

THE RISKS OF 'VOLUNTOURISM'

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Humanitarian tourism or **VOLUNTOURISM** is a form of tourism in which travellers participate in voluntary work, for what they believe to be a good cause.

Tour operators may propose such offers that are of interest to travellers in search of meaningful experiences. Most voluntourism experiments operate in a north-south direction, which means that volunteers from rich countries can pay to volunteer in developing countries.



The development of this sector has many negative aspects; especially in the field of volunteering with children, the risks are particularly high.

One of the most telling examples is **ORPHANAGE TOURISM** and its links to child trafficking and to violence against children.

It is estimated that 80% of children living in orphanages around the world are not really orphans. Living in an orphanage does not allow children to receive the care and attention they typically need to fully develop or be happy. Institutions such as orphanages can often be places of great violence; between the children living there and the adults supervising them. It is no coincidence that orphanages in Europe have largely disappeared in the last 50 years.

Family based care (which of course does not go without its own difficulties) through fostering, adopting or being housed with extended family, is a much better option for the wellbeing of an orphaned child.

Orphanage tourism (and donations made by tourists to orphanages) oftentimes creates a demand for orphanages, which in turn, creates situations where families are separated.

Children from vulnerable (or poor) families are separated from their parents (and siblings) who are led to believe that living in an orphanage could provide a child with a better education.

The main risks and dangers facing children living in orphanages include:

- Poor quality education: education is too often provided by untrained volunteers, who do not know the language of the country and only stay for a few hours, days or weeks.
- Child abuse: even if most tourists mean well, there are instances where malicious people can take advantage of this type of access to vulnerable children.
- Emotional problems: Children may develop emotional problems associated with living away from their families and siblings. They may also develop emotional issues related to abandonment as they often come in contact with tourists (with whom they build close bonds) who come and go every few days / weeks.
- Dissemination of their image without their consent and that of their parents/guardians.

CHILDREN ARE NOT TOURIST ATTRACTIONS



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