

# Tourism and Crime: key themes



**Edited by**

**David Botterill and Trevor Jones**

## **Flying without Wings**

 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ  
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

Copyright © Goodfellow Publishers Limited 2010

All rights reserved by Goodfellow Publishers Limited. The text of this publication, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, storage in an information retrieval system, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.



Design and setting by P.K. McBride

# 6 Flying without Wings: drug tourism and the political economy of pleasure

Michael Shiner

---

This chapter includes a discussion of the following themes:

- ◆ Drug tourism and the legal prohibition of drugs
  - ◆ The social meaning of drug tourism
  - ◆ Drug use at home and away
  - ◆ Drug use and social change.
- 

Drug use offers a potentially fertile meeting ground for criminology and tourism studies. One of the most obvious intersections between these two fields of study occurs when tourism involves criminal behaviour, which is generally the case with drug tourism. There are, moreover, notable conceptual links as drug use raises a series of themes, including the pursuit of pleasure, excitement and escape that are relevant to the study of both crime and tourism. Despite several potential points of contact, criminology and tourism studies have tended to develop their interest in drug use in isolation from one another (but see Belhassen et al., 2007). The aim here is to promote dialogue between them. To this end, the following discussion is divided into three parts: the first considers political and ideological dimensions of drug tourism, paying particular attention to the role of prohibition and reform; the second is more conceptual in its focus and highlights some striking parallels between the way in which criminology and tourism studies have sought to understand drug use, with both fields of study having linked this behaviour to broader existential concerns such as the search for meaning and fulfilment in 'late industrial' or 'post modern' societies. The third part seeks to locate drug tourism within broader debates about social change. The unifying theme, linking the different parts of the chapter together, is provided by the claim that criminology and tourism studies offer ways of looking at drug use that are simultaneously different yet complementary, creating opportunities for synthesis and exchange.

Before starting the analysis, some preliminary comments are required about exactly what it is that constitutes drug tourism. This is a matter of some debate, with definitions varying in terms of the range of behaviours they cover. According to

Valdez and Sifaneck (1997: 880) drug tourism refers to ‘the phenomenon by which persons become attracted to a particular location because of the accessibility of licit or illicit drugs and related services’. Such a definition applies only to those for whom drug use provides the main motivation for travel and excludes various other manifestations of drug use in the context of tourism. A broader, and arguably more satisfactory, definition is provided by Uriely and Belhassen (2005: 239), which includes tourists for whom drug taking appears to be more spontaneous:

Accordingly, tourists who are aware of the accessibility of illegal or illegitimate drugs in a particular location and consume these drugs during their stay in these locations are defined here as drug tourists. This definition refers to both tourists who are attracted to a specific destination because of their previous knowledge about the accessibility of drugs at this site and tourists who become aware of the accessibility of drugs only during their stay in a particular location. Moreover, drug consumption might not necessarily function as the major travel motivation for these tourists but only as a by product of their tourist experience.

## Drug tourism and the politics of control

Drug tourism is sometimes attributed to liberal drug regimes that are said to act as a ‘magnet’ to drug tourists. While international conventions aim to restrict the use of controlled substances to ‘legitimate’ medical, industrial and scientific purposes, the specifics of implementation are left to individual states, with the result that there are marked variations between jurisdictions (Elvins, 2003). Some states have adopted significantly less punitive and restrictive forms of drug control than others, but, even so, the suggestion that liberal policies are responsible for drug tourism is difficult to sustain. Such claims fail to appreciate that liberal regimes only act as a magnet to drug tourists in the context of prohibition: that is to say, it is inconsistencies between jurisdictions, rather than liberal regimes per se, that promote drug tourism and channel it in certain directions. More fundamentally, liberal regimes are neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for drug tourism. It is not just that drug tourism is evident in places where such behaviour is criminalised, but that there are also cases where the introduction of more liberal policies has not generated the expected upsurge in drug tourism. In illustrating these points particular attention will be paid to the Netherlands, Mexico and Portugal.

### The Dutch policy of *Gedogen*

The Netherlands has adopted one of the most explicitly tolerant approaches to drug control of all Western industrial nations and, in so doing, has highlighted some important, albeit fairly subtle, legal and practical distinctions (MacCoun and Reuter, 2001). Consistent with the broader policy of *gedogen* (condoning), whereby small wrongdoings are tolerated in order to prevent more serious offences, the Dutch have sought to separate the market for cannabis from that for more

**Chapter extract**

**To buy the full file, and for copyright  
information, click here**

[http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&st](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&storyID=208)

[oryID=208](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&storyID=208)



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recorded or otherwise, without the written permission of Goodfellow Publishers Ltd

All requests should be sent in the first instance to

[rights@goodfellowpublishers.com](mailto:rights@goodfellowpublishers.com)

[www.goodfellowpublishers.com](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com)