



WHY ORPHANAGE TOURISM COULD SOON BE OUTLAWED

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16 AUG 2017

Organising trips to orphanages could be criminalised if orphanage tourism is defined as supporting modern slavery under a landmark new act.

A parliamentary inquiry will submit an interim report on the proposed Modern Slavery Act next month.

But ReThink Orphanages, an organisation which has long been campaigning on the issue, is confident the Act will be inclusive of orphanage tourism.

“We’ve known for a long time that orphanage voluntourism is a harmful practice, and it’s excellent the Australia government is giving this issue the attention it deserves,” coordinator Leigh Mathews told *KarryOn*.

<http://karryon.com.au/community/why-orphanage-tourism-could-be-outlawed-under-modern-slavery-act/>

“For those companies still offering orphanage trips, we would strongly encourage them to reach out and seek support to safely transition away from supporting orphanages, and provide ethical alternative for travellers.

“Australian businesses have a responsibility to ensure their practices are not harmful – and being associated with a form of modern slavery is certainly not good for business.”

Australian actress Rachel Griffiths, of *Muriel’s Wedding* fame, has added her weight to the campaign to dismantle the modern day slave trade.



Griffiths in 1994’s *Muriel’s Wedding*

She is patron of charity [Hagar](#) which has so far helped to rescue over 15,000 women from the modern day slave trade.

As Griffiths urged politicians earlier this month to legislate a modern day slavery act, she also called upon members of the public to stop visiting orphanages in South East Asia and taking “selfies”.

“Vulnerable children should not be visited without training,” she said, as reported by the [Sydney Morning Herald](#).

“I have nothing for respect and compassion for the empathy of others. [But] we know in developed countries institutions are not the place for children to grow up.”

Intrepid Travel has played an important role in raising awareness within the travel industry about the issues associated with orphanage tourism.

But responsible business manager Liz Manning highlighted the scale of the problem.

“That photo of a traveller surrounded by cute kids has become a bit of a bucket-list moment for many young travellers,” she told *KarryOn*.

“One of the challenges in addressing the issue is that it is difficult to put actual numbers on the scale of the problem because there are so many organisations that unwittingly contribute to the orphanage tourism industry.”

The problem extends beyond travel companies to institutions like charities, churches and educational facilities, making it “near impossible” to accurately estimate the number of Australians involved.

“You don’t have to be a social media expert to know that people love sharing travel photos online, and that’s also led to many travellers posting pictures of their interactions with kids without fully understanding the child protection risks involved,” Manning said.



While awareness among travellers of the negative impacts of orphanage voluntourism is growing quickly, it can be a “really emotional issue” for many, she explained.

“Often travellers who have volunteered or visited orphanages before have done so with good intentions and feel quite protective of their experience,” she said.

“As a responsible business we want to raise awareness that the growing demand from travellers for these kinds of experiences has resulted in children being unnecessarily separated from their families and in many instances being trafficked into orphanages, despite having one or more living parent.”

The end result can be the child’s development of attachment disorders, mental illness and developmental delays.

As for the travellers that still want to do something to help without harming, Manning encouraged them to support organisations that work to keep families together or reunite children with their families.

“It’s also important to try and keep your tourism dollars in local communities when you travel,” she said.



If the act goes through, ReThink Orphanages will work closely with the Australian government to ensure that Australians are made aware of the harms of orphanage voluntourism, enabling them to make ethical choices when planning their travel itineraries.

“We are developing and disseminating a number of educational campaigns aimed at different audiences over the coming months,” Mathews said.

Meanwhile, it is working closely with government, partner organisation and the travel industry to **“ensure children’s rights are considered when it comes to our impact overseas”**.

Intrepid and [Flight Centre](#) are among those working with the organisation on the issue, with others expected to come on board in the near future.

ReThink Orphanages will host a travel industry forum on the issue in collaboration with Intrepid by the end of the year.

Have you noticed a shift on the issue of orphanage tourism?