Relationships between female tourists and male locals in Cuzco/Peru: Implications for travel health education

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Summary

Background: Health concerns regarding casual sexual encounters during travel have been recognized for some time. The perception that female travellers’ motivations are more romantic rather than sexual when entering a relationship with local men may exclude them from receiving appropriate travel health advice. This may pose even greater health risks, not only to themselves but also to their local partners.

Method: This paper presents 11 Western female tourists’ perceptions of their relationships with local men in Cuzco/Peru, based on in-depth interviews, observations, and informal discussions.

Results: Relationships with local men were often triggered by their physical appearance. Other themes identified were: methods and location of first contact, benefits for the local men, safe sex/condom use, and travel health advice received.

Conclusions: The findings support calls for more emphasis on sexual health in travel health education. Three aspects should be included: 1) an awareness that unfamiliar environment can cause ‘out of character’ behaviour, 2) an emphasis on not only to use but to not stop using condoms, and 3) the need to acquire negotiation skills.

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Introduction

The link between travel and sex or romance is not new. The Grand Tour in the 18th and 19th centuries provided young unrefined Englishmen with the education and sophistication only available on the Continent. Apart from the required exposure to some culture, sexual needs were not only catered for, but itineraries were based on recommendations of sexual opportunities, predominantly in France and Italy. There can be little doubt that sex has always been linked to human movement. Nor is the concept related exclusively to men. ‘By the end of the nineteenth century, there were more women tourists than men in southern Europe’, 1(p.62). Lively independent women were keenly attracted to local men so different from what was available at home. Being (temporarily) liberated from stifling social

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constraints had thousands of women escape to greener pastures — what some called ‘situational disinhibition’, 2 or ‘hedonistic zone of exception’. 3 Only over the last few decades has this topic entered increased academic debate. The fields of Social Sciences, and Tourism discuss topics on gender in tourism. 4,5

The term ‘sex tourism’ has long been associated with Western men travelling to developing countries, predominately in Asia, for the express purpose of having sex with local women, children and men. This happens within the frame of prostitution, defined as ‘granting sexual access relatively indiscriminately in return for money or goods’ 6 (p.108). However, real life is not that clear-cut, and attempts to define sex tourism have so far failed because a variety of variables, such as the question of intent before travel, duration of service, emotional involvement, in-kind payment, and other ambiguities, force a constant extension of the definition with the danger of making it meaningless. A framework of dimensions of sex tourism 7 illustrates the breadth of the concept, and Günther 8 explored a sex tourists’ perception of himself which, not surprisingly, did not coincide with the classic view of that type of pursuit.

Considering the large and increasing number of women travelling alone or in groups for leisure or business, and revisiting the crucial elements of sex tourism, i.e. sexual encounters with locals for payment (of any kind), female sex tourism has been identified. 9 For some reason, women travellers’sexual encounters with locals were given a veil of romance, implying that women would not display the same predatory characteristics as men but their contacts were based on emotional involvement, more genuine and, hence, permitting subsequent physical contact as part of the logical sequence of human ‘sexual scripting’. 10 Perhaps to distinguish between the ‘bad’ sex tourism of men and the ‘good’ emotional encounters of women, the term ‘romance tourism’ 11 appeared.

The expectation of sex and romance while on holidays has been observed in single women travelling to destinations that are known to offer ample opportunities, such as Indonesia, 12 Jamaica, 6,11 the Dominican Republic, 13,14 Barbados, 15 Costa Rica, 16 The Gambia, 17,18 Ecuador, 19 and, more recently, Egypt. 20 Noteworthy is that except for Ecuador, all study locations are beach destinations advertising sun, hot sultry nights, happy music, exotic friendly people, and skimpy clothes that allow the display of dark muscular bodies. The strong Caribbean bias may be due to the researchers’ convenience of access or an indication that, for most women, this is, indeed, the preferred location for sexual pursuits. This also disagrees with the notion of romance tourism, considering the myth of the Caribbean black male hypersexuality attracting droves of female women in search of the ‘big bamboo’ (presumably like demure Asian women attract Western men). 6 However, the degradation and exploitation, as is often suggested in the case of Asian women, does not seem to apply to the Caribbean where the arrangement seems mutually beneficial to both partners, 6 a notion one can agree with if an essentialist model of gender and sexuality 21 is used. Because Otavalenos in Ecuador are rather well off, their case may be less a matter of exploitation rather than ‘mutual fascination’. 19 Yet, the gender role reversal (women are in charge) and the underlying neo-colonialistic nuances of economic power imbalance are hard to ignore.

In addition, and particularly with the advent of HIV/AIDS, ‘travel and sex’ has become an important health issue 22 and relates to the appropriate precautions to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in such transient situations. Safe sex practices during travel are far from ideal. The use of condoms has generally been found to be disappointing. 23–26 Of particular concern is women’s lack of protection overseas. 27 Reasons for not using condoms are not well understood but are often said to constitute ‘situational constraints’, 28 such as unavailability when needed, or the spontaneous nature of the situation.

Apart from the much-studied destinations above, there are other locations that have acquired a reputation among travellers through word-of-mouth recommendations. One such place is the city of Cuzco in the Peruvian Andes. Cuzco is on the itinerary of most of the over one million international tourist arrivals to the area, 29 making it the number one meeting place in the region. A previous survey on tourists’ sexual behaviour in Cuzco 30 highlighted the need to explore the topic in this particular geographical area more closely. The prevalence of HTLV-1 in the wider area of Cuzco 31 adds some urgency to further research. There was no correlation between HTLV-1 infection and sex with foreigners a decade ago, but this may change and become a travel health problem in the future. At the same time, there is a health risk for the local partners and their respective local sexual partners when, for financial, cultural or religious reasons, medical care are not sought or, worse, a potentially fatal infection is contracted.

If STIs are a possibility at home with all the information and means of protection available, it is fair to assume that when away from constraints at home and in a ‘liminoid period’, 32 in holiday mood, in an exotic location, and attracted by ‘different’ men, the possibility of unplanned and unsafe sex is even greater. It was important to not only consider sexual behaviour in terms of statistical frequencies but also to better understand the motivation, views and experiences of the individuals involved and also of their assessment of others in this position. This paper concentrates exclusively on the female tourists of a study exploring male and female tourists’, and male and female locals’ perceptions and reasoning regarding relationships between them, published earlier in this journal, 33 so that this knowledge may be incorporated in more appropriate health education strategies.

Method

For this qualitative study, unstructured interviews were conducted in English and German with 11 female tourists, aged 19–33, from US, UK, Germany, Holland, Switzerland and Australia. The conversations took between 30 min and two hours depending on the tourists’ interest and availability. The recordings were transcribed on location. As most people moved on rapidly, intra-interview validation ensured the correct representation of participants’ information. Thematic analysis 34 of the transcripts allowed the identification of themes and topics. In addition, participant and non-participant observations, and informal discussions with others, provided supporting evidence for the study context. Posters with a contact number announced the
study in bars, hotels, discos, restaurants, language school, with the owners’ permission. Some participants were recruited in popular ‘hang-outs’. Ethical approval was granted by Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, Lima/Peru and James Cook University, Townsville/Australia.

Results

The results are summarized and presented under common themes which, where appropriate, are illustrated by verbatim quotes. The participants’ names have been changed to protect their identity. At times, links are made to findings relating to the local participants of the overall study.35 The purpose in this paper was to not press the information into existing conceptual/theoretical frameworks, but comparisons with other studies will be made at times, and some theoretical aspects will be touched upon so that readers may explore such connections further.

Types of relationship and reasons for commencement

Overall, there were two distinct reasons for starting a relationship. One concerned more the long-term tourist, and people met similarly to home, by crossing each other’s paths. These relationships often had a more romantic basis and, in most cases, an emotional involvement by both partners. Also, possibilities of a long-term relationship beyond the tourists’ stay were explored. Others, perhaps more realistically, appreciated that with their departure, the relationship would come to an end (Helen: ‘‘we had something sweet for a little while’’). Particularly for those on extended trips, being tired and worn out after a few months (Helen: ‘‘it gets lonely and hard on the road [laughs]’’), being in one place for a while, feeling vulnerable and craving rest, companionship, physical contact on the one side, and the ready availability of partners on the other hand, made a time-limited relationship attractive. In one case, a chance meeting with a person Helen had met in another city, made her arrival in unfamiliar Cuzco more enjoyable, and much time was spent with walks, shared meals, and movies before a sexual relationship commenced — perhaps more a search for intimacy rather than sex. Unfortunately, cultural misunderstandings and different expectations could terminate relationships.

Cornelia: ‘‘They don’t fall in love, it’s a matter of the moment or sex. When she is gone, there will be the next.’’

The second reason, more for short-term tourists, often travelling in groups, were sexual opportunities.

Alison (travelling with two girlfriends): ‘‘Um, really, we just want some fun. I am here for the sex thing. Cuzco is good for getting locals for sex. Hm, yes, I was told there is plenty of sex available in Cuzco.’’

Emotional vulnerability and relationship break-ups at home can trigger sexual openness.36 Mia had broken up with her boyfriend before the trip they were supposed to take together. After a while she felt ‘‘sex-starved’’ and found a solution.

‘‘Actually, no, I don’t think now that I like him that much, I think it was the initial attraction, no sex for a while, that kind of thing. I saw now someone else who seems different. See how it goes with him’’, and she planned to have more local sex while on location. Some women took the initiative and pursued the men boldly.

Alison: ‘‘We told them in the plaza that anything was possible’’.

Susan (here with three others): ‘‘…today in Machu Picchu I saw this guide […] so I went over to him, he was with a group of oldies and I’d say he was bored, so I went and talked to him […] I sure like to try out what he can do’’. [After the interview she was off to meet him].

Elke: ‘‘Tourists are here on holidays and want fun. It works both ways, it is so easy to get into bed on the first night.’’

Such initiative had been commented negatively by some local study participants who were amazed and bewildered by the tourists’ behaviour.35

When a relationship included an emotional element, a decision had to be made eventually if travel plans needed to be modified. Two women were adamant that they would leave as planned [yet, they did stay longer in the end]. Another felt that her partner would not fit in with her family and friends at home but that she could live in Peru if necessary. Others were to leave as planned but had discussed their partners’ visits to their home countries and also return visits to Peru. These women also appreciated the emotional suffering of their partners upon the tourists’ departure. Sue-Ellen found Peruvians very affectionate, and their potential suffering when the girls left prevented her from entering a relationship. Cornelia and Melanie found it very difficult to see their partners sad, and Liz had to deal with her boyfriend’s growing coldness towards her as he steeled himself for yet another girlfriend leaving. Women who were more interested in the sexual experience did not share these sentiments.

Susan: ‘‘I guess these guys know plenty of tourists, so for them it is probably fun, too, but nothing else.’’

Alison: ‘‘I am sure the guys here see it the same way. They must know that we are only here for, what, a few days, and we leave. Sure, they do it for fun, too’’. Asked: ‘‘So, would you say it is only a game for you while you are on holidays?’’ Alison: ‘‘Um, yes, I suppose. Well, these guys must know this.’’

Female travellers’ approach to sexual encounters has been categorised as first time romantic tourist, first time sex tourist, romantic returnees, committed sex tourist, and adventure sex tourist14; situational, repeat situational, and one-nighter (usually British who come explicitly for sex),15 or first timers/neophytes, situational sex tourists (if the opportunity arises), veterans (explicitly for sex), and returnees (returning to the same man).6 The women in this study were all either first timers or situationers. Unlike the classic ‘‘sex destinations’, and also based on my familiarity with Cuzco, women do not seem to travel all the way to Peru with the express purpose of sex but, once there,
sexual opportunities are sampled by a considerable number.

**Attraction**

Without exception, the women were very clear about what attracted them to local men: the physical appearance, namely the long black hair, and the facial features. These looks easily counterbalanced a comparatively short stature, and a lower socio-economic and educational status. The shiny muscles and smooth movements employed in the Caribbean were not required here.

Cornelia: "Black hair, dark skin, beautiful, different from home, I find him very beautiful".

Liz: "Physically very, very, very attractive, some have dreadlocks... but also the lifestyle of the artisan boys..."

Alison: "They are hot, so cuddly, cute... they sure look different, somehow wild, the ones with long hair are the best, some have dreadlocks."

Melanie: "Very exciting, the different look, the exciting lifestyle as a musician".

Susan: "He had this wild look [...] like some savage prince."

Helen: "The long hair, the Inca look, so different from our men, the whole Pachamama thing, they may speak Quechua, give you a Quechua name, some play the flute, chew coca leaves..."

'The whole Pachamama thing', as Helen called it, included a mostly staged spirituality that presented an enticing change from the Western lifestyle to which the women were accustomed. Additional bonuses were 'new age' (or old hippy?) behaviours, such as giving massages, and displaying a listening and caring side (again different to many Western men). If the locals spoke English at all, it was with an interesting accent, but even just in Spanish, things sounded so much better. Looking and being different to Western men was an enormous drawcard, and so was not being tied down to a regular job (many were artisans and/or musicians), allowing local men to match their availability with the tourists' flexible time. The resulting constant attention was allowing local men to match their availability with the tourists' flexible time. The resulting constant attention was also probably less 'clingy' and demanding.

Elke: "...blond, white, nice blue eyes." She had been to a meeting where she noticed that all the Peruvians present had come with a blond woman as their partner. "They like the sexual freedom, tourists are more 'loose' and experienced".

Helen: "Gringas are different, especially the blondes,...they don’t even have to be pretty."

With both sides possessing valuable qualities, their encounters were assessed as of mutual benefit. It was not lost on men from other parts of Peru that a simple change in hair length and a move to Cuzco could open up enormous opportunities, a mimicry women were either not aware of or did not mind.

**First contact**

Most contacts start in 'gringotecas' (popular discos along the Plaza de Armas), bars and pubs, even more so for those who are interested in a sexual encounter. There, the sequence of the progress was reported as either 'alcohol → kissing/making out → sex', or 'alcohol → dancing → kissing → sex'. The link between alcohol and sex (safe or unsafe) has been discussed by some as an almost causal relationship. Others countered that alcohol is part of the social setting (here the disco) and, while it may lower inhibitions and impair judgement, it does not automatically lead to poor decisions. In Cuzco, most discos offer a free first drink and, if timed carefully, much can be consumed cruising from one establishment to the next. In this study, women pointed out that "alcohol definitely helped" (Alison) in proceeding faster than perhaps anticipated and planned.

Susan: "We had some Coke and rum in a plastic bottle with us, so we did that [...] , and then things happened very quickly, and we had sex."

Kirsty: "It was a bit awkward, unless we were drunk [laughs]."

The couples then either went to the tourists’ hotel where staff were seen as being accustomed to that though some women felt embarrassed, to another hotel where they were not known, or to the man’s room.

Alison: "So, we went to one of these discos in the plaza, Mama something, with them and, well, each of us took one guy and we went drinking and dancing, and then it got really close, and the kissing and all this started. So, we stayed a while and then [one friend] left with her guy, I think they went to his place, [other friend] went to our room with hers in the hotel, and I went to some house in the centre where, I think it was with his cousin, he stayed in his house. Things got pretty hot quickly and, well, you can guess."
In some locals’ rooms, numerous photos of ‘gringas’ on the wall clarified the basis of the encounter (Helen: “I am sure he had tons and tons of women”). Helen stayed with two men for a number of days each and had negotiated to not have sex for the first nights but just have it cosy in the bitter cold Cuzco nights. Rightly or wrongly, she felt completely in control, as did other women. Retrospectively, it is not clear how safe they really were. On the other hand, men who had previous gringa girlfriends may have been used to the way in which foreign women operated. Yet others reported that their partners, under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, were hard to control. This does not seem surprising. Sleeping in the same bed with a relatively unknown man may send signals that are very clear in the man’s perception of a hierarchy of sexual acts. When sexual encounters happened during tours or other tourism pursuits, tents or convenient ruins provided privacy.

On the other hand, women who stayed in Cuzco for longer did not have to hurry that much and could progress through the development of their relationship at a slower pace. They had the luxury of time to decide if and when they wanted to engage in sex. Some even managed to postpone sexual relationships for a few weeks, something very unusual for local men, which was met with admiration and respect for the woman.

Benefits for local men

It was interesting to hear the women’s general appraisal of what local men might get out of such a relationship. Yet, this did not seem to apply to their own situation, at least not for those in a romantic relationship. A main benefit was seen in the major boost to the men’s self-esteem and their standing among their peers. Being accepted by a white woman could not be surpassed. Others thought that free sex was a major bonus.

Elke: “Gringas have more sexual experience, so, the guys want to get that. Get experience with a gringa, then marry a local girl.”

Also, tourists had more disposable time than Peruvian women who worked long hours, and that increased chances of travelling together, going out at night, yet, without any obligations and knowing that the women would leave at some stage and they were free again. Material gains scored highly in terms of paid meals, drinks, accommodation, trips, money and other perks. Even when a local partner’s friend appeared unannounced, inclusion in the beneficial arrangement was expected. Also, ‘borrowed’ money was never expected to be claimed back. Helen was adamant that each paid half of everything, as she did not want to be a ‘sugar mama’. Others did not realise that they were part of the benefit system. Susan said that she would never give money or anything they asked for. When reminded that she and her three girlfriends had paid for all the meals of the four musicians they had met, she said: “Ah, oh, yes, well, I guess you could count that…”.

In many countries, today, it is not seen as extraordinary for a woman to foot the bill every now and then. In a relationship between a white woman and a man from a developing country, this may become a sensitive issue. Without doubt is there an economic power imbalance between the Western women and the local men, the reverse of what is traditionally and culturally acceptable, and this opportunity is taken up by a number of men. The famous Cuzco-specific phenomenon ‘bricherismo’ refers to this population. However, the women decide how they use their money, and if they choose to support somebody whose interest clearly lies in the material gain, one could argue that it is their decision. In the general local view, such women were judged as stupid and naive. They were laughed at for doing it, and the men were despised for taking up the offer. Perhaps surprisingly, most interviewees described the situation as if they were exclusively talking about somebody else, denying that they could be seen as doing the same. While they were critical of other women, their own case was perceived as different.

Locals’ strategy of approach

First and foremost, the participants acknowledged that the men’s physical appearance needed to be kept ‘in good working order’. However, not all local men keen on meeting a tourist had long hair and ‘the Inca look’, and had to employ other measures. Men interested in gringas usually approached at varying speeds [often surveying from benches on the Plaza de Armas]. Some watched for a while (Mia: “he was just sitting there but I noticed that he looked at me out of the sides of his eyes”, which presumably meant that she was checking him out as well), others did not waste time.

Elke: “Ah, where are you from? What are you doing here? How old are you? Do you have a boyfriend? Do you want to go out? Do you want…this, that, bla, bla…”

Helen: “What are you looking for? Restaurant, bar, movie, a man?”, and I was so shocked, he said ‘a man’, you know”.

Jill: “Where are you from? Do you have a boyfriend?”, so I started to say, yes, just to make them go away, ‘Is he here in Perú?’, and I say, no, he is in the States... ‘oh, well, as long as he is not here...’, yeah”.

Women who were emotionally involved with a local man did not report such behaviour as the start of their relationship. This may have been genuinely the case, or some embarrassment may have prevented them admitting that their partner belonged to the ‘hunter’ category. Some women did not appreciate the constant attention, and turned to behaving coldly and brusquely as a kind of defence mechanism, but they felt bad as they still wanted to be friendly and not appear arrogant.

Perception of local population

For some it was of no interest what the general population thought when they appeared in public with their boyfriends. Others, especially those who perceived their relationship as different, i.e. genuine, felt at times embarrassed that they might be seen as one of those women who ‘scored’ a local.
Helen: "...you know, I think sometimes we are seen like prostitutes or something..."

and she reported encountering hands on her bottom when walking through the streets. A young schoolboy had uttered to her once ‘tonight is sex night’ and she felt shocked, embarrassed and dirty. There was some feeling that Peruvian women might get jealous and feel threatened by gringas “because we look different and have more experience” (Elke). On the other hand, gringas went out with men whom the local women did not particularly value. Cross-cultural couples have been a common feature in Cuzco for a considerable time, and the reasons for them being together vary widely but, because of the reputation of some tourists, there might be a degree of uneasiness felt by some women.

Safe sex/Condom use

A number of women stated they would never have unsafe sex, and they also provided the condoms to ensure they were in control. The local partners of some also expected their use and had their own condoms. Helen, while not wanting to have sex on some occasions, gave in because her partner had produced a condom. Others had to supply condoms and insist on their use because the men did not like them, did not buy them or, when drunk or on drugs, did try to have sex without.

A problem arises when there is a perception of, or a desire to create, romance in the relationship, be it new or longer-term. For some reason, unprotected sex seems to be a declaration of an emotional basis of the partnership or, as has been suggested, condoms jeopardize potential romance. Feeling, wishing to feel, or wishing the partner to feel that this particular relationship consists of more than terms of sexual pleasure.

use were still confronted with a regular request to ‘do it following scenario. Some women who insisted on condom use were still confronted with a regular request to ‘do it now.’" Asked if it could be possible that she didn’t use a condom: “Um, I suppose...I don’t remember. Maybe that was a bad thing, come to think of it. Um, I just remember, we were real hot and things got fast...” She did have no regrets: “No, not really, I mean we are here on holidays, that’s part of it...you know how it is, things can get out of hand....”

Susan did not use a condom at all “well, I guess, it’s bad, but, no...”. She had one in her backpack but didn’t want to interrupt ‘great sex’. She had spotted another local whom she assessed as being a minor risk (“he is this deep, quiet type”) and deduced that he hadn’t had that many tourists yet. In a study in Ecuador,19 women seemed to assume that indigenous men by virtue of living in ‘time-less’ idyllic villages also lived in the pre-AIDS past. Mia had used a condom but then ran out and had sex without “I guess this was not smart”. Women had a much harder job to convince their local partners to use condoms. However, Kirsty thought there were still a lot of things to do if a condom was not at hand, like ‘fooling around’. Clearly, carrying a condom in itself does not automatically lead to its use. It seems travel health education has to improve considerably regarding the safe sex message.

Travel health advice

It is good practice to include safe sex messages in travel health advice (THA)20 for short-term as well as long-term travellers. Unfortunately, only one woman recalled it being mentioned, coinciding with a study21 where only one fifth of almost 6000 travellers to Cuzco had received THA on condom use. Alison thought it would be of no great value as “people do what they want anyway”. Liz remembered being warned to not hang around artisans as “they smoke marijuana and try to take your money”, yet, sex was not part of the advice. She believed, however, that the “do this – don’t do that” method does not work and reasoned.

“...When people are away... they are a different person... smoking marijuana because they are on holidays... taking cocaine because they are on holidays...they are doing things that are totally out of character for them because maybe they feel so restricted at home, and they finally feel so free that they go crazy.... [the safe sex message] got to be presented as a choice with reason.”

Local knowledge of STIs was judged as very limited, with some half-knowledge about AIDS, attributed to gay men, dirty people, and tourists who bring in diseases. There was also a very limited knowledge about contraception. This overall lack of knowledge is easily illustrated in the following scenario. Some women who insisted on condom use were still confronted with a regular request to “do it without just one time” to see what they were missing in terms of sexual pleasure.
Discussion

The purpose of presenting these findings was to explore if they suggest a modification of current, not very successful THA. The literature has deplored at length that sexual health education is not needed by travellers. Lists of recommendations have followed with some more specific advice of always mentioning alcohol and caution in the choice of sex partner or to alert to unexpected behaviour in conducive environments. The advice of condom use seems to refer more to men, women are not taught how to insist on their use, therefore, making gender-specific advice necessary. Although the safe sex message should be an integral part of any THA, at-risk persons may warrant additional counselling. However, research has not yet established a clear profile of such a person. Some argue that women who display other health risk behaviours also engage in unprotected travel sex, others believe that promiscuous people are more likely to carry condoms. Women who did not anticipate having sex were less likely to have condoms and were also more difficult to advise, and more at risk on location.16,46

There does not seem to be a lack of knowledge among Westerners. The principle of prevention is 'so simple and straightforward' that everybody should be able to protect oneself and the partner. The problem rather lies in the knowledge-behaviour transfer. A number of health behaviour models have been used to understand people’s motivation to follow, or not to follow, health advice. Three frameworks (Personality, Rational Man, and Cybernetic) could be used to understand and modify unsafe sex behaviour. More research needs to be conducted on that front. For the purpose of this study, the problem areas identified in the findings will be discussed briefly.

First, the exotic appeal of people, culture and location, together with the freedom from social constraints at home, and exposure to alcohol and drugs (either as a novice or perhaps more excessively than usual) can all combine to become a dangerous cocktail. Locals linked to the tourism and hospitality industry may then turn into rather desirable objects. It may not be possible to judge accurately every woman who seeks THA, but creating awareness of this ‘danger’ should be included in the advice as a matter of course. This may also address the problematic view that one’s own case is different and, therefore, not in need of reasonable caution. Second, the inclusion of condom use in THA is important. What must be mentioned is that the advice should not only be “Use condoms!” but “DON’T STOP using condoms!”.

assertiveness and physical strength, create a power inequality that requires negotiation to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, and to achieve an acceptable outcome. ‘Negotiation and joint decision-making’ was found to be one of seven major impediments to the knowledge-behaviour transfer. The context of pressure in heterosexual encounters needs to be considered more because behaviour based on knowledge is often not practised due to trust and commitment issues. Also, the ideology of male power in heterosexual masculinity makes safer sex practices rather unacceptable. Transferring these views to a society with a strong machismo perspective towards sexual encounters, the need for women travellers to learn negotiation skills seems logical. It was recommended to find the cause for sexual behaviour in the way partners communicate rather than in ‘psychological malfunctioning’. The need to emphasise negotiation in health education includes empowering women to negotiate sexual encounters to protect them not only from STIs but also other physical and emotional risks. It seems unrealistic at this stage to request that travellers are taught that skill in THA sessions but an awareness of the need to negotiate may enable women, be they the initiators of the relationship or not, to prepare a mind set that allows them to be in control when needed.

Following this discussion, THA should include 1) an awareness that being in an unfamiliar environment can cause unexpected ‘out of character’ reasoning and behaviour, 2) an emphasis on not only using but also stopping to use condoms, and 3) the need to be ready to negotiate the conditions under which sex occurs. This study has been a baseline project. Much more research should follow to paint a more complete picture of tourist-local relationships in the city. Such research should include larger and stratified samples with any possible range of individual-related variables, different tourist categories, planned vs. executed behaviour, barriers to condom use including cultural issues, and any theme touched on in this study. An added dimension is the advent of ‘new age’ tourism in the region that incorporates commercialised shamanism and drug use, and includes potential sexual connotations. Faithful to history, sex or romance will continue to be part of travel, but it is the privilege of modern responsible and educated travellers to put knowledge into practice and protect not only their own but their local partners’ well-being.

Conflict of interests

No competing interests to declare.

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