



HAPPY HOUR IN PARADISE

**On alcohol and tourism in Thailand,
Cambodia and the rest of the world**

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**SCHYST
RESANDE**

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SUMMARY

Until the 1970s, tourism was commonly described as an exclusively positive phenomenon. The growth in travel, especially to Asia, Africa and Latin America, was seen as generating economic revenues and enabling development. Since the take-off of mass tourism, however, numerous studies from different parts of the world have highlighted the series of problems that follow in tourism's wake. It remains a potential driving force for development, but this will require greater respect for the environment and for economically and socially sustainable development.

This report raises the question of whether increased tourism leads to increased consumption of alcohol by citizens of the host country. It shows, through a survey of the existing literature in the field, and with examples from countries including Thailand and Cambodia, that tourism is indeed one of the causes of increased alcohol consumption in many tourist destinations.

There are several explanations for this. One is that tourism, and especially mass tourism, has helped to spread new drinking habits. Moreover, the tendency of tourists to drink more when on holiday means that the pattern of consumption they pass on is often a high-risk one. Secondly, the demand for alcohol by tourists also leads to increased access for the local population. Thirdly, the tourist and alcohol industries are able in various ways to influence policy proposals and legislation relating to alcohol. The alcohol industry also uses images related to holiday-making in its marketing, while many of the trips and destinations offered by the tourist industry feature alcohol as a selling point.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2010 the World Health Assembly will discuss a proposal for a global alcohol strategy as drafted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in cooperation with member states. If the assembly can unite around the proposal, we will have for the first time a common strategy for reducing harmful alcohol use, and the scope for measures at national as well as global level will be strengthened.¹

A common strategy also means that the issue will receive much greater attention. This is important not least for the European region, which currently tops the tables for both alcohol consumption and the share of alcohol-related deaths in the population.² The issue is also of great significance for those countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America which at present wholly or partly lack legislation and policies relating to alcohol. Average consumption in these regions remains low compared with Europe owing mainly to a high share of non-drinkers in many countries: 16 per cent of men and 75 per cent of women in the world are abstainers.³

Historically, alcohol has played a part in many societies. Local culture and/or religion regulated how, where and by whom alcohol was used. Drinking was linked to certain persons, contexts or points in time. With European colonisation, however, alcohol was exported as a commodity around the world, and the introduction of new products went hand in hand with the development of a new alcohol culture.

Today, the same exports are being sold through new channels, with still greater powers of penetration. Globalisation, economic growth, increased tourism and an alcohol industry on the offensive are all contributing to a change in the pattern of alcohol consumption. In countries where social safety nets and the capacity for preventive measures and support are weak, the growth in drinking has a severe impact – in terms of ill health, domestic violence and road accidents as well as in economic terms.

The global alcohol industry is, like an expanding tourist industry, an attractive source of income for many countries. At the same time, the costs that these

¹ World Health Organisation <www.who.int>.

² Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs <www.regeringen.se/sb/d/2533/a/14157>.

³ Robin Room, 'Summary' in *Alcohol in developing societies: a public health approach* (WHO, 2002), pp. 9, 16–17.

industries bring with them are substantial. The aim of this report is to raise the question of whether increased tourism influences consumption of alcohol by the citizens of host countries. The available research on this subject is largely limited to single disciplines. Research on tourism refers in places to alcohol, but chiefly from the perspectives of alcohol-related trips (such as wine tasting) or tourists' risk of accidents. Some alcohol researchers have looked at whether tourists' drinking influences the statistics on alcohol consumption in host countries, and have even carried out in-depth field studies in specific tourist destinations. However, besides a WHO report from 2001 which was never published, there is a lack of more comprehensive research in the area.¹

One factor that makes research more difficult is the lack of reliable statistics on alcohol consumption, particularly in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America where the tourist industry is growing. The lack of basic studies complicates the follow-up of developments in both consumption itself and consequences of consumption such as accidents and criminality. The invisibility of these problems in the statistics makes it more difficult to focus attention on the issues and on the political and economic action that is required to change the situation.

¹ Vicky J. Lee, *Tourism and Alcohol in the Developing World*, Report for the WHO (2001).

METHOD

The background work for this report began with a survey of possible tourism-related influences on alcohol consumption in tourist destinations, with special emphasis on countries in the South. These factors were then divided into five areas: alcohol and holidays; the consequences of tourists' drinking; the influence on consumption by local people; tourism vs public health; and the influence of the alcohol industry.

An inventory of the research literature and other articles on the subject within the fields of alcohol, tourism and medicine was made. In addition, several Swedish and international researchers in public health, alcohol and tourism were consulted for their views on existing research and possible ways to approach the problem.

Johan Bengtsson then explored approaches to the problem in greater depth on a two-week field trip to Thailand and Cambodia on behalf of Fair Travel (Schyst Resande). This involved interviews and discussions with researchers, organisations working with health issues, and local staff in the tourist sector. The trip was also documented by photographer Martin Hultén. Interviews were conducted in Bangkok, Phuket and Chiang Mai in Thailand and in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville in Cambodia. Sara Heine compiled this material and wrote the rest of the report.

1 HOLIDAY SPIRITS

***“Happy hour all day. Draft 50 c. Free kiss!
Fire show Friday + Saturday.”***

One of many handwritten signs along Ochheuteal beach in Sihanoukville, Cambodia.

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries today, generating €643 billion in export earnings in 2008. From the 1950s to the end of the 2000s, the number of international tourist arrivals increased from 25 million to nearly 1 billion. The figure fell slightly in 2009, mainly because of the global economic crisis. However, arrivals in Africa continued to grow, while the number in South East Asia remained unchanged. A global increase of 3 to 4 per cent in the number of arrivals is predicted for 2010. In the Middle East, Asia and Africa, the expected increase is around 6 per cent on average.¹ This is partly because more and more people have the means and the opportunity to travel within their own region, but it reflects above all the continuous growth in interest from European and North American tourists in travelling ever farther afield. Behind the new destinations in the tour operators' brochures lies the dream of an untouched paradise.

International tourism from Sweden really began to take off in the 1950s with charter flights and package holidays. The phenomenon of the package holiday, however, is said to have been introduced by an Englishman, Thomas Cook, who as early as 1841 arranged a train journey for a group of members of the Order of Good Templars to attend a temperance meeting. Cook realised that he could earn money by arranging a package of travel, accommodation and entertainment – and so the package holiday was born.²

Today, package holidays are perhaps most readily associated not with abstinence but rather with increased drinking. Studies both in Sweden and in other parts of the world point to increased alcohol consumption during holidays. In an opinion survey carried out in 2009 by TNS-Sifo on behalf of the insurance company Europeiska, 60 per cent of respondents said that they drank a little or a lot more alcohol when on holiday. The main reasons given were the party atmosphere, not

¹ World Tourism Organisation <www.world-tourism.org>.

² Ester Wolf, *Med charter till Estoril. En etnologisk studie av kulturell mångfald inom modern svensk turism* (2001), p. 102.

having to get up for work, the cheap alcohol and the fact that it is easier to 'let go' when abroad.¹

The significance of alcohol for a holiday depends of course on the type of holiday, the age and preferences of the travellers, the destination and the social context. On a trip with the family, a cultural tour or an adventure holiday, alcohol is perhaps less important than it is on a holiday with friends. Yet alcohol remains an important ingredient for many holiday-makers. This is clear both from travel reporting in the media and from travellers' own accounts, as posted in countless Swedish and international travel forums on the internet. The links to alcohol here are many. For example: Where can you buy the cheapest spirits? How strict are they with age limits? How do you get hold of alcohol in Muslim destinations?

Drinking is still surrounded by ritual and symbolism. In our society, for example, alcohol is strongly linked with the celebration of certain festivals, with parties and with specific contexts such as holidays. On holiday, alcohol is associated with relaxation, reward, enjoyment and getting away from everyday life. The cocktail parasol is part of the experience – drink in hand, we find ourselves in another world, far from home.

The links and similarities between holidays and alcohol are many. The same rituals and symbols could equally well apply to the phenomenon of going on holiday. A holiday is also associated with leaving the day-to-day behind, taking on a new role and feeling liberated from the usual social constraints. Both alcohol and travel become symbols for something that seems greater than it really is, based on our marketing-fuelled imagination and fantasies. Alcohol seems to follow us even during the journey. The airport bars and duty-free shops are open 24 hours a day. Drinks are served on the flight, while the advertisements in and around the airport and in the in-flight magazine can hardly be missed. Upon arrival, tourists are often welcomed with the destination's 'signature drink' – such as piña colada in Puerto Rico, mojito in Cuba, Singapore Sling or dark Jamaican rum.

Swedish travel companies have become more cautious about drinking-related activities following a series of high-profile cases involving mostly Swedish youths in alcohol-related accidents. According to the largest companies, organised bar crawls are a thing of the past which they no longer have anything to do with.

¹ TNS-Sifo survey on behalf of Europeiska, based on responses from 1,001 Swedes, 1–10 December 2009.

While one of the larger organisers of skiing holidays in St Anton, for example, still mentions bar crawls as an activity in the programme, most of the companies seem to have cleaned up the content of their brochures. But descriptions such as the one below could be found on Vingresor's website as recently as 2008.¹ This information about Sunny Beach in Bulgaria, a resort catering mainly to a younger market, clearly shows what kind of expectations the organisers have of their intended clients:

'It isn't elegant like Ibiza, or exotic like Phuket. But it's popular. It's like a giant funfair with happy hour 24 hours a day, discos with and without indecent attractions, and the lowest prices in Europe. The atmosphere will be familiar for anyone who has ever seen calves let out to graze in the spring. Frisky, unlimited and tremendously exciting. Everywhere you look there are visitors staring in wide-eyed wonder at the opportunities on offer in this holiday paradise. The sun is shining, the beach is calling and the nights are long.'

At the time of writing, the toned-down description of the same resort reads as follows:

'Along the smart beach promenade and the main Flower Street, designer copies and souvenirs are on sale at relatively low prices. And you will find a wealth of restaurants, bars and cafes – most of them with large open-air areas where you can eat well, enjoy the view and take in the street life. The food is very similar to what you get on holiday in Greece. A little way from the main street lies the liveliest entertainment district. Here it rocks 24 hours a day, and those who want to can party until the sun comes up.'

According to a survey carried out in 2009 on behalf of the Fair Travel (Schyst Resande) network, eight out of thirty-three tour operators state that they have guidelines for responsible marketing of alcohol and other drugs in their advertising and activities. Nineteen out of thirty-three say that they inform their passengers orally and/or in writing about the socio-economic and

1 Vingresor <www.ving.se>.

cultural conditions in host countries as regards prostitution, poverty, alcohol and drugs, and so on.¹ What these guidelines and information actually contain, however, will have to be the subject of a more in-depth study. So too will the question of whether this information permeates the company sufficiently to reach Swedish and local staff employed at the resort. With the growth of all-inclusive and 'all-inclusive ultra' packages, employees in hotel bars and restaurants will need to know how to handle over-consumption.²

¹ Jenny Eriksson, *Kartläggning av Sveriges researrangörer* (2009).

² '*Rusning efter All inclusive*' <www.mynewsdesk.com> (2009). 'All-inclusive' means that food and drink, including alcohol, are included in the package. 'All-inclusive ultra' means that international alcohol brands are also included.

Everybody's Paradise

Thailand. Until the 1960s Thailand had fewer than 100,000 tourist visitors a year, but with the Vietnam War the country became a location for American soldiers' so-called R&R, or rest and recuperation.¹ The leading destination was Pattaya, which quickly grew from a fishing village into a leisure resort with a large number of bars and brothels – a feature that remains, and continues to attract tourists. When the last soldier left Thailand in 1976, the number of annual arrivals had risen to almost 1.1 million.



Photo: Martin Hultén

Thailand developed early as a tourist destination, and the government saw the opportunity to play an active part in this development by setting up Tourism Organisation Thailand in 1960 to market the country. Tourism expanded sharply, helping to meet the objectives of increasing the inflow of foreign currency and improving the trade balance. Sex tourism was a driving force, and by the 1980s there were nearly one million prostitutes in the country.² Today there are twice as many, and a relatively high share of these are children under 18 years of age. A precise figure is difficult to obtain, in part because many children come from neighbouring countries. For this reason, estimates vary widely, from 30,000 to hundreds of thousands.³

¹ *Pocket Thailand in Figures*, 12th Edition 2010; Tourism Authority of Thailand, *Statistical Report 2007*. TAT

² Linda K. Richter, *The politics of tourism in Asia* (1989).

³ Ecpat UK, *Child Sex Tourism in Thailand* (2005).

Tourism was evaluated at first in economic terms, with little regard to how the receipts were distributed among the population or to the costs associated with the downside of the industry. In a study from the early 1990s, Thailand was rated number one for hospitality, low living costs and interesting nightlife, but it was also seen as the second most polluted and unsanitary country after India.¹ The expansion of tourism continues even today, despite overcrowding in several resorts.

At the end of the 1970s, attempts were made to introduce a so-called Tourism Control Act with a view to regulating development. The tourist industry, however, was able to ward this off by means of lobbying and close connections to parliament.²

With the growth of tourism came a broadening of the target market, from business and group travellers to package tourists and backpackers. The number of tourist resorts increased accordingly. By way of illustration, Bangkok accounted in 1987 for 76 per cent of tourist earnings, and Pataya for a large part of the remainder. By 1994, Bangkok's share had fallen to 37 per cent, and new regions such as Chiang Mai, Phuket and Songkhla had become major tourist destinations.³

In 1996 the Tourism Authority of Thailand produced a guide to ecotourism, which set out policies for income distribution, preservation of Thai culture and support for participation in activities to develop ecotourism.⁴ The real significance of this guide is, however, hard to measure, since many of the activities that go under the name of ecotourism fulfil only one of the given criteria. One example is the trekking tours organised among the mountain peoples of northern Thailand, where the relatively large tourist presence has generated local sales of alcohol, marijuana and opium. At the same time, the tourists who choose this kind of holiday want to experience authentic local culture – and the more commercialised the villages become, the fewer new visitors they attract. The tourists find new, undiscovered places, and move on.⁵

¹ Mingsarn Santikarn Kaosa-ard, *Thailand's Tourism Industry—What Do We Gain and Lose?* (1994), pp. 23–26.

² Linda K. Richter, *The politics of tourism in Asia* (1989).

³ Thailand Tourism, 'Vision 2012, Natural Resources and Environment Program', *TDRI Quarterly Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1997), pp. 14–24.

⁴ Tourism Authority of Thailand, *Policies and Guidelines: Development of Ecotourism* (Bangkok, 1996).

⁵ Adis Israngkura, 'Ecotourism', *TDRI Quarterly Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (June 1996), pp. 10–15.

Developments in Thailand in recent years point towards a continued surge in domestic tourism. More Thais can afford to go on holiday, and tourist resorts must therefore welcome even more visitors. In 2007 it was reported that Thais made 83 million journeys within the country. The growth in tourism within the wider region increases the pressure still further. Today around one third of all arrivals are from China, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia. Of these, around 65 per cent are men.¹

Pattaya continues to attract many foreign tourists with problematic backgrounds in their own countries (involving criminality and drug abuse, for example) who now see Thailand as their new homeland. This has led to local problems on such a scale that the Scandinavian Church has decided to open a branch in Pattaya.²



Photo: Patrik Deijenstedt

'They took over the whole party and suddenly the atmosphere changed from being fun and relaxed to being just about drinking. Alcohol became the focus. The day after, I was there just taking a few photos. It was such a shame to see how everyone had just left the beach, with bottles strewn across the sand.'

Patrik travelled in 2009 to Thailand and stayed for a while on the island of Koh Chang. One evening, one of the resorts on Lonely Beach celebrated its tenth anniversary, sponsored by the beer brand San Miguel. Advertising placards and beer girls took over the beach party.

¹ *Pocket Thailand in Figures*, 12th Edition 2010.

² Scandinavian Church in Bangkok and Pattaya <www.skut.com>.

Thailand in a glass

Thailand. Although Thailand is one of the more popular tourist destinations with over 14 million international visitors in 2007,¹ the recent political unrest has led to something of a downturn. In search of a new marketing angle, the Thai Tourist Authority together with the Thai Hotels Association sponsored a competition in 2009 to create a national cocktail. The winning drink was named Siam Sunrays and is currently being launched with the slogan '*Thailand in a glass – the new punch in Thai tourism.*'

In a joint statement the sponsors explained that: *'For the world's tourism capitals, signature drinks are very much a part of the overall brand experience, and can help raise awareness of the destination. They are fun and become the talk of the town, spreading by word of mouth and viral marketing. Well-established cocktail drinks – such as The Big Apple's Manhattan, the Singapore Sling or the Cuban Mojito from Havana – have become a part of global cosmopolitan culture and are recognized worldwide. Successful signature drinks are one way to fast track holiday destinations on to the world tourism map, and can contribute some added identity to the local food and beverage scene in the hospitality and tourism industry. Visitors are always keen to have a taste of the local signature drink as part of their overall trip experience. Hopefully the first encounter turns out to be a positive and memorable one that keeps them repeating their orders with every opportunity that arises.'*²

¹ Tourism Authority of Thailand <www2.tat.or.th/stat/web/static_download.php?Rpt=cre>.

² Tourism Authority of Thailand <www.tatnews.org>.

UNTAC paved the way

Cambodia. Tourism in Cambodia began around the turn of the twentieth century when the ruins of the city of Angkor Wat were excavated and restored, which attracted a couple of hundred visitors each year.¹ Around the 1950s the coastal town of Kep was extended and Sihanoukville established, but the influx of travellers came to an abrupt halt in 1970 when Nool Lon seized power in a coup. The consequent hostilities with the Khmer Rouge, and the USA's bombing of eastern Cambodia, made continued tourism an impossibility.

In 1992, after nearly 20 years of civil war, the UN's peacekeeping force UNTAC took control of the country. The 20,000-strong force made its mark and laid the ground for rapid growth in the supply of alcohol and prostitutes, both in Phnom Penh and in other areas where UNTAC personnel were stationed.² Narcotics too were available, with marijuana sold openly in street markets – something that continued even after UNTAC had left the country.³

The UNTAC period and the sex-and-drugs tourism that followed left an impression on the country, and even today many tourists come in the belief that anything goes, and that one can always buy or bribe oneself free of any complications with the law. This remains a common topic, for example, on Scandinavian internet forums for backpackers. The growth in prostitution in the early 1990s also brought with it a sharp increase in the spread of HIV, and the situation in Cambodia was for a time the most alarming in the region. Through preventive measures, the trend has been reversed and the share of the adult population who are HIV positive has fallen from 3 per cent to under 1 per cent today.⁴ Among those who work in the sex industry and in bars and karaoke clubs, however, the share is significantly higher.

Poverty and the aftermath of the HIV epidemic in the 1990s have resulted in a large number of street children in Cambodia today. These children are living in an extremely vulnerable situation. A study from Phnom Penh shows for example that the majority of street children in the capital have been the

¹ Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siem_Reap> (6 March 2010).

² Interviews with Yong Kim Eng, 25 February 2010, and Mom Kong, 1 March 2010.

³ Amit Giloa, *Off the rails in Phnom Penh* (1998), p. 108.

⁴ Andrea Kim et al., 'High prevalence of HIV and sexually transmitted infections among indirect sex workers in Cambodia', *Journal of the American Sexually Transmitted Diseases Association*, Vol. 32, No. 12, (December 2005), pp. 745–751. Current figures from UNAIDS <www.unaids.org> and KHANA <www.khana.org.kh>.

victims of sexual assault by tourists.¹ Moreover, the consumption of alcohol and other drugs among street children – a way perhaps for them to survive their experiences and escape from their daily lives – is high. Voluntary organisations working with street children in Phnom Penh also describe how children are given alcohol and narcotics in exchange for sex, or are lured into drug abuse so that those who sell their services can maintain a hold on them.

As for the government, its recent marketing efforts to attract new target groups have been focused on Cambodia's cultural heritage and history. Private interests, however, have a different agenda. The March 2010 number of *Bayon Pearnik*, 'Cambodia's ORIGINAL FREE Tourism and Information Magazine', is full of advertisements for bars and nightclubs along the lines of 'Dream Bar; Food, Friendly Girls, Wine & Beer, Pool table, Relax', with pictures of young girls and special offers of cheap alcohol and happy hours.

With the expansion of tourist resorts in and around coastal towns such as Sihanoukville, the government has requisitioned beaches, forcing people to move. Many have been deprived of their former source of income from selling to tourists. Sandi Bassett from the Children's Painting Project works with children on Ochheutual beach in Sihanoukville. The group of children has grown in number along with the expansion of the tourist areas. Most come from families that were forced to move and/or lost their source of income when their seafront restaurant or shop had to make way for a new hotel. According to the country's department of social affairs, nearly 10,000 children in Sihanoukville are living in extreme poverty.²

- *'Tourism the way it is right now isn't helping so many Cambodians,' says Sandi Bassett. 'It's mostly the people in the government and those who are already rich who are making money.'*

The environment on the islands along the coast is still as good as untouched, but if the expansion to accommodate mass tourism happens in the same way as it has done in the rest of the country, there is a substantial risk of serious damage to both natural and cultural life.³

¹ Consortium for street children <www.streetchildren.org.uk/_uploads/resources/Street_Children_Stats_FINAL.pdf>.

² Consortium for street children <<http://www.globalactionforchildren.org/page/-/Street%20Children%20Stats%20Jan%202009.doc>>.

³ Conversation with Sandi Bassett, 28 February 2010.

2 TOURISM'S DOWNSIDE

"Swedish men are good, one man was here two weeks. His wife didn't want to stay long time in Thailand so he was here self. Drink some beer and then he take me to hotel. Give me 3000 baht."

Bar girl in Patong, Thailand

In many ways, travel offers a break from everyday existence. It changes the way we act – a phenomenon which some researchers refer to as 'behavioural inversion'.¹ We find ourselves far from home and the rules of social conduct that usually apply. This may lead us to stretch the boundaries, for instance where sex or alcohol and other drugs are concerned.²

It may also lead us to take greater risks than we otherwise would, and in an environment where security, healthcare and social conditions may be worse than at home. It is hard to estimate how many of the accidents involving tourists can be linked to alcohol. Representatives of the insurance company Europeiska say they often have the impression that people involved in accidents may have been drinking, but that this is hard to prove. In many countries, alcohol breath tests are not required in the event of traffic accidents or assault.³

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that a large share of road accidents, drownings, physical and sexual assaults and other incidents are linked to alcohol and other drugs. This also places demands on the resources of local health services and affects their ability to care for the local population in crowded tourist resorts.⁴ In an opinion survey carried out by TNS-Sifo in 2009, one in ten people said they regretted something they had done on holiday. The most common regrets were spending too much money, having unprotected sex, getting into a fight or committing vandalism done on holiday under the influence of alcohol.⁵

New surroundings, new acquaintances and a party atmosphere also increase the likelihood of sexual relations. The combination of high alcohol consumption and new sexual encounters also increases the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. In 2005 a comprehensive study of sexual risk behaviour in eight

¹ Alessandro de Oliveira Santos, *Vulnerability to HIV: tourism and the use of alcohol and other drugs* (2007), p. 2.

² Bellis et al., *Sexual behaviour of young people in international tourist resorts* (2004).

³ Conversation with Johanna Snickars, public relations officer for insurance company Europeiska (January 2010).

⁴ Pan American Health Organization, *Leading Pan American Health* (1998).

⁵ TNS-Sifo survey on behalf of Europeiska, based on responses from 1,001 Swedes, 1–10 December 2009.

countries in different parts of the world was undertaken on behalf of the WHO.¹ Among the findings were that men traditionally have greater freedom and power as regards alcohol and sex, and that this is strongly linked to notions of maleness. However, an increase in consumption was observed among women and teenagers, due partly to globalisation and other influences on values and social norms.

In several of the countries, alcohol was seen as facilitating sexual contacts, or even as a prerequisite for them. Such contacts often occurred in places where alcohol is supplied, such as bars, night clubs and discos. Women who had been exploited in the sex trade said that they drank to be able to cope with their situation, which in turn made them more vulnerable to assault or unprotected sex.

Many of those who buy sex choose to do so abroad, both because it may be easier to make contacts and because the risk of being found out is lower. There are two main categories of sex purchaser: those who travel with the main aim of buying sex, and those who find themselves in a situation while on holiday where they end up doing so. The role that alcohol plays in the decision is greatest for the latter group. Most western tourists are well aware of the health risks associated with unprotected sex, but the health aspect is not always decisive, especially when people are drunk or high on other drugs.²

It is difficult to determine the role of alcohol in the spread of HIV. No statistics are collected on whether a person was drunk at the time of infection. There are, however, indications that alcohol is significant – as a factor in power relations between men and women, as an excuse for unfaithfulness, and as a cause of unprotected sex. According to a research report presented at the WHO's expert meeting in Stockholm in 2009, it is estimated that 48,000 deaths from Aids each year can be attributed to alcohol. Of these, 11,000 occur in Thailand.³

Research has also demonstrated a link between alcohol and the capacity of cells to resist the HIV virus, with some studies pointing to a threefold increase in the risk of infection when a person has drunk alcohol.⁴ While several research projects in this area are currently in progress, the WHO report on alcohol and sexual risk behaviour maintains, as do a series of other studies, that patterns of alcohol consumption must be taken into account in developing preventive programmes to combat HIV.

¹ WHO, *Alcohol use and sexual risk behaviour: A cross-cultural study in eight countries* (2005).

² Rosalia Rodriguez-Garcia, *The health-development link: Travel as a public health issue* (2001).

³ J. Rehm et al., *Alcohol, social development and infectious disease* (2009), pp. 10, 25.

⁴ J. Rehm et al., *Alcohol, social development and infectious disease* (2009), p. 7.

Enjoyment, happiness and good company

Thailand. There are both similarities and differences between the women who sell beer in Thailand and their counterparts in Cambodia. In Thailand, 'beer promotion girls' dressed in sexy miniskirts or dresses adorned with brewery logos sell and market different brands of beer in department stores, restaurants and bars. The risk for these women of becoming involved in prostitution as a result of their job is quite small. However, the link between alcohol, sex and male customers is evident. Together with advertising campaigns, calendars and competitions featuring scantily clad young women, the 'beer promotion girls' reinforce the image of Thai women as sex objects and the view that purchasing sex is a normal activity – a view that is shared by many tourists.

Prostitution is illegal in Thailand. In 1966, however, when the Thai government first sought to increase earnings from the 'rest and recuperation' visits of the American military during the Vietnam War, an 'Entertainment Places Act' was adopted. This means in practice that prostitution is tolerated under the pretext of legal enterprises such as massage parlours, bath houses or bars – legitimate workplaces which also become meeting places for potential sex clients.¹ The women working in these places often lack a formal employment contract and access to social and health insurance. Bar girls commonly have to be 'bought out' by a client to be allowed to leave the bar early. The fee goes to the bar owner.

Around the bars in tourist areas it is not uncommon to hear conversations about sex and alcohol, such as this one between two 'expats' in Chiang Mai:

- *'How much does it cost to take a girl home or to a hotel?'*
'It shouldn't cost more than 1,500 baht, otherwise you're paying too much.'
'Can you bargain?'
'Come with me. I usually go to the same place so the girls know me and they know I'll buy them drinks. Wait till they start getting tipsy and it might be cheaper.'

¹ Jon Fox, 'Sex laws in Thailand', <www.thailawforum.com> (2009).



Photo: Martin Hultén

Bar girls in Patong, Phuket selling beer – and entertainment.

Cambodia. The sex trade is also forbidden in Cambodia. Because of corruption, poverty and prejudice, however, the judicial system seldom intervenes. Prostitution is found in brothels, but is on the increase above all in bars and karaoke bars. A group that has attracted increasing attention in recent years is the 'beer girls' employed by breweries to market, sell and serve beer in bars. As in Thailand, they wear brewery uniforms with a silk sash across the breast displaying the beer brand and logo. These women are in a vulnerable position for several reasons. Many drink together with their clients in order to increase sales and, according to studies by researcher Ian Lubek from the SiRCHESI organisation, consume from 1.3 to 1.7 litres of beer daily. This in itself can lead to alcohol problems, and intoxication increases the risk that girls will follow clients home for unprotected sex. Around 20 per cent of the beer girls in Cambodia are HIV positive as a result of having sex with many different partners – both tourists and local men. This compares with a share of around one per cent in the general population. Another reason for

the prevalence of prostitution among beer girls is the difficulty they have in surviving on the income they receive from the breweries.¹

Interviews with around one hundred beer girls in Battambang province showed that 26 per cent were HIV positive, that 82 per cent had been or were still being exploited in the sex trade, and that only 39 per cent regularly protected themselves by using a condom.²



Photo: Martin Hultén

The bar girl pictured is not the woman interviewed here.

We meet a woman who works for Angkor beer (majority-owned by Carlsberg) in the tourist resort of Sihanoukville in Cambodia. She comes from Svay Rieng, a province to the east of Phnom Penh, and moved along with many others to Phnom Penh for economic reasons. Today she is one of 500 girls who work for Angkor beer in the capital. The monthly salary is 60 dollars.

- *'We work every day,' she says. 'According to the contract we have the right to four days of holiday a month, but I usually work then too.'*

¹ SiRCHESEI <www.ethicalbeer.org>.

² Andrea Kim et al., 'High prevalence of HIV and sexually transmitted infections among indirect sex workers in Cambodia', *Journal of the American Sexually Transmitted Diseases Association*, Vol. 32, No. 12, (December 2005), pp. 745–751.

On her arm she wears a badge that says BSIC (Beer Selling Industry Cambodia). These are the people she is supposed to phone if something happens. They have also provided her with training on how to deal with pushy customers and on HIV. This work is part of a venture launched by the breweries after heavy criticism from both non-governmental organisations and representatives of the Cambodian government.

Carlsberg describe on their website what working for the company involves: *'Working with some of the world's strongest brands, you will be faced with many professional challenges. The road may be tough but the daily work need never become boring. We are in the beer business and sell enjoyment, happiness and good company – which you can experience on a daily basis.'*¹

In 2009, CAS, a Cambodian research organisation, carried out an evaluation of this preventive work on behalf of BSIC. This showed that there have been changes: the girls are wearing more clothes, and many of them have received training. But it also showed that they still drink with their clients, and that working conditions still fail to meet the standards required by labour law. According to independent organisations working with the beer girls and on the issues they face, salaries have not increased and cover only half of the women's living costs.²

¹ Carlsberg <www.carlsberg.com>.

² SiRCHESE <www.ethicalbeer.org>.

The girls on the Loi Kroh Road

Chiang Mai. The high season is over in Thailand when we visit Loi Kroh in Chiang Mai. The road stretches from the eastern side of the moat down to the night market. The west end is packed with bars, each employing several bar girls to attract customers. Coloured lamps hang outside and inside the bars, but otherwise the lighting is subdued. Those who choose a table at the very back can sit largely unobserved.

Eastwards on the Loi Kroh Road lies Chiang Mai Entertainment Center – a narrow covered alley flanked by bars with names like Sexy Pumpuij ('sexy fatty'). At the back of the alley is a boxing ring that hosts Thai boxing several evenings a week. The ring too is surrounded by bars.

Wan ('sweet taste'), aged 25, from Udon Thani in north-east Thailand works in one of these. Even though the bar lies in the middle of the tourist area, her English is not yet very fluent. But she is working on it:

- *'I said to my mother that I could learn English in Chiang Mai, and that would mean the possibility of a job with better pay. My mother understood and thought it was OK for me to move.'*

Whether Wan's mother understood what the work really involves we do not know. Wan's father is dead, and the family's land did not yield enough to support them. Wan therefore chose to move, and now sends home a little money every month.

Wan works at the bar seven days a week, but receives no salary apart from tips and the money she earns from going home with customers. The bar has not provided her with any information on HIV and safe sex. It seems as if instruction in these matters is left mainly to non-governmental organisations.

Wan herself does not think much about HIV. She tells us instead how much she likes cooking:

- *'When I was a little girl I used to watch while my mother cooked, and I learned new dishes from her. I'm especially happy when I get to cook for someone who appreciates it.'*

She also tells us how she drinks more alcohol in Chiang Mai than in her home village. It is part of her job, and she drinks when the customers are buying.



Photo: Johan Bengtsson

The women pictured are not those interviewed here. The bar girl on the left is dressed in the uniform of the Smirnoff vodka brand.

Porn, a young woman of 27 from Chiang Mai, works in a bar in the west end of Loi Kroh. Compared to Wan she is more experienced in the ways of the world, and speaks better English. Porn took the job in order to fund her studies seven years ago. After a time in Malaysia she is now home again.

- *'I'm planning to work just for a short time now to pay off my student loan and finish my studies in English at Commercial College. Then I'm hoping to get a job as a tourist guide or in some other profession where I can use my language skills,' she says.*

Like Wan, Porn has not been given any information about safe sex. She is conscious of the risks, though, and tries to be selective in her choice of clients.

- *'At the moment I have a British client who comes regularly,' she says. 'He has taken me on trips but hasn't wanted to have sex once. That's very uncommon. Most come to the bar to drink, and many are looking for someone to go on elsewhere with afterwards. Some of them want to be together for a few days and travel somewhere, but for many it's just a question of one night.'*
- *'For the bar it's good if they drink a lot. It usually makes them more generous, and that suits me too.'*

3 FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

“They have joined the Club.”

Advertising billboard for Club beer in Kampala, Uganda. The picture shows an African man and woman sunbathing on white sands. The slogan has a double meaning: the couple have chosen not only a beer brand, but also culture and social status. The beer becomes a symbol of a western lifestyle.

Alcohol is estimated to account for 2.6 million deaths each year and is, according to the WHO's report on global health risks, the third largest contributor to the global burden of disease, after underweight and unprotected sex.¹ Alcohol consumption and its consequences vary markedly between regions and groups. Consumption is highest in Europe and Eastern Europe, and lowest in parts of Africa and the Middle East. At the same time, the proportion of deaths due to alcohol is higher in lower- and middle-income countries. This apparent anomaly may be explained by the distribution of consumption within the adult population. In Sweden, 90 per cent of adults drink alcohol, but most do so in moderation; the proportion is much lower in many other countries, but among those who do drink, the level of consumption is often much higher. Another reason may be the relatively low capacity for preventive work, rehabilitation and health care, as well as the low general health status, in these countries.

Alcohol is not only a health issue. It also has a powerful influence on other obstacles to development, such as lost income, domestic violence, road accidents and the spread of HIV.² Consumption is also related to gender. Globally, men drink more than women, and the share of men with alcohol-related health conditions is far higher than that of women.³ This relationship, however, is changing as globalisation, economic growth, tourism and the global alcohol industry introduce new patterns of consumption. This means that drinking is increasing outside Europe and North America, and among new social groups.⁴

It is difficult to determine how much of the increase in alcohol consumption is due to tourism. There are, as mentioned above, a series of factors that influence consumption. These are often inter-related, a point we shall return to in the next chapter.

¹ J. Rehm, *Alcohol, social development and infectious disease* (2009), p. 10; WHO, *Global health risks* (2009), p. 9.

² Pierre Andersson, *Världens Baksmälla* (2005), p. 31.

³ WHO, *The global burden of disease: 2004 update* (2008), p. 36.

⁴ Robin Room, 'Summary', in *Alcohol in developing societies: a public health approach* (WHO, 2002), pp. 10, 12.

People have always been influenced by each another; this is a part of our ongoing development. The problem with so-called mass tourism is that its sheer size makes it difficult for the local population to benefit from the process of social change. Economic and political forces press for increased tourism, and when it becomes the main source of local income, local society soon finds itself revolving entirely around a large tourist resort.

As travellers we have enormous influence. Whether as backpackers, package tourists, voluntary workers or business travellers, we bring with us ideas, values and norms.¹ Given our tendency to stretch the boundaries when abroad, these ideas, values and norms may appear extreme to people in the local population. The tourist is someone who can afford to travel, to stay in a hotel and eat at restaurants, to shop, drink and sunbathe, and to live – at least for a week or two – a relatively carefree life, far away from home and work.

This lifestyle hardly corresponds to most people's everyday existence back at home, but it is the one we put on display in the places we visit.²

Consequently, tourists' desires and needs must be satisfied locally if resorts are to attract them and profit financially from their presence. Hotels, excursions, food and drink must be provided. The logistics required to put all this in place mean that tourism has in effect contributed to infrastructure development, which also benefits the local population. However, this structure also embraces and facilitates activities such as sex tourism and an increased trade in alcohol and other drugs.³

One way to get an impression of how far tourists' alcohol consumption has influenced that of local citizens is to evaluate how the infrastructure and regulations for the sale of alcohol have developed in tourist destinations. In other words, we may look at how many licences have been issued and at the rules that apply to serving, opening times, pricing, age limits and marketing. Several studies have shown that increased access and proximity to alcohol lead to increased consumption among the local population, and also to a change in consumption patterns.⁴ A bar on every corner also means increased competition and reduced

¹ Rosalia Rodriguez-Garcia, *The health-development link: Travel as a public health issue* (2001), p. 2.

² Edward Bruner, 'Transformation of self in tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 18 (1991), p. 240.

³ James Mosher et al., *Tourism, alcohol problems and the international trade in alcoholic beverages* (1982).

⁴ Roland Moore, 'Gender and alcohol use in a Greek town', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 301–302, 306–311.

prices, which makes it easier for local people to buy alcohol, and influences their choice of products. Areas where consumption was low before the invasion of tourism appear to be the most exposed to these changes.¹ But even places where alcohol has long been part of the culture have been affected as new customs are added to old ones. Comparison may be made here with Sweden, where increased travel to countries in southern Europe has gone hand in hand with an increase in wine drinking, on top of traditional Swedish alcohol habits.

The new patterns of consumption that tourists bring with them have led to an increase in the number of physical outlets, but also to increased social accessibility to alcohol. Drinking among younger and female tourists makes it more acceptable for similar groups in the local population to drink. Norms are changing. A study from Arachova, a small tourist resort in Greece, shows how alcohol consumption has changed over time. Traditionally, both men and women drank locally produced wine. Consumption among women was low, occurring mainly at meal times. From the 1960s, when travellers began to visit the area, it was mostly men who were affected by the new bars and drinks on offer. Beer drinking increased while wine consumption remained the same. After 1980 there were bigger changes. By then, well-off people from Athens had adopted new drinking habits, and displayed them when holidaying within Greece. When local people saw women from their own country out drinking at bars in Arachova, local consumption increased too. The choice of drinks expanded to include imported spirits and beer – products which in the first place had been brought to the area to serve the needs of tourists.²

Young people are another group whose consumption pattern, like that of women, has changed distinctly. One reason for this is migration from the countryside to cities, due for example to conflicts, lack of work or the longing for a better life. It is a long journey, in terms of culture and lifestyle as well as distance. City life means new opportunities, but also greater vulnerability and anonymity – a breeding ground for increased consumption and abuse of alcohol and other drugs.³ Young people account for a large part of this migration, perhaps because they do not yet have a family of their own, or because their dream of a better future is more

¹ Vicky J. Lee, *Tourism and Alcohol in the Developing World*, Report for the WHO (2001).

² Roland Moore, 'Gender and alcohol use in a Greek town', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 311.

³ Robin Room, 'Summary' in *Alcohol in developing societies: a public health approach* (WHO, 2002).

powerful. It is easier for young people to break free from traditional values, and many wish to lead a different life from their parents'.¹

The tourist industry offers both job opportunities and a new lifestyle. Many local people are employed in restaurants, hotels, sales and bars, or in connection with excursions. They come into contact and interact with tourists in a variety of ways, which may also influence their own choices. A study from Brazil shows that tourist guides end up identifying with the lifestyle of the tourists they accompany. This leads in turn to increased consumption of alcohol and other drugs, and to a greater risk of contracting HIV.²

But there are also cases where mass tourism has given rise to local opposition. This occurs when the behaviour of tourists contrasts so sharply with the local culture that the fear of tourism's influence strengthens traditional values and religious norms. One example is the Waswahili people, a Muslim community living along the coast of Kenya who were long influential in the region's economy, but have recently been marginalised on account of tourism. The Waswahili have in various ways actively ignored the growing tourist trade, and have even tried politically to put a stop to it. One of the reasons for their disapproval is that tourism has increased the sale and consumption of alcohol and other drugs in the local population. As a result, the tourist industry has developed in enclaves, without the involvement of the Waswahili, which has led to still greater segregation.³

¹ Alessandro de Oliveira Santos, *Vulnerability to HIV: tourism and the use of alcohol and other drugs* (2007), p. 5.

² Alessandro de Oliveira Santos, *Vulnerability to HIV: tourism and the use of alcohol and other drugs* (2007).

³ Isaac Sindiga, *International tourism in Kenya and the marginalization of the Waswahili* (1996), pp. 425–428, 431.

Proximity to tourists increases drinking

Thailand. Starting from a low level, alcohol consumption took off in the mid-1970s and, except in a few isolated years, continued steadily upwards to reach an average of 7.7 litres of pure alcohol per adult per year in 2008.¹ In Sweden, consumption in the same year was 9.4 litres.² In Thailand, the following formula is used: domestic production of alcohol, plus exports, minus imports, all divided by the number of adults in the population.³ This may mean that illegally produced alcohol (which amounts to 2 litres per person per year according to WHO estimates) is not included in the calculation.⁴

The Thai statistics also show consumption in different parts of the country. Most consumers are found in the northern and central parts, while heavy drinkers (i.e. those who drink every day) are found mainly in the northern regions and around tourist areas such as Phuket. Tourists' consumption is not included in these calculations.⁵

Although Thailand's GNP is relatively high compared with other countries in the region, the consequences of alcohol consumption are striking. Alcohol is the cause of more than 10 per cent of ill-health and premature death in Thailand – a figure that is higher than in China, and much higher than in India. One of the reasons for this is that a large share of the Thai population drinks alcohol.⁶

In 2008 Thailand adopted an Alcohol Control Act. The process leading up to this was a long one, and industry pressure led to a considerable weakening of the proposed regulation of the advertising and marketing of alcohol. The law that was passed does address areas such as sales and opening times. In addition, the minimum age for the purchase of alcohol in both shops and bars was raised to 20 – a limit which applies to tourists as well as Thais.

We travelled to Phuket for a closer look at the alcohol situation on the island, and met Wiwat Seetamanotch, who is responsible for public health in the province. His office in the health department's building is painted in a pastel shade of yellow, and around the table sit five members of staff. Several of

¹ Alcohol Research Center, *Report on Alcohol Situation 2009*.

² SoRAD <<http://www.sorad.su.se/content/1/c6/07/18/63/PressmeddelTalOmAlkohol.pdf>>.

³ Alcohol Research Center, *Report on Alcohol Situation 2009*.

⁴ WHO, *Global Status Report on Alcohol* (2004), Thailand country profile.

⁵ Alcohol Research Center, *Report on Alcohol Situation 2009*.

⁶ J. Rehm et al., *Alcohol, social development and infectious disease* (2009), pp. 23, 25.

these, however, disappear after a short while to take care of other business, and the conversation becomes less formal.



Photo: Johan Bengtsson

Loading up with beer for the islands around Phuket.

The island has been inhabited for a long time, Dr Wiwat explains. Historically, the population consisted mainly of Indonesian Muslims, but the influences of the British and Portuguese colonial eras are also apparent. Tourism began in earnest in the middle of the 1980s. Doctor Wiwat moved to Phuket at the same time, and has therefore been able to observe the impact of tourism on the local community. The island has around 320,000 inhabitants and around 30,000 long-term foreign residents. A further 600,000 seasonal workers come to the island each year – mainly Thais from other provinces or migrants who work in areas such as hotel construction, cleaning and gardening. To these may be added approximately five million tourists – a number that is already placing great strain on the local environment, yet is expected to continue growing. According to Dr Wiwat, tourist arrivals are expected to increase by a further 23 per cent by 2011.

As more and more areas on the island have been taken over for use in tourism, so the number of sales outlets for alcohol has increased. Since a large part of the native population are Muslims, consumption has traditionally been very low. However, according to Dr Wiwat and Malai Minsee, a representative of the Stop Drink Network in southern Thailand, consumption among Muslim groups has increased along with tourism. Men who work with

tourists in one way or another, for example on sightseeing boats or tourist buses, are the ones who drink. For the most part, they do not drink with the tourists, but gather among themselves at the end of the day. This has also led to an increase in domestic violence and other problems that arise when the men come home drunk.

Tourism has, according to Dr Wiwat, created both new sales outlets and new drinking habits, which affects the local population as well as tourists. Events such as the October beer festival are one example. The sale of alcohol has thus been extended, even to Muslim areas and to islands where previously it was not sold at all. This follows pressure direct from tourists themselves, who ask or even demand to be able to buy alcohol in the places they visit.

Some of the smaller islands with a majority Muslim population have now imposed restrictions on the sale of alcohol, allowing it only in resorts belonging to international chains. One aspect of the ecotourism found in certain places is that tourists live in a so-called homestay, where no alcohol is served. Thus the 'eco' in ecotourism covers tradition, culture and religion as well as ecology, with a view to the preservation and development of nature and the environment on the islands.

The tourist industry was initially opposed to any restrictions on the sale of alcohol, but the Muslim groups on the islands simply informed politicians and tourists of the decision they had made. Some islands have refused permission altogether for the construction of resorts, taking the view that the employment opportunities and accompanying influences will change their way of life for the worse.

An example of the ecotourism that has developed in certain areas is in the village of Baan Bangrong, in the south-eastern part of Phuket. We travelled there. In the middle of the village a new mosque is being built. So far, it consists only of grey concrete pillars, but the roof is on already, and the minaret has been painted. From the mosque the road slopes down towards the canal and the bustle of activity surrounding the tourist and fishing boats. Construction of a ticket office, where tourists will come to pay for the various ecological and agricultural activities on offer in the village, is under way.

Ten years ago, 80 per cent of the natural mangrove forest along the canal lay devastated, which reduced the availability of fish, shellfish and vegetables. This was one of the reasons why the population was forced to seek new sources of income within the tourist sector. But the new income failed to

cover expenses, and many families found themselves in debt. At the same time, the local culture was undergoing a rapid transformation.



Photo: Johan Bengtsson

Villagers from Baan Bangrong cross the bridge on their way to the local restaurant to receive a prize for their work in achieving self-sufficiency.

The village leaders decided, therefore, to work for a different kind of development. The government contributed with funding, and a self-sufficiency project was begun. Today the villagers make a good living from fishing, organic farming and agritourism among other activities. Tourists who visit the village can take a cycle tour along the cultivations and former settlements, or a kayak tour on the canal. The village has also worked to strengthen the Muslim culture and religion, and is therefore completely alcohol-free.

Pla

Patong. -'Hi mister, where you go? Come sit here, we have very good beer. What beer you want? Maybe you buy beer for me too?' She gives a big smile.

The bar is on Soi Bangla, a small street on Phuket, and is one of several hundred along the street itself and in the alleys. There are other businesses too, such as tailors, local travel agencies and electronics shops, but it is the bars that attract the masses.



Photo: Johan Bengtsson

They are all here to see the spectacle: the transvestites from the nearby Phuket Simon Cabaret, dressed (if not half-naked) in slit skirts and feathers to promote their show; the girls waiting for potential customers to invite into the bars; and the girls upstairs inside the bars, minimally clothed and dancing to music, entertaining and enticing their guests.

The girl who entices us in is called Pla ('fish'). The bar where she works is quiet. Not many people find their way into the alley, and eventually she buys a San Miguel Light with her own money and sits down next to us.

- *'I like San Miguel,' she says. 'It feels better to drink than other beers. I only have two or three a day. There's something about the taste, and it's light beer of course. I prefer it to the others.'*



Photo: Martin Hultén

Pla has her own particular views on tourists and alcohol.

- *'Men from England and America drink the most. Swedish men don't drink so much, although in fact German men drink even less.'*
- *'So you have met Swedish men here in the bar?'*
- *'Yes, several,' she says quickly, and adds in halting English, 'Two weeks ago there was a man here who was staying in Thailand for a long time. His wife didn't want to be here for so long, so he was here alone. He drank some beers and then he took me to the hotel. I got 3,000 baht. Swedish men are very good.'*

Pla comes from Isaan in north-eastern Thailand near the border with southern Laos. This is Thailand's poorest region, with many small-scale farmers and

large families. In the past, self-sufficiency through growing rice and vegetables was possible, but today's economic climate requires cultivation on a commercial scale. When the land fails to yield a sufficient return, families join forces, and one member of the family takes over the management of the combined land while the rest go off to look for work elsewhere, for example in the tourist industry. Compared with other Thai regions, Isaan has a relatively high share of drinkers. Most, however, only drink around once a week in connection with celebrations and festivals, and very few drink every day. Women like Pla very likely experience a drastic change in their drinking habits after the move to Phuket or similar areas.

Pla's father is dead, and the family do not have enough land to be able to support themselves. Even if Pla's mother does not know the whole truth about her work, it was to help her mother that Pla decided to move.

- *'But I travel home once a year,' she says. 'My mother cooks fantastic food. Nothing like here.'*¹

¹ Interview with Pla in Phuket, February 2010. See also <<http://www.phuket.as/bar-girls-in-patong>>.

Drinking on holiday or drinking every day

Cambodia. Cambodia is one of many poor countries in the world that lack effective legislation on alcohol. There is no legal minimum age for its purchase, nor any regulation of its advertising or marketing.¹ Since few resources are devoted to alcohol-related issues, there is a lack of reliable statistics, and without these it is difficult to demonstrate the need for change.

According to the available estimates, alcohol consumption in Cambodia stood at about the same level as in Thailand until the mid-1960s. Thereafter, consumption grew rapidly in Thailand, while in Cambodia it fluctuated according to the political situation in the country. In 1960 the Angkor brewery was founded with French financial support,² and sales of beer overtook those of rice wine for the first time. In 1991 Canbrew³ took over the brewery, and the year after, the UN peace-keeping force, UNTAC, arrived in the country. This resulted not only in an increase in beer consumption and in the number of bars and other outlets, but also in a loosening of the social and religious restraints on drinking.⁴

By 1996 there were 48 different brands of beer for sale, and a price and marketing war was raging. An article in *Asia Times* from the same year described the situation: *'Keeping up with the competition at all costs is also the motor that drives the industry's lavish promotional engine. Besides squadrons of "beer girls" there are the umbrellas, the pens, the cash prizes hidden under bottle tops, ring pulls or scratch cards, the gifts for the bride and groom who choose to serve a certain brand at their wedding.'*⁵

The marketing war continues even today with the introduction of new products. Currently in progress is a major campaign for the Spanish wine Randonal which entails advertising, competitions and parties with free wine. The industry in general also sponsors bars, music festivals and other events for young people.⁶

¹ WHO, *Global Status Report on Alcohol* (2004), Cambodia country profile.

² WHO, *Global Status Report on Alcohol* (2004), Cambodia country profile.

³ Carlsberg <www.carlsberggroup.com/Company/Markets/Pages/Cambodia.aspx>.

⁴ Conversation with Kim Eng, PDP, 2010.

⁵ *Asia Times* <www.wisdomofwhores.com/writings/older-journalism/cambodias-battle-of-the-breweries>.

⁶ Randonal <www.randonal.com>.



Photo: Johan Bengtsson

Ochheuteal beach, Sihanoukville.

According to the non-governmental organisation People Center for Development and Peace (PDP), the incidence of alcohol-related problems is higher in Cambodia's tourist areas.¹ A lack of research, however, makes it difficult to support this with facts and figures. PDP also say that in areas visited by large numbers of young people and backpackers, alcohol consumption and behaviour patterns have spread to the local population. Drinking is leading to more cases of fighting and other violence than before, even among local youths.

PDP sees no difference today between tourists' and Cambodian's drinking habits. The amounts consumed are the same. The difference, however, is that the tourists are on holiday for a limited period during which heavier drinking is seen as acceptable, whereas the Cambodians are keeping it up all year round. Total consumption among the Cambodians is therefore higher.

¹ Conversation with Kim Eng, PDP, 2010.

4 TOURISM VS PUBLIC HEALTH

"Can you imagine a future without Adelaide's magnificent bluestone pubs, can you imagine a future without Victoria's fantastic bar culture?"

Matt Hingerty, Managing Director for Australia's Tourism Export Council on the government's proposals for higher taxes on alcopops (alcoholic soft drinks) aimed at discouraging drinking among teenage girls. He says that social commentary on the issue of alcohol consumption is a worrying trend that is demonising alcohol, the tourism sector's 'lubricant'.¹

Alcohol generates income for the state through exports and taxes. It is also a source of income for agriculture, manufacturing industry, advertising and the media – and for all those who work in sales outlets such as bars, restaurants and shops. There is no doubt that alcohol creates both income and employment opportunities. But these must be balanced against the costs that it imposes in terms of lost years of life, disease and ill-health, accidents, violence and reduced labour income.² Viewed in these terms, it is clear that the costs are substantially higher than the revenues. The mental and physical suffering caused by alcohol is as hard to measure in economic terms as are the expected positive effects of social drinking.

Alcohol affects us medically, mentally and socially through intoxication, toxicity and dependence. Many researchers therefore consider that alcohol cannot be put on an equal footing with other goods in international trade and the rules surrounding it. In negotiations within the World Trade Organisation (WTO), however, alcohol is still classed as just another ordinary commodity, and falls therefore under the same free trade rules. Here, the industries that benefit from a free market in alcohol have lobbied for the abolition of preventive measures such as state alcohol monopolies and control through taxation. Public health is thereby set in opposition to the profit motive.³

The WHO report *Alcohol No Ordinary Commodity* was published in 2003, with a revised edition in 2010. Behind the report lie 15 of the world's foremost researchers on alcohol, with backgrounds and experience from various parts of the world. The report is based on a survey of the available literature from 1994

¹ Susanna Dunkerley, 'Tourism leader slams alcohol crackdown', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 2009 <www.smh.com.au>.

² Thomas Babor, 'Summary' in WHO, *Alcohol No ordinary commodity* (2003), p. 1.

³ Thomas Babor, *Linking science to policy: The role of International Collaborative Research* (2002), pp. 67, 70, 72.

onwards, with the aim of answering two main questions: how serious are alcohol-related problems, and what are the most effective methods for dealing with them? The answers are that alcohol is a big problem, and that the best and most cost-effective ways to deal with it are through policy and legislative initiatives such as sales monopolies, regulation of age limits, restrictions on opening times, and taxes.

Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries were pioneers in the field of national alcohol policy, and are still seen by other countries as models. Many countries, however, not least in Asia, Africa and Latin America, still wholly or partly lack effective alcohol legislation. This makes them even more vulnerable and susceptible to the influence of the alcohol and tourist industries.

Both industries have much to gain from being involved in the design of national alcohol regulations, and both are active in lobbying at both national and international levels. It is quite common to hear pleas for the tourist industry in discussions on alcohol legislation. One example is the citation above from Australia. Another comes from Mauritius, one of the countries that cut taxes on alcohol, after pressure from the hotel and tourism industry, in a bid to attract more tourists.¹ The result was an increase in the number of alcohol-related road accidents, cases of alcohol addiction and deaths due to cirrhosis of the liver.

There are more examples, not least from Muslim countries, which have traditionally had a restrictive approach to alcohol. In Bahrain a ban on selling alcohol in places such as airports and restaurants that are not part of a hotel has been discussed. Criticism from the industry has been sharp. Business leader Faieq al Zayani said to Al Arabia News Channel, '*Bahrain needs visitors and tourists and restaurants and alcohol are all part of that.*'²

The Maldives have since 2009 granted licences for the sale of alcohol in larger tourist hotels on inhabited islands. The matter has been in the hands of the ministry for economic development, with the initial intention of exploring the possible expansion of alcohol sales. However, criticisms were raised by a series of organisations, including the trade union for tourism employees in the Maldives, whose representatives said that the proposal would increase access to and consumption of alcohol among their members. The finance minister then withdrew the original proposal but went ahead with the licensing (albeit tightly

¹ Robin Room, 'Summary' in *Alcohol in developing societies: a public health approach* (WHO, 2002), p. 24.

² Al Arabiya <www.alarabiya.net> (2009).

regulated) of hotel bars. He commented: '*So we were studying ways to control it. But in controlling it, we have to consider that our economy is based on the tourism sector and how we could control it in a way that does not weaken the tourism industry.*'¹

The tourist and alcohol industries reinforce each other with new customers, new products, infrastructure and marketing. The alcohol industry relates its campaigns to holidays, parties and relaxation. And both industries have a hand in shaping new alcohol laws.² More on this in the next chapter.

¹ 'Alcohol regulations sent to parliamentary committee', Minivan News, <www.minivannews.com> (2009).

² James Mosher et al., *Tourism, alcohol problems and the international trade in alcoholic beverages* (1982), pp. 594, 600.

Seven deadly days

Thailand.

- *'How can tourists enjoy their holiday in Thailand without drinking? Like Phuket or Pattaya, they're coming for beaches and fun. They like to have beers and some drinks on the beach. If we ask them not to do so, they won't be happy.'*

Readers of the Thai newspaper *The Nation* were able during 2009 to follow a debate on a proposal to ban alcohol on certain public holidays. Prakrit Chinamourphong, President of the Thai Hotel Association, was one of several agitated voices from within the tourist industry. His view was that alcohol consumption is part of the daily routine of tourists, and that a ban would therefore upset many of the country's visitors.¹

The debate originated in the high toll of deaths and accidents during celebrations of Songkran, the Thai New Year. The newspaper reported that between 11 and 17 April 2008, 32,327 people had been killed or injured, many of them as result of drink-driving. The week-long festival thereby earned the nickname 'seven deadly days'.²

The Thai social minister Witthaya Kaewparadai put forward two alternative proposals for preventive measures, one a total ban on the sale of alcohol, the other a ban on sales in shops but not in hotels, restaurants or bars. However, the minister for tourism and sport, Chumpol Silapaarcha, was concerned about the impact of these proposals on the tourist industry, suggesting that they could only be implemented when the country's economy was more stable: *'We have to remember that tourists bring money to Thailand and we must take advantage of this. So I ask the government to put off the ban.'*³

An opinion survey showed, however, that a ban on sales during Songkran would not have a significant effect on the number of tourist arrivals, since 94 per cent of those asked said they would still choose to travel to Thailand for the New Year.⁴

¹ Suchat Sritama and Kwanchai Rungfapaisarn, 'Alcohol ban on religious holidays', *The Nation* (2009).

² 'Alcohol ban will not be effective', *The Nation* (2009).

³ Suchat Sritama and Kwanchai Rungfapaisarn, 'Alcohol ban on religious holidays', *The Nation* (2009).

⁴ Suchat Sritama and Kwanchai Rungfapaisarn, 'Alcohol ban on religious holidays', *The Nation* (2009).

5 ABSOLUT TRAVELLER

"Big Spenders Little Earners"

Humor Wang, General Manager of CR Snow Breweries, describes on SABMiller's website how the number of bars in China's larger cities is growing along with the number of visitors. Most of the latter are young but not necessarily well-off, and the brewery is seeing a growth in sales not only to the wealthy elite but also to the general public.

The alcohol industry, in common with the tobacco industry, is finding it difficult to increase its turnover in the European and North American markets. The tobacco industry's problem is that westerners are smoking less. The alcohol industry's problem is that we cannot drink very much more than we already do. Profit maximisation therefore requires efforts outside these regions, on the so-called international market.

The multinational drinks companies have in recent years invested heavily in new markets, and underline in their annual reports how they are expanding in important regions for future growth. Companies such as Diageo and Pernod Ricard regard themselves and their products as leaders in a range of countries. The third-largest market today for Diageo's beer brand Guinness is Nigeria. Pernod Ricard points to Thailand, Argentina and Mexico as being among their biggest growth markets. Other countries that are growing strongly as part of the global alcohol market include the so-called BRICs: Brazil, Russia, India and China.¹ These are the same countries identified in the report *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity* as those where alcohol is the principal cause of ill-health and premature death.²

The potential for expansion in these countries is substantial, not least on account of their large populations. In Russia the level of consumption is already high, but in a country such as India, where only a small part of the population today drinks alcohol, the possibilities are endless.³ In his book *Globalkohol*, researcher Lars Åke Augustsson estimates that consumption has the potential to double in Brazil and China. In India, consumption can grow twentyfold before it reaches even the current level in Brazil and China.⁴

It is worth remembering, though, that in countries where consumption per capita is low, there are often a high number of abstainers, whereas those who do drink

¹ Lars-Åke Augustsson, *Globalkohol* (2008), p. 78.

² Thomas Babor et al., *Alcohol no ordinary commodity* (2010), p. 59.

³ Thomas Babor et al., *Alcohol no ordinary commodity* (2010), pp. 78–79.

⁴ Lars-Åke Augustsson, *Globalkohol* (2008), p. 88.

tend to consume relatively large amounts.¹ This of course implies great potential for the industry to expand by attracting new groups of consumers, although that will require a change in drinking cultures and consumption patterns – that is, when, where, how and by whom alcohol is consumed. Several factors influence this, including the media, travel and tourism as well as marketing through advertising, sponsorship and product placement.

Marketing is largely a question of placing alcohol in a certain context and associating the drink or the brand with a desirable lifestyle. Love, sex, happiness, success, power and beauty are all common attributes associated with alcohol. The choice of drink becomes a symbol of something bigger. For example, India-based UB Group, now the world's third largest manufacturer of spirits, describes future prospects in its home market thus: *'Youngsters seeking western lifestyles typically begin by drinking beer and move into spirits. The brand positioning of UB Spirit Brands are designed to attract these upwardly mobile and aspirational customers.'*²

These new target groups consist largely of young people. This is partly because the young find it relatively easy to adopt a new lifestyle associated with parties, success and social connections, but also because many are drawn to a western lifestyle having encountered it in films, on the internet and through meeting travellers and tourists. In addition, young people make up a majority of the population in most countries on the international market.

The industry is focusing its promotional efforts on regions where effective regulation of alcohol is often lacking. Changes are, however, under way. Thailand and Sri Lanka have passed alcohol legislation, and countries such as India, Malaysia and Vietnam are in the process of doing so. The WHO's expert committee on problems related to alcohol consumption has stated clearly its view that the alcohol industry should not be party to the development of alcohol policy and health promotion measures. Despite this, the industry itself, under the banner of the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP), organises symposiums to draft alcohol policies for a number of countries, particularly in Africa. These policies are largely the same from country to country, and while they include the more obvious preventive measures such as age limits and drink-driving

¹ Robin Room, 'Summary' in *Alcohol in developing societies: a public health approach* (WHO, 2002), p. 16.

² Lars-Åke Augustsson, *Globalkohol* (2008), p. 39.

restrictions, they leave plenty of scope for the industry itself to regulate areas such as the marketing of alcohol.¹

The design of legislation relating to opening times, pricing and sales outlets is also of importance for the tourist industry. In several of the countries that have now adopted policy proposals drafted by ICAP, the tourist ministry was involved in the negotiations. One example is Lesotho, whose tourist minister is quoted on brewing giant SABMiller's website praising the Lesotho Brewing Company for the role it has played in the development of the country's alcohol policy.²

One of the guiding principles of Lesotho's alcohol policy states that: *'It is recognised that when used in moderation, alcohol has a positive role to play in socialisation, celebration and enhancing life style consistent with the culture of Lesotho.'* In the drafts for Malawi, Botswana and other countries, the name of the country has been changed, but otherwise the formulation remains the same. These documents therefore prescribe a pattern of alcohol consumption in several different countries, and their authors then help to establish that pattern through advertising, the media and influences from tourists and migrant workers.

An example of such marketing is the intensive campaign that is currently running in Cambodia for the Spanish wine Randonal. This is being promoted with the aid of competitions and events such as beach parties, Valentine's Day celebrations and masquerade balls. Tourists and foreigners are also invited to these events, and thus play their part in ushering in a new drinking culture. As Randonal's website explains: *'No celebration is complete without wines. A party does not have a character unless of course there is a wine. Wine is not only essential in fine dining, it actually promotes good health if consumed moderately. Besides what better way to feel totally relaxed and uninhibited among friends than with a good glass of wine. A perfect icebreaker in high society functions. ... [T]he party was themed after a European aristocratic tradition which is a masquerade ball and it was an evening which gave an opportunity to introduce the new lifestyle from Europe.'*³

ICAP also produces its own reports on alcohol. Report 18 on alcohol tax presents alcohol as a positive financial force for the tourist industry – an industry that constitutes a *'significant source of employment and revenue.'*⁴

¹ Contacts with organisations in the countries concerned.

² SABMiller <www.sabmiller.com>.

³ Randonal <www.randonal.com>.

⁴ ICAP, *Alcohol taxation*, ICAP Reports 18 (2006).

One reason why these industries are allowed to participate in the development of policy is that they generate substantial revenues for the state. Furthermore, many of the large drinks companies own a range of other businesses, which means that any scaling down of their activities might have a wider impact beyond that of reduced revenues from alcohol. Several of them are tied to the tourist industry, one of many examples being the spirits manufacturer UBGroup, which also owns India's largest airline, Kingfisher.

On drinks industry websites too, the links with tourism are many – beaches, cocktail parasols and competitions with prize holidays. Bacardi's website shows the spirits manufacturer's latest commercial, in which a large group of young people build their own paradise island using boats, rocks and palm trees. They unload their cases of Bacardi and start to party. *'We create what Bacardi stands for,'* says one of the creators behind the film.¹

Absolut Vodka's website shows four visualisations of the brand. One of these is Absolut Traveller. On the site is a map, two cameras, a postcard showing a sunset on a paradise island, some cocktail recipes, and the text: *'We picture you in a hotel lobby on the other side of the planet. One hand on your expensive luggage, in the other a drink. Or perhaps at home, in your comfy chair, reminiscing on adventures from the past. Just kidding. But it's a great drink!'*²

For the breweries it is also a question of establishing a presence in the countries and regions where potentially lucrative target groups are to be found. On 'just-drinks', one of the news sites that report on the latest developments in the soft drinks, beer, wine and spirits industry, there are several articles on how alcohol is being used to attract tourists, or on the potential for increasing sales in tourist destinations. In an article from 2008, for example, the brewery behind the San Miguel beer brand is said to be on the way to establishing operations in Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar (Burma) – encouraged by the development of tourism in these countries and the large target market that comes with it.³

¹ Bacardi <www.bacardi.com>.

² Absolut Vodka <www.absolut.com>.

³ 'San Miguel eyes South East Asian growth' <www.just-drinks.com> (2008).

Leo sexy girls

Thailand. ThaiBev, owner of brands such as Chang beer, is one of the largest producers of alcohol in Thailand, with a long history in the country as a manufacturer of rum and whisky. Chang was introduced in 1995 in an attempt to compete with Singha beer, which had been the market leader since the 1930s.¹

Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, the man behind ThaiBev, was granted his family name by the King of Thailand in recognition of 'his social engagement and his efforts for Thailand'. The same honour was bestowed on the family behind Singha. Both families have close links to the political world. Charoen is a close friend of the former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, while one of the grandchildren in the family behind Singha has worked for the prime minister and is now standing as a candidate for the Democratic Party.

The profits from Chang beer have allowed the company to invest in a range of other activities, including the hotel industry. Today they own the Imperial Hotel Group, with hotels in Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and elsewhere in Thailand and abroad. The hotels are used as part of the marketing strategy for the group's drinks – the Imperial Mae Ping in Chiang Mai, for example, has its own Chang beer garden.²

Singha, for its part, also manufactures Leo beer, which is aimed at a younger market. In order to increase sales, the brand has been linked to campaigns and calendars featuring young, scantily clad Thai women – the 'Leo sexy girls'. The latest launch, however, drew protests and demonstrations from several organisations, who criticised the link being made between women, sex and alcohol.³

The latest commercials for Leo, which can be found for example on Youtube, make the link instead between tourists and young Thais, who find friendship through swimming, surfing and beer.⁴

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ThaiBev#The_Chang.2FCarlsberg_history> (6 March 2010).

² <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2005/0328/028a_print.html>

³ 'Controversy of the week: Bangkok's calendar girls', CNN Go <www.cnn.go.com> (2009).

⁴ Youtube <www.youtube.com/watch?v=SezWyqGCsUg>.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With a desire among people in the West to travel ever farther afield – and with greater economic opportunity for more people in the South to travel within their own regions – tourism to Asia, Africa and Latin America is on the increase. Tourism can serve as a catalyst for development in many ways, but for this to happen, greater attention to the environment and to sustainable development will be required. It is a question not only of climate taxes on aviation, but also of our attitude and behaviour in the places we visit.

Many of the countries that are currently growing as tourist destinations have serious alcohol-related problems among their own citizens. Total consumption may still be lower than in Europe, but it is high within those groups who do drink, and has a severe impact in countries where legislation, preventive measures, social safety nets and rehabilitation are wholly or partly lacking.

In this report, we have raised the issue of how the growth in tourism to these countries affects local consumption. That this is the case is clear, but the extent of the impact is harder to determine. There is a shortage of adequate research in the area at present. An even greater problem is that many countries lack reliable statistics on alcohol consumption, which makes it difficult to measure how much and in which groups consumption is increasing. A third difficulty lies in differentiating tourism from other factors, such as globalisation and economic growth.

This said, it remains clear that tourism is a significant influence on consumption patterns and in the spread of a new alcohol culture. Most travellers tend to drink more on holiday. Far away from home, they see the trip, like the alcohol, as a way to relax and take a break from everyday life. Several tourist resorts even market themselves with the help of alcohol – from the wine in South Africa's vineyards to local cocktails such as piña colada in Puerto Rico or Siam Sunrays, newly created to help boost tourism in Thailand.

Increased drinking during holidays, together with tourists' tendency to push the boundaries while abroad, increases the risk of accidents, drug abuse and unprotected sex. And the consequences of tourism do not end as soon as holiday-makers take their seat on the flight home. Tourists' behaviour leaves a clear impression on the places they visit. Their demand for goods and services in

holiday destinations influences the local culture and leads to increased supply and accessibility for the local population as well.

With the growth of tourism, the number of outlets selling alcohol has increased significantly in tourist resorts. New products have been introduced and intense competition between bars has led to a fall in prices. Easier physical accessibility has contributed to an increase in consumption among the local population. Greater social acceptability of alcohol has had an equally large impact in terms of young people's drinking habits, women's alcohol consumption and the targeting of a broader clientele. This creates legitimacy for a new alcohol culture. One example is the Muslim population on the island of Phuket in Thailand, where consumption has traditionally been very low, but has recently increased among men working in tourism-related occupations. This in turn has led to an increase in alcohol-related problems such as violence in the home.

The tourism and alcohol industries are linked in several ways. Cheap and easily accessible alcohol is a means of attracting tourists. Demand from tourists provides the opportunity to stock a wider range of products and to launch new products. Both industries thus have a common interest in alcohol policies that do not adversely affect tourism. Both industries' connections at the political level counter public health concerns with economic arguments, and may therefore obstruct the development of alcohol policy.

Recommendations

Government/civil society:

- Support for the development of alcohol policies in countries that currently lack effective legislation in this area. Important aspects include age limits and regulation of the marketing and sale of alcohol.

Tour operators:

- Training on the local situation as regards alcohol and any related national legislation for Swedish personnel in tourist destinations.
- Training on alcohol management for Swedish and local personnel in hotel restaurants and bars.
- A wide range of alcohol-free alternatives in hotels and during excursions and other events.

Tour operators/travellers:

- Information on the local situation regarding alcohol and on travellers' own responsibilities to be provided by tour operators.

General:

- Training of politicians, tourism planners and decision makers on how the local health situation is affected by tourism and other travel.
- Further studies on the relationship between tourists'/travellers' drinking and local alcohol consumption to be carried out.

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