A New Perspective of Beach Boys and their Life Strategies in Tourism
− Case Study of Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka −

観光の場におけるビーチボーイとその生活戦略の新たな視点

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A New Perspective of Beach Boys
and their Life Strategies in Tourism
− Case Study of Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka −

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ABSTRACT

A New Perspective of Beach Boys and their Life Strategies in Tourism

Beach boys and their relations with female tourists have been discussed under the context of sex tourism and/or romance tourism, but existing studies within both sex tourism and romance tourism are problematic. Although some scholars have broadly discussed the concept of sex tourism, they have analyzed all the dimensions of sexual encounters under the context of sex tourism. Similarly, different arguments could be seen within/against the concept of romance tourism, such as only female tourists practice romance tourism, or both female and male tourists practice sex tourism. However, within studies of beach boys and their relationships with female tourists, there can be seen a lack in theoretical analyses that discuss international marriages and empowerment in detail. Thus, the objective of this study was to offer a new perspective toward beach boys analyzing their motivations and perceptions of the general public more broadly. Existing concepts of sex tourism and romance tourism were also rearranged in view of the hypothesis that beach boys’ and female tourists’ relationship is closer to the concept of romance tourism. Using methods including interviews, participant observation, and questionnaire, and by analyzing the findings in a broader view, this study ultimately offers a new perspective toward beach boys.

Findings revealed that beach boys’ motivations and their relationships with tourists have changed through inner and outer influences. Although former beach boys chose international marriages as a ‘survival strategy’ so as to overcome destitution, current beach boys focus on it as an ‘advancement strategy’ and their reason for choosing migration through international marriages is advancement of their life. Beach boys at present focus more on international marriages with young female tourists, and their main motivation is migrating overseas to work and become economically independent. Moreover, some former beach boys have started up businesses after returning to Hikkaduwa. Whether settled in the spouse’s country or in Hikkaduwa, most have improved their life by being empowered economically, socially and psychologically. From this, it could be identified that due to an increase of beach boys’ motivations and their empowerment, perceptions within general society have also changed from negative to favorable. Further, it became apparent that beach boys are neither child/male sex workers nor deviants, but young men similar to other men in general society attempting to gain a secure future. Hence, findings from this study claimed a new perspective of beach boys, and offered a new definition for ‘beach boy’. New findings of beach boys and their relationship with female tourists revealed that their relationship is rather similar to the concept of romance tourism.

Through offering a thorough sociological analysis on beach boys, this research fills a huge gap in tourism research in Sri Lanka. Although findings from the 1980s and 1990s are accepted as valid, beach boys’ motivations were found to have changed during the last decade. However, the concept of ‘beach boy’ remains varied worldwide according to local legal actions, cultural background of the country and the scope of the existing tourism/sex industry.
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