the streets of Montreal, for his sense of superiority, control and safety rests in part on relative wealth (he has some kind of income wired to him from Canada); on his 'racialised' identity as *gringo*. He may be derelict but his dereliction is nowhere near as great as that of the people living in *rancheros* in Limon.

When we asked him about the prostitution of pre-pubertal children he pointed across the road to a woman walking along with a child of about seven and said, 'If I wanted that little girl, all I have to do is offer the mother 5,000 colones. They need the money to feed the family'. Even a third rate man is king in a 'third world country'.

Costa Rica also provides Ted with opportunities to see himself as a sexual success. He 'loves women' and 'beautiful girls', and again, he claims that has always been successful in attracting them. 'You have to understand', he told us, 'that I've always had beautiful girls around me'. He has a predilection for teenage girls, a taste which would be difficult to indulge back home in Canada:

Here, a man has no age. You have to understand this. I'm 52. In Canada, I've had 17 year olds spit on me for nothing, just for looking at them. But here, 13 year old girls smile at me. They look at me and they come up to me and they smile, I mean smile in that 'come on' way. In Canada, oh my God, that would never happen.

Moreover, his 'knowledge' and 'understanding' of Costa Rican culture makes it perfectly permissible to satisfy his desire for such young girls. Another of the things that 'you have to understand' about Costa Rica, according to Ted, is that sex means something very different here. It is 'natural', is 'beautiful', it's a part of 'the way of life'.

Equally important, age means something different in Costa Rica. Girls 13 and 14 years old are not children:

They all get pregnant by the age of 13, for Christ's sake... This is such an open, natural culture. Girls are so willing and open, they want to please. They're sexual from the age of six.

You should see them dance, see how they move at six and eight, they're moving their hips, moving their butt, they want to please men. By the time they reach puberty, oh my God, it's so natural to them.

Presumably if Ted's sexual preference was for eight year old girls rather than 13 year olds, the same rationale would apply. He told us that there were many 13,14 and 15 year olds among the girls who hung around his bar in Cahuita trying to pick up tourists:

They have to do it. Once they've had a baby, how else are they going to support them? It's not prostitution. They just need the money.

Through Ted's eyes the sexual exploitation of young girls is simply part of the natural order of things: naturally, they want and need to support the babies; naturally, they use their sexuality to do this; naturally, adult men want to fuck 13 year old girls; and naturally, the girls enjoy it.

And, of course, nature is not the proper province for morality. We do not apply moral judgments to natural phenomena. Ted did feel able to pass moral judgement on 'unnatural' desires, however:

I've heard about older men looking for little boys... I know that goes on in Thailand. It's evil. It makes me feel terrible, I can't think about it - it makes me feel so bad. I have three little boys... so I can't bear to think of it.

5. Tourists and Sexual Exploitation

Costa Rica attracts large numbers of tourists from North America, Italy and Germany and a smaller number of tourists from other European countries (France, the Netherlands and the UK) and Latin American countries such as Argentina and Mexico.

Package holidays from Canada and the USA are extremely cheap (Miami based travel companies offer short, all inclusive breaks for \$400, and flight time from Miami and from Los Angeles is only a couple of hours

The country caters to several different 'types' of tourists, including so called 'eco-tourists', surfers, hippy backpackers, 'beach party' tourists, package tourists and older male tourists. Although couples travel to Costa, it does not attract many family holiday-makers.

It was very much low season when we visited Costa Rica (August) so that the following typology of tourists lacks the kind of detail that would have been furnished during high season.

Ageing 'Regular Guys'

Costa Rica is one of the many economically underdeveloped countries on the itinerary of the kind of sex tourist who considers himself to be an 'average', 'regular' guy who enjoys 'the company' of women and likes to visit brothels, strip clubs, go-go bars.

All of the 'regular guys' we met were American, and the fact that bars, clubs and brothels in San Jose advertise the presence of English speaking staff and provide details of shows, menus, cocktail lists etc. in English but not in, say, German or Italian, suggests that the organised sex industry caters largely to North Americans.

The sex tourists we met in San Jose were bachelors, divorcees or widowers aged between 45 and 70 (it may be that during the high season in Jose, the age profile is younger), they were comfortably off but not wealthy by US standards and they make between two and five trips a year either to Costa Rica or to other favourite American sex tourist destinations such as the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Mexico.

The attitudes of these men towards gender and sexuality, as well as attitudes towards Costa Rica, were essentially the same as those of the North American retirees described above (who had, of course, practised sex tourism prior to moving to Costa Rica on a permanent basis).

They told us that Tican women 'love sex', that Costa Rican attitudes towards sex are 'different' and more 'natural', that as a consequence prostitution is not frowned upon in Costa Rica. They told us that Costa Rican women are not like American women, they don't judge a man by his age or appearance, that Tican women are 'really sincere and friendly'.

They also believed that Tican men (unlike themselves) are macho and that women therefore prefer American men who are true 'gentlemen' and treat them well. It is this and not the economic situation in which most Costa Rican women find themselves which explains the large numbers of Tican women seeking Western husbands.

It may be that only a 'hard core' of 'regular guy' sex tourists travel to Costa Rica in low season but it certainly seemed, even more than in Thailand or Cuba, that such sex tourists feel themselves to be part of a large and loosely co-ordinated 'Boy's Club'.

A small fraternity of middle aged and elderly American men gather in a specific bar at 'happy hour', a Tican girl at their side while they watch the ball game on cable TV or flick through the 'defence' magazines (many of them are military or ex-military men).

They can buy souvenir baseball caps and T-shirts to remind them of evenings spent this way and the owner invites them to bring along their own state flag to hang in the bar next time they come to San Jose. Later on, they can go to another bar where they will see the same faces night after night, the other 'guys' out to get laid, compatriots with whom to laugh and boast about their 'sexploits'.

Although such men enjoy a visit to brothels and strip joints, it is highly unlikely that they go to the illegal brothels which cater to local demand. Indeed, the guru and epitome of 'regular guy' sex tourists, Bruce Cassirer, explicitly warns them not to stray too far from bars and massage parlours that cater to tourists: 'Watch out... it can get a little seedy if you wander too far away from the park' (Cassirer, 1992:77).

It is even less likely that these men would visit areas such as Los Cuadros. However, such men will be offered opportunities to sexually exploit children in privacy, comfort and safety if they happen upon those bars which have catalogues of children and offer to make discreet arrangements to supply them, or if they take rented accommodation with a maid (which many do) rather than staying in a hotel.

They also go to discos in San Jose and both independent child prostitutes and those being worked by pimps go, or are taken, to discos to pick up.

At a disco, for example, we observed girls in their early teens sitting with much older Costa Rican men, who would greet tourists and call them over to the table, after which one of the girls would go onto the dance floor with the tourist.

Meanwhile, if 'regular guys' spend time in beach resorts such as Puntarenas or in areas like Golfito, they are likely to find themselves approached by the pimps of child prostitutes as well as by zorras in their early teens. Nothing in the attitudes expressed by the men we spoke to reassured us that they would turn down such offers.

Beach Party and Surfer Sex Tourists

The Pacific coast attracts large numbers of North American surfers and many of these men divide their vacation time between surfing and sexual exploitation. It goes without saying that these are younger men (between 18 and 35), who are either making good money or have well off and indulgent parents. They find themselves 'girlfriends' whilst on the coast but also often spend a few days in San Jose on their way home.

These men do not regard themselves as sex tourists (one referred to the 'regular guy' type of sex tourist as 'pathetic').

However, in San Jose we observed several groups of surfer-types making their way into brothels and strip clubs. In a disco we also observed four blonde, bronzed Californian surfers, aged around 19 or 20, 'picking up' teenage girls.

We interviewed two surfers waiting for their return flight to Los Angeles. These were both men in their late 20s and both were self employed, one in construction, the other in landscape gardening.

This was their second visit to Costa Rica but they take between four and six trips per year to other surfing (and sex tourist) destinations: the Philippines, Hawaii and Mexico. They had also heard that there is good surfing in Vietnam and were considering a visit there next year.

These men were prostitute users in America and felt that Costa Rican prostitutes compared favourably with US prostitutes:

The girls are great, but you need to get there early or all the good looking ones have gone and you're left with the dogs no-one else wants... They charge \$100 a night, but that's cheap when you think they spend the whole night with you. No way a hooker would do that in the US. And they're nice girls, they're not like prostitutes, a lot of them are working their way through college.

Like other sex tourists we interviewed, they believed that prostitution is seen as a perfectly respectable occupation in Costa Rica ('no-one looks down on the girls') and that attitudes toward sex are very different. They told us that three of their friends (also surfers) had picked up two girls the previous night and taken them back to their hotel room.

They had paid them \$100 each to participate in making a pornographic video involving the five of them. They had then shown the video to our interviewees that morning. 'It was a lot of fun', one said. 'They got up to stuff that would be illegal in the States, or even in Mexico', the other remarked and they both then commented on how lax the authorities in Costa Rica are about all matters sexual. 'No-one cares what you do here'.

Their more general attitudes are, by now, predictable. 'Everything in Costa Rica is behind the times, even the women'. 'There's no women's lib here, they're all just looking for a guy to take care of them, they're not demanding', 'they love sex, they don't seem to care about age difference', 'they grow up very young', 'prostitution is a way of life, it's not really prostitution because they have to do it to get by' -'It's a third world country'.

The Caribbean coast tends to attract more of what might be termed 'Beach Party' sex tourists than surfer-sex tourists. Most of Costa Rica's black population is to be found here (Costa Rica operated a virtual system of apartheid until the 1940s so that descendants of the indentured workers from Jamaica who came to the country in the nineteenth century were more or less compelled to remain in this region) and 'trendy' Italian, German, Canadian and American tourists view towns like Cahuita and Puerto Viejo as 'funky', 'partytime' places.

They want to 'hang out' with 'colourful' locals, gambling, dancing, drinking rum and smoking marijuana. Needless to say, they also see sexual access to local people as part of their holiday experience.

Local people in Limon and Cahuita told us that many girls of 12 through 15, as well as older teenagers and women, have sexual relationships with tourists like this, which means that the Caribbean coast may well be one of Costa Rica's major centres of tourist-related child sexual exploitation.

Because such girls typically prostitute themselves independently and enter into diffuse, non-contractual relationships with men, it is very easy for tourists to deny that they are either children or prostitutes.

There were very few tourists around when we visited Cahuita but the two men we did manage to briefly speak to shared Ted's racist fantasies about Costa Rican girls being 'sexual' from an early age and adult by the time they are 13 (which suggests that they would have few qualms about picking up a 13 year old 'girlfriend'), and did not view non-contractual relationships as prostitution, even when 'boyfriends' paid girls in cash or kind.

Situational Sex Tourists

As well as men who have travelled to Costa Rica with the specific aim of practising sex tourism, there are single men who visit Costa Rica ostensibly for other reasons yet end up sexually exploiting women and children there.

We interviewed an American computer scientist in his late 20s, for example, who had come to Costa Rica for an 'activity' holiday, having prebooked white water rafting lessons and an organised cycling tour. He had chosen Costa Rica not just for the sporting possibilities it offers but also because he wanted to go somewhere 'exotic' and

'colourful'. (He told us very proudly about his trip to a market full of 'local flavour' where he had been 'the only Anglo' in the place.)

This man was an extremely shy and gauche bachelor who had never had a girlfriend and whose physique made him not only an unlikely candidate for the type of holiday he had chosen but also unlikely to attract amorous attentions from women in the US.

In San Jose, however, he had gone to a strip joint where he was approached by women who did not conform to his stereotypes of prostitutes and yet, he suspected, were on the game. This man did not confess to having taken up the offers he was made, but since he felt sufficiently disinhibited to visit a strip joint in this 'exotic' holiday location (something he claimed never to have done in the States) it seems quite possible that he did on this occasion or would do so on future occasions.

We also interviewed a Canadian businessman in his early 60s, a single man who had come to Costa Rica to combine dental treatment with sightseeing. In Costa Rica, both dentistry and plastic surgery are cheap by North American standards and a great many Americans and Canadians travel here for this reason.

Our Canadian, who was having bridge-work and gold caps, told us that he was saving more than 3,000 Canadian dollars by using a Costa Rican dentist and that this covered the cost of his flight and sightseeing holiday. It was his first visit to Costa Rica and he did not like San Jose. But he had spent a few days in Jaco on the Pacific coast where he had 'fallen in love' with a 'beautiful' girl, who was only 18.

He felt a little odd about the age difference but 'no-one here seems to think anything of guys dating girls young enough to be their daughters'.

UNDERSTANDING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION BY SEX TOURISTS AND EXPATRIATES: SOME CONCLUSIONS

Expatriates and sex tourists in Costa Rica are faced with ample opportunities for the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Poverty and drug addiction place large numbers of children in an extremely vulnerable position and there are many third parties who are keen to exploit this vulnerability for pecuniary ends, as well as individual men who wish to exploit it for sexual ends.

There is probably no single motive behind Western men's propensity to take advantage of the opportunities they are offered. For older men, aside from immediate sexual gratification, the use of young girls appears to counteract the psychological discomfort they feel about their own ageing and restores to them the sense of power over their own sexuality and over the external world that is so critical to their masculine identity.

But younger men also appear to value sexual access to multiples of teenage girls for reasons that one of the authors has discussed elsewhere (see O'Connell Davidson 1995a and b), and to make little distinction between a girl of 18 and one of, say, 14 or 15.

In Costa Rica, a number of factors serve to rid foreign men of any guilt they may feel about exploiting the misfortunes of girls in their early teens in order to obtain sexual access to them, as well as to remove any inhibitions the older men may have about sexual intercourse with girls young enough to be their daughters or granddaughters. First, they feel safe from legal sanction and from social censure.

Second, they buy into a philosophy of cultural relativism which tells them that 'everything is different here'. Sex is not sex, old men are not old men, children are not children and prostitution is not prostitution and anyone who says otherwise is simply demonstrating their own ignorance of 'Costa Rican culture'.

Third, the relative deprivation of the majority of Costa Ricans allows them to construct their own actions in a benign light. It is, after all, 'a third world country' and people's expectations are not high. Indeed, a 14 year old domestic is probably grateful to be employed by an American rather than a Tican, even if s/he is sexually abused by him; a 13 year old street prostitute is probably delighted to be sexually abused by a foreigner who tips her a few colones; a 15 year old girl is probably over the moon to find herself a Western 'boyfriend' who 'helps' her out with money or clothes for the baby, so what is there to feel bad about?

One of the many depressing things about the situation in Costa Rica (and that in other sites of sex tourism) is that there is a grain of truth in the exploiters' self-justifications. These men are not at great risk of prosecution and are neither censured by local people in tourist areas nor by their fellow tourists (most of whom have a Tican woman or girl on their own arm).

Back home, even if they confess to having had a 'holiday romance', they are more likely to be hailed as 'interesting' authorities on a 'third world country' than to be castigated for their actions and most probably make no mention of this side of their 'holiday' anyway.

As one of the surfers said, 'My girlfriend thinks I only come for the surf, she'd kill me if she knew what we get up to'. Nor are the attitudes towards age, gender and sexuality that they attribute to Costa Ricans simply figments of their own imaginations.

Many ordinary Tican people do talk fatalistically about the prevalence of teenage mothers, about sexual relationships between adult men and young teenagers, and about teenage prostitution, which is not to say that these things are necessarily held to be unproblematic but that they appear to be widely accepted as inevitable.

The distinction between saying something is 'inevitable' and saying it is 'natural' is a subtle one. It certainly appears to be too subtle for most sex tourists to grasp.

Finally, and most gut wrenching of all, there is an element of truth in sex tourists' and expatriates' conviction that the expectations of the children they exploit are low and that many consider themselves 'lucky' to be used by a North American or European man. Any sense of 'luck' is, of course, simply a testament to the horror of the 'choices' that poverty forces upon people but it seems to us significant that the only Western 'aid' to reach so many of the world's children should take this particular form, whilst the women and children who are sexually exploited in countries like Costa Rica do so much (albeit indirectly) to increase the profitability of Western

owned airlines, travel conglomerates and hotel chains, as well as to help ensure that their country's debts to world financial institutions can be serviced.

All this should underline the fact that any campaign to end child sexual exploitation must also be a campaign against poverty and the massive inequalities of wealth and resources between economically developed and underdeveloped nations.

Footnotes:

1 Most of Cahuita's tourist businesses are actually owned by foreigners.

2 In 1989, there were an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 undocumented refugees, mainly from Nicaragua, living in Costa Rica (Barry, 1991). Newspaper reports and our own interviews with sex workers suggest that there are also significant

numbers of women from the Dominican Republic living and working illegally in San Jose.

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SUMMARY POINTS

The Organisation of Sexual Exploitation in Costa Rica

1. Sexual exploitation in Costa Rica is arranged in a number of different ways:

- independent prostitution - autonomous adult and child prostitutes solicit from a variety of settings, including bars, streets, beaches, discos, casinos.
- informal, independent prostitution - women and children enter into informal, non-contractual sexual exchanges with tourists and expatriates.
- third party organised prostitution - the work of some adult and child prostitutes is directly organised and controlled by a third party brothel owner, bar owner, hotelier or pimp.
- third party promoted prostitution - adult and child prostitution is promoted by some third party bar owners, hoteliers, escort and domestic employment agencies, who benefit financially but do not arrange the details of transactions.
- sexual abuse of domestic servants - 28% of youths between the ages of 12 and 19 are employed as domestics, and there is reason to believe many are sexually abused and exploited by their employers.

2. Formal, organised prostitution is vertically segregated in terms of payment, worker control and working conditions, with child prostitutes generally at the bottom of the pile, earning small sums and exercising very little control over transactions with clients, and a small 'elite' of more fortunate adult women at the top, earning relatively good money and exercising far greater control over the details of the prostitute-client exchange.

3. The main factors pushing women and children into the most extreme forms of sexual exploitation are:

- poverty
- drug addiction
- absence of alternative means of subsistence
- coercion by parents, husbands, drug suppliers and/or employers.

The main factors pushing adult women into 'elite' forms of prostitution are:

- inadequate income from other employment
- absence of alternative employment opportunities
- absence of educational opportunities or of alternative means to support study
- desire to migrate to economically developed countries.

Types of Demand

1. Local demand - there is local demand for both adult and child prostitutes in Costa Rica. Local use of child prostitutes may reflect the fact that access to children is cheaper than access to adult women, rather than denoting a specific sexual preference for children.

2. Sailors - adult and child prostitutes in port towns like Limon get a substantial portion of their business from Jamaican, Filipino and Argentinean sailors from ships that dock there weekly.

3. Expatriates - large numbers of North Americans retire to Costa Rica, some of whom sexually exploit local women and children. There are also other expatriates who work or own businesses in Costa Rica (especially those connected with the tourist industry) who do likewise. Expatriates are also known to be involved in the operation of paedophile rings and the production of child pornography, and the sexual abuse of children employed as domestics by locals and expatriates is also of particular concern.

4. Tourists - Costa Rica hosts large numbers of dedicated, seasoned sex tourists and it seems probable that some of the tourists who are ostensibly drawn to Costa Rica for other reasons (surfing, water sports, eco-tourism, etc.) also sexually exploit local women and children during the course of their stay.

Explaining Child Sexual Exploitation by Expatriates and Tourists

Sex tourists and expatriates come mainly from societies with strong prohibitions against adult-child sex, prohibitions which are internalised by most people to some degree.

Although there are some men who are willing to acknowledge and defend a specific preference for immature sexual partners and seek only opportunities to indulge their tastes, they are far outnumbered by men who need to be disinhibited in some way in order to break this taboo. In Costa Rica, men are provided with:

1. Opportunities - Expatriates and tourists in Costa Rica are faced with ample opportunities for the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Poverty and drug addiction place large numbers of children in an extremely vulnerable position and there are many third parties who are keen to exploit this vulnerability for pecuniary ends as well as individual men who wish to exploit it for sexual ends.

2. Motives - Western men have a number of motives for taking advantage of the opportunities they are offered. Some have a specific sexual preference for children. Others seek to counteract a more general sense of powerlessness that they feel over their own sexuality and over the external world.

3. Disinhibiting factors - Sex tourists and expatriates in Costa Rica feel safe from legal action against them and from social censure. They also strongly believe that 'everything is different in Costa Rica' and that both age and sex carry different social significance here.

They are disinhibited by their conviction that Costa Ricans hold girls aged 13 and over to be sexual adults.

They are also disinhibited by their attitudes towards 'third world countries', where they believe that people's expectations are not high and that nothing they do can be as bad or as exploitative as the things that most Costa Rican adults and children daily endure.