

What sort of tourism does S'pore want? Surely it can't be sex

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We refer to your article "Escort agencies beefing up ranks for mega-meet" (ST, Sept 13) that throws into sharp relief questions about the priorities and social values of our country. Firstly, what kind of tourism does Singapore wish to attract and promote? A Bangkok Post article on this topic entitled "Singapore escort agencies love IMF" on September 13 cast an unpleasant and disturbing picture in portraying Singapore as a hub for escorts and after-hours services.

This gives the Four Million Smiles campaign a rather different face. With recent local and international coverage on Singaporean demand for child sex tourism still lingering, it behooves Singaporeans to reflect on whether we condone such actions with our silence and what message this sends to others at home and abroad.

Why does the sale of women's time overshadow other major tourist attractions Singapore can proudly promote? Why promote this kind of 'night safari'? The tourism that promotes the patronage of Singaporean women by foreign visitors is both demeaning to Singaporean women who do not want to be perceived as tourist attractions and to families that cherish sound and moral family values.

While strong messages are sent out about marital fidelity and cohesive families, it is a painful irony that the article also suggests that the escort market is a demand-led business. The prospect of the 'mega-meet' is reported as inspiring both Singaporean women and guests from the region to be of service while the conference proceeded.

Surely this is not what we want to promote as uniquely Singaporean. Does society not condone the trading of women by our silence and our unwillingness to acknowledge the moral crisis it represents?

The third area of concern is the public health risk associated with 'after-hours services'. It is again ironic that the recent banning of a large-scale gay party was apparently due to the public health hazards that officials associated with a permissive sexual culture.

Is there also a contradiction in the article by indiscreetly mentioning "what the escort does outside the paid hours is up to them?" and that "prostitution is not illegal"? This is not a morally neutral posture.

The many unfortunate ironies of the IMF and World Bank meetings are important catalysts for our serious reflection. We must consider what we value, who we are, and the kind of society we are creating for our children. Singapore stands for much more than people being told to smile and the sale of after-hours services by 'young, athletic and confident' Singaporean women.

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