



## Research Article

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# Scientific Research Production on Sex Tourism: A Bibliometric Analysis (1988-2023)

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## Abstract

*Sex tourism is a classification of tourism that focuses on obtaining pleasure in exchange for money. For this research, a total of 212 papers on the topic of sex tourism were selected from the Scopus database, and a bibliometric analysis was conducted. The analysis concluded that this behaviour can be confused with prostitution and child sexual abuse. Therefore, to protect the integrity of citizens and to avoid public health problems arising from an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, it is recommended that the sex tourism industry be regulated and/or prohibited.*

**Keywords:** Bibliometrics; gender; law; protection; trade

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is defined as moving from one place to another and engaging in at least one overnight stay. There are various persons who are linked to tourism activities, such as those working for businesses that offer accommodations, food and beverage, entertainment, and others who provide alternative

services to tourists.

Sex tourism is a diversified classification of tourism. Although the factors that lead certain tourist to this choice are not fully understood, the goal of it is to engage in sexual activity. In some places, such as Prague, Czech Republic, sex work is not criminalized and is seen as an opportunity to improve quality of life (Bar-Johnson & Weiss, 2015; Carr, 2016; Ying et al., 2022).

In this context, the sexual and affective relationships that occur between tourists and the local population are not regulated by government authorities. These circumstances lead to public health issues as health sector law is not applied to the activities conducted by sex workers. Sexual contact in sanitary or unsanitary conditions can lead to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). STDs arise from having unprotected sex with clients (Brooks et al., 2019; Hillis et al., 2022; Patterson et al., 2006; Robertson et al., 2014; Valcuende Del Rio & Feria, 2014).

In some countries, such as South Korea, sex tourism is sanctioned as illegal, yet it is in high demand as a luxury commodity for the local population. In other cases, it is associated with sex trafficking that occurs parallel to mega sporting events. In the same vein, there is evidence linking sex tourism to strippers and those who identify as transgender workers (Jeong & Lee, 2023; Matheson & Finkel, 2013; Ocha & Earth, 2013; Ryan & Martin, 2001; Yan et al., 2018).

Thus, sex tourism is closely connected to sex trafficking and to the tourism industry in general (Brooks & Heaslip, 2019). In this context, there is the question of whether aspects of sex tourism should be regulated to avoid the criminalization of people who engage in it. This question is fundamental to sanctioning paedophilic behaviours occurring under child sex tourism (Dombert et al., 2015; Harkonen, 2016).

It is necessary to differentiate between sex tourism and romantic tourism. Some authors argue that the difference is perception as the former focuses on male workers and the latter on female workers. However, there is no consensus on this point. In addition, dependency theory has been used to try to explain the behaviour of sex tourists, aiming to analyse the movement of affluent people to developing countries for purposes of consuming sex (Chang & Chen, 2013; Li et al., 2021; Spencer & Bean, 2017; Guilamo-Ramos, et al., 2014; Pritchard, & Morgan, 2000).

Based on the review of the literature, it is possible to add the following characteristics related to sex tourism: (a) it is not a form of deviance, and the tourist's behaviour must be socially acceptable (Ryan & Kinder, 1996); (b) it focuses on the behaviour and interaction between the tourist and the locals (Berdychevsky et al., 2013); (c) it is considered a relational economy because it is founded on the connection between masculinity and the value product (Rivers-Moore, 2012); d) beauty and exoticism have an influence on sex consumption (Rivers-Moore, 2013); e) in many places, sex tourism is considered an illegal activity, but it is acknowledged to be in high demand (Jeong & Lee, 2023); and f) it is associated with sex trafficking and hospitality (Aston et al., 2022).

In this context, the following questions arise:

Q1. What are the most influential journals and authors on sex tourism?

Q2. What are the most frequently cited articles?

Q3. What are the most frequent words used in research on sex tourism?

## 2. Methodology

The Scopus database was selected for use because of its multidisciplinary nature. The information was collected on 22 April 2023.

The research objective of this study is to identify the scientific production of sex tourism in the period 1988-2023. The latter year was considered to provide the most up-to-date information.

The search strategy considered the title, abstract, and keywords related to the terms "sex tourism" or "sexual tourism". The Prisma protocol was used.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: i) limited to social sciences, ii) limited to articles, iii) limited to journals, and iv) limited to English.

The preliminary search resulted in 479 articles. Following data cleansing, the result included 212

articles.

For the data analysis, Excel and the software RStudio 4.1.0, the bibliometrix package, and the BiblioShiny interface were used.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Most Relevant Sources

Figure 1 shows that the journal *Sexualities* (ISSN:1363-4607E-ISSN:1461-7382) is the most influential publication on the topic of sex tourism, with 9 articles. Its origin is the United Kingdom, its H-index is 62, it is listed in quartile 1 of the Scopus database, established in 1998 and published by SAGE.

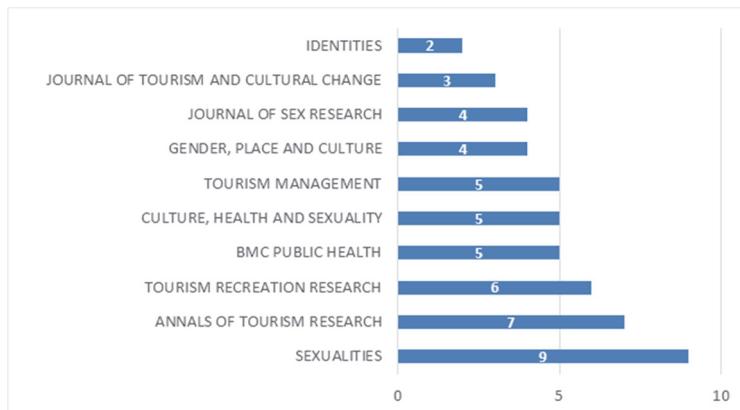


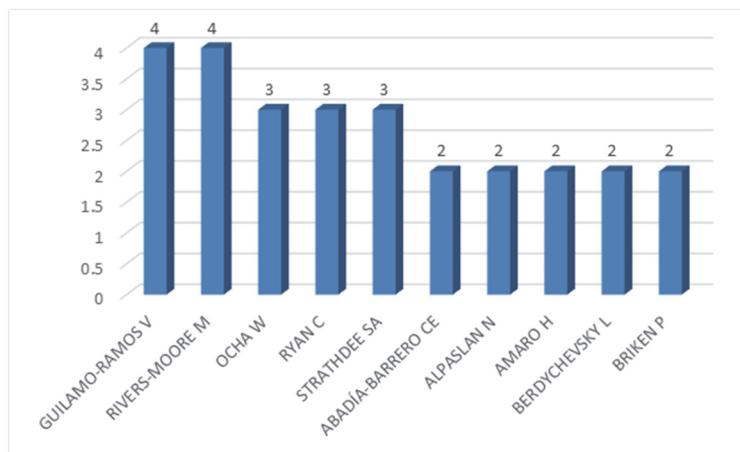
Figure 1. Most Relevant Sources

In the same vein, the journal *Annals of Tourism Research* (ISSN:0160-7383) is the second most influential journal on the topic of sex tourism, with 7 articles. Its origin is the United Kingdom, its H-index is 187, it is catalogued in quartile 1 of the Scopus database, established in 1973 and published by Elsevier.

Third is *Tourism Recreation Research* (ISSN:0250-8281E-ISSN:2320-0308), which registers 6 articles. Its origin is the United Kingdom, its H-index is 50, it is catalogued in quartile 1 of the Scopus database, established in 1976, and published by Taylor & Francis.

#### 3.2 Most Relevant Authors

Figure 2 lists the most influential authors who have published research on sex tourism.



**Figure 2.** Most Relevant Authors

Guilano-Ramos, V. is one of the most influential authors on the topic of sex tourism. He coauthored the article entitled "Illicit drug use and HIV risk in the Dominican Republic: Tourism areas create drug use opportunities". Of her scientific output, this article has the highest number of citations and was written in 2014. It was published in the journal *Global Public Health*, which is ranked in quartile 1 of Scopus. The central theme of the article is sex tourism and its relationship to HIV and drugs.

Similarly, Rivers-Moore, M. is a highly influential author on the topic of sex tourism. He coauthored the article "Almighty gringos: Masculinity and value in sex tourism". Of his scientific output, this article has the highest number of citations and was written in 2012. It was published in the journal *Sexualities*, which is ranked in quartile 1 of Scopus. The central theme of the article, sex tourism, is linked to travel opportunities and technological innovations.

Ocha, W. is also an influential author on the topic of sex tourism. He coauthored the article entitled "Identity diversification among transgender sex workers in Thailand's sex tourism industry". Of the research she has generated, this is the article with the highest number of citations and was written in 2013. It was published in the journal *Sexualities*, which is ranked in quartile 1 of Scopus. The central theme of the article is that sex tourism promotes new identities among sex workers linked to transgender identity.

Ryan, C., is also on the list of the most influential authors on the topic of sex tourism. He coauthored an article "Sex, tourism and sex tourism: fulfilling similar needs?" Of his scientific output, this is the article with the highest number of citations and was written in 1996. It was published in the journal *Tourism Management*, which is ranked in quartile 1 of Scopus. The central theme of the article is that sex tourism requires the observance of norms of social behaviour.

Finally, Strathdee, S.A. is an influential authors on sex tourism. He coauthored the article "Comparison of Sexual and Drug Use Behaviours Between Female Sex Workers in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico". Of her scientific research, this article has the highest number of citations and was written in 2009. It was published in the journal *Substance Use & Misuse*, which is ranked in quartile 2 of Scopus. The article examines how sex work is characterized and how sex tourism is culturally sanctioned.

### 3.3 Most Cited Articles

Figure 3 the most cited article is "Privileging the male gaze: Gendered tourism landscapes", which was published in the *Annals of Tourism Research* and focused on establishing that sex tourism represents

the analysis of the relationship between gender, employment, and the promotion of tourism. However, there are authors who believe new sexual experiences are the tipping point for choice. The choice that countries be marketed as sex tourism destinations is a consequence of supply and demand (Bandyopadhyay, 2013). Given this, sex tourism develops parallel to general tourism, and its practise is spread with restrictions and legal consequences of such behaviour.

The second most cited article is "Female tourists and beach boys: Romance or Sex Tourism? ", which was published in the journal *Annals of Tourism Research* and focused on determining that sex tourism is about the exchange of money for sex. It also includes the satisfaction of the basic physiological and psychological needs of human beings (Cansel et al., 2009).

The third most cited article is entitled "Dollars Are a Girl's Best Friend? Female Tourists' Sexual Behaviour in the Caribbean", which was published in the journal *Sociology* and focused on the need to differentiate sex tourism from romantic tourism. There are elements to account for in sex tourism, such as the diversity of sexual-economic exchanges and that they take place in economically underdeveloped countries. Importantly, in the absence of government control, sex tourism tends to increase HIV transmission (Mao et al., 2018).

The fourth most cited article, "Sex tourism", was published in the journal *Annals of Tourism Research* and focused on identifying criteria for defining sex tourism. For example, the length of time, the sexual encounter, and the characteristics of the tourist could be considered. Notably, it was developed parallel to sports mega-events, with children as the focus of attention (Castilho et al., 2018).

The fifth most cited article, "Bodies, Borders, and Sex Tourism in a Globalized World: A Tale of Two Cities-Amsterdam and Havana", was published in the journal *Social Problems* and focused on ways sex tourism increases commercial sex, with the focus on the tourist. Notably, this occurs to the detriment of the health and well-being of sex workers. It is necessary to understand that this activity is often related to improving quality of life.

The sixth most cited article, "Sex, tourism and sex tourism: fulfilling similar needs? ", was published in the journal *Tourism Management* and focused on establishing that tourism is a liminal behaviour. Tourism activities, such as prostitution, are fulfilled through companionship and recreation to realize fantasies. As such, it is important to avoid an increase in sexually transmitted diseases. The sixth most cited article, "Sex, tourism and sex tourism: fulfilling similar needs? ", was published in the journal *Tourism Management* and focused on establishing that tourism is a liminal behaviour. Tourism activities such as prostitution are fulfilled through companionship and recreation to realize fantasies. As such, it is important to address the issue of sexually transmitted diseases.

The seventh most cited article, "How Common is Men's Self-Reported Sexual Interest in Prepubescent Children? ", was published in *The Journal of Sex Research* and focused on sex tourism involving men who are interested in children. This was associated with the need for therapeutic help. Child sex tourism affects more than 2 million children a year; therefore, all countries should develop strategies aimed at preventing child sexual abuse. To achieve this, some legislation should be enacted to punish the sex offender who comes to a country seeking a sex tourism destination involving children (Johnson, 2011; Koops et al., 2017; Kosuri & Jeglic, 2017; Newman et al., 2011; Winkler, 2006; Cohen, 1988; Herold, et al., 2001; Leheny, 1995; Oppermann, 1999; Sánchez, 2001; Wonders, & Michalowski, 2014; Yeoman, & Mars, 2012).

The eighth most cited article is "Tourism and AIDS in Thailand", which was published in the *Annals of Tourism Research* and focused on establishing that sex tourism represents a public health problem because it is projected to increase the number of AIDS cases, thereby increasing cases of mortality. Thus, it is necessary to promote sex education among tourism workers and tourists.

The ninth most cited article is "Robots, men and sex tourism", which was published in the journal *Futures* and focused on determining that sex tourism in 2050 might involve the participation of androids to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. This futuristic idea recognizes the continuity of sex tourism, adapted to new circumstances.

The tenth most cited article is "A political economy of Asian sex tourism", which was published

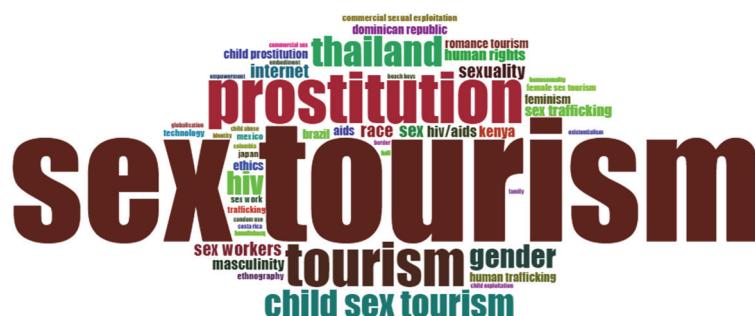
in the journal *Annals of Tourism Research* and focused on establishing that sex tourism is an economic and political phenomenon. There is less sex tourism in countries where there are greater protections for women. Sex tourism is promoted through the advertising of sex destinations.

**Table 1:** Most Cited Articles

N	Title	DOI	Year	Total Citations
1	Privileging the male ga, Ze: Gendered tourism landscapes.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00113-9">https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00113-9</a>	2000	295
2	Female tourists and beach boys: Romance or Sex Tourism?	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00003-2">https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00003-2</a>	2001	177
3	Dollars Are a Girl's Best Friend? Female Tourists' Sexual Behaviour in the Caribbean.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038038501000384">https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038038501000384</a>	2001	166
4	Sex tourism.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00081-4">https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00081-4</a>	1999	156
5	Bodies, Borders, and Sex Tourism in a Globalized World: A Tale of Two Cities—Amsterdam and Havana.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2001.48.4.545">10.1525/sp.2001.48.4.545</a>	2001	136
6	Sex, tourism and sex tourism: fulfilling similar needs?	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(96)00068-4">10.1016/S0261-5177(96)00068-4</a>	1996	133
7	How Common is Men's Self-Reported Sexual Interest in Prepubescent Children?	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2015.1020108">10.1080/00224499.2015.1020108</a>	2016	126
8	Tourism and AIDS in Thailand.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(88)90044-8">https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(88)90044-8</a>	1988	101
9	Robots, men and sex tourism.	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2011.11.004">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2011.11.004</a>	2012	97
10	A political economy of Asian sex tourism	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(94)00082-4">https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(94)00082-4</a>	1995	96

### 3.4 Most Frequent Words

Figure 4 shows that the words that stand out are sex tourism (53 times), prostitution (22 times), tourism (19 times), child sex tourism (12 times), gender (10 times), internet (6 times), race (6 times), and sex (6 times).



**Figure 3.** WordCloud

Figure 5 shows the conjugation of the terms, for example, child sex tourism and child tourism. Similarly, romance tourism and female sex tourism. Likewise, the cluster that stands out the most is the conjugation of the terms sex tourism, race, gender, sexuality, identity, technology, commercial sexual exploitation, masculinity, ethics, and sex workers.



**Figure 5.** Co-occurrence Network

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of this study was to identify the scientific production of sex tourism literature in the period 1988-2023. The Scopus database is considered valid, given that a multidisciplinary database of universal recognition in the academic world was selected.

About the most influential journals and authors on the subject of sex tourism

From the review of scientific production, the most influential journals on the topic of sex tourism are *Sexualities*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, and *Tourism Recreation*. All three journals have high impact and are ranked in Scopus quartile 1. This attests to the importance of the research topic and the willingness of the editors to publish the articles.

The three most influential authors on the research topic are Guilano-Ramos, Rivers-Moore and Ochoa. They recognized the importance of the interaction of sex tourism from different perspectives: health (HIV), technological innovation (travel), and new identities (transgender). This proves the versatility of the research topic and highlights the need to regulate the behaviour of tourists.

All three of the most cited articles on the topic of sex tourism aimed at defining the term. Each one is from the perspective of gender, sexual experiences, interaction with money, and the difference between romantic tourism and sex tourism. Given this, there is an assumption that sex tourism is mostly carried out by men, who in search of new sexual experiences seek pleasure with locals in exchange for money. There is a fine line between the conception of sex tourism and prostitution or sexual abuse.

The most frequent words used in the research on sex tourism.

The most frequently used terms reinforce what is written in the previous paragraph. However, there is an additional element to consider in them as the trend related to child sex tourism is revealed. When someone commits sexual abuse of minors, they may develop paedophilia, a condition that should not be tolerated by any legislation.

#### 5. Conclusions

We analysed 212 documents corresponding to the scientific research production on sex tourism published in high-impact journals in the Scopus database in the period 1988 to 22 April 2023.

The definition of sex tourism is strongly associated with sexual abuse or prostitution. Thus, the behaviour of tourists must be regulated. Aside from preventing other forms of prostitution, fostering integrity and preventing the transmission of sexual diseases from becoming a public health issue should be paramount in regulating sex tourism. Regulations should prevent tourists from seeking a service that involves minors or other persons against their will.

Scientific production linked to child sex tourism was reviewed. The consensus in the research holds that sex tourism should be regulated or prohibited in the legislation of all countries. If this is not done, any paedophile could act indiscriminately, affecting the integrity and sexual indemnity of children and adolescents. For this reason, further investigation in response to what has been described should occur.

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