

What happens in Vegas: Consent matters in 'Sin City' and other sex tourism cities

March 24 2020, by Paul J. Maginn, Aleta Baldwin, Barbara Brents and Crystal A. Jackson



Credit: Paul Maginn, Author provided

Mention the phrase "sex tourism" in conversation and most people will cringe in disgust.

Why? People often picture old Western men visiting Asia for easy cheap sex with young boys and girls.

Stereotypes of sex tourism, as geographer Phil Hubbard [notes](#), "[obscure a more complex global economy of sex](#)". A [wide range of people](#), regardless of age, gender, relationship status, race/ethnicity, ability/disability and sexuality, engage in sexualised tourism and leisure activities. We do this whenever we watch porn at home or in a hotel room when on holiday; go on a "romantic/dirty weekend"; visit a strip club, brothel, swingers' club or bdsm dungeon when on a business trip; attend a gay/lesbian Mardi Gras parade; or go to a porn expo.

Consent matters in sexualised touristic spaces. It can't be taken for granted just because a space is hyper-sexualised. Workers are continuously negotiating consent. They can and should be able to withdraw consent at any time.

Most people who regularly engage in these practices recognise this. Venues are increasingly taking responsibility for this issue too, but there is still work to do.

Sexualised tourism takes many forms

As we note in our [recent research paper](#), the touristic gaze involves more than just looking. It includes "touching or being touched (physical or emotionally), buying, moving around and talking."

Different cities are [renowned for particular forms of sexualised leisure/tourism](#).

Sydney, for example, is globally recognised for its [Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras](#). The [Folsom Street Fair](#) in San Francisco is arguably the tourist capital for fetishists from around the U.S. and the world. Paris is the tourist city for romantic getaways. And in the UK the "[dirty weekend](#)" is synonymous with seaside towns such as Brighton and Blackpool.



in the hypersexualised atmosphere of events like the AVN Expo, consent matters more than ever. Credit: Paul Maginn, Author provided

Other UK cities such as London, Liverpool and Newcastle, plus European cities such as Amsterdam, Dublin and Prague, are popular destinations for [stag](#) or [hen](#) parties. These may include visits to strip clubs, brothels, sex shops and casual or hook-up sex.

Casual/hook-up sex in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Cancun and Cabo San Lucas is popular for US college students during "[Spring Break](#)". During "[Schoolies Week](#)" in Australia, high school graduates hit destinations such as the [Gold Coast](#), Byron Bay and Bali.

But if there is one city that personifies sexualised leisure tourism and hedonistic urbanism it is the US city of Las Vegas, Nevada—aka "Sin City." Nevada has "[built a tourist industry on turning deviance into](#)

[leisure](#)".

Pascale Nédélec [notes](#) that Las Vegas has aggressively marketed itself as a "free-wheeling, anything-goes kind of place." Its long-running advertising slogan is "[What Happens Here, Stays Here](#)".

Managing issues of consent

The [AVN Adult Entertainment Expo](#) represents one key node in a global network of adult-oriented entertainment expos that attract fans and industry personnel. Examples include [Exxxotica](#) (U.S.), [SEXPO](#) (Australia), [Taboo](#) (Canada) and [Expo Sexo y Erotismo](#) (Mexico).

Every January the sexualised touristic gaze within Las Vegas ramps up when the AVN Expo sets up camp at the [Hard Rock Hotel and Casino](#) (soon to be rebranded).

The largely LA-based adult entertainment industry relocates to Las Vegas for about a week, bringing with it performers, producers, directors and videographers. The porn community is in town for business-to-business events, to shoot porn, celebrate industry achievements at the AVN Awards—the so-called Porn Oscars—and meet and greet porn fans.

The meet-and-greet aspect is where the touristic gaze is particularly intense. In a [panel we organised](#) at the 2020 AVN Expo, performers [Jessica Drake](#) and [Katy Jayne](#) said they often felt an even more intense gaze when winding their way to their hotel rooms, restaurants and bars within Hard Rock's broader spaces.



AVN Code of Conduct Agreement

To ensure that everyone has a safe and enjoyable show, AVN has instituted a Code of Conduct. These rules not only apply to the AVN Show at the Hard Rock Hotel, but also to all offsite activities and parties.

If anyone engages in harassing behavior, AVN Media Network staff will take prompt action in any form they deem appropriate, which may include immediate expulsion from the AVN Show, as well as a ban from attending any future AVN Shows or events. Violations that are criminal will be reported to Hard Rock Hotel Security and the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police. Our policy applies to EVERYONE at the convention: exhibitors, fans (attendees), speakers, guests, professionals, press, staff, volunteers and security are all subject to our Code of Conduct. AVN Media Network, Inc., has a ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY for harassment of any kind.

By signing below, you agree that you will not engage in the following behavior or acts;

- Physical assault and/or battery
- Stalking
- Unwelcome physical contact
- Harassing photography (cameras are allowed, but *no means no* if an individual declines to pose)
- Photographs or recordings that violate privacy (e.g., upskirt shots, shooting in non-public spaces)
- Offensive verbal assaults, including but not limited to negative comments based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity/presentation
- Harassment in public restrooms (guests at the AVN Show are welcome to use the restrooms that match their gender presentation or identity)

You also understand and agree that AVN or the Hard Rock Hotel reserves the right to expel, remove or ban you for any reason, including but not limited to violations of the Code of Conduct, disorderly conduct or causing a public disturbance. If you are removed from the AVN Show or Hard Rock Hotel you will not be provided a refund.

And you agree that any claims for breach of this agreement, shall be subject to confidential binding arbitration in the State of California, in the County of Los Angeles. Also, this agreement is entered into pursuant to the laws of the State of California and shall be interpreted pursuant to those laws.

By signing below, you consent to be photographed, filmed and/or otherwise recorded and to for that content to be used, in any and all media throughout the universe in perpetuity of your appearance, voice and name for any purpose whatsoever.

Date

Signature

AVN requires all people attending its expo to sign a code of conduct. Credit: Paul Maginn, Author provided

Admittedly the expo encourages a sexualised touristic gaze by largely heterosexual male attendees. But this in no way negates the importance of negotiated consent in interactions between fans and performers.

A "[mix of physical, social and institutional boundaries and formal and informal rules of engagement](#)" prevails within the AVN Expo space. Attendees—performers, media and fans—must sign a "code of conduct." Signage around the expo space reminds patrons of the AVN's [policy of zero tolerance](#) of anyone found and/or reported to have engaged in assault, non-consensual physical contact, violations of privacy, and verbal or physical harassment.

While this code isn't perfect, [our research](#) found it's part of a "mix of physical, social and institutional boundaries and formal and informal rules of engagement." These help keep non-consensual contact to a minimum and empower the performers to negotiate their own boundaries.

A charter of consent helps

When sexualised [leisure activities](#) are an important part of a city's tourism or night-time economy, it is critical for government officials, local businesses and advocacy organisations that represent workers in sexualised tourism to come together and develop what might be termed a "charter of consent."

Such a charter would set out the essential "rights, roles and responsibilities" of participants. It could also highlight the repercussions for those who transgress consensual boundaries.

This charter could be widely promoted via traditional and [social media](#), creative marketing strategies (e.g. drinks coasters, receipts, online adverts, and posters in restrooms in bars, clubs and restaurants), as well

as signage in sexualised tourism/leisure spaces to remind tourists consent is paramount.

With active promotion and demonstrated commitment by regulators, such a charter would help give those on the front line of providing sexualised leisure experiences the confidence to report non-consensual or inappropriate behaviours to their employers and relevant authorities.

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