

## Life&Style travel

# Youngsters saying no to sex tourism



The overall winner of the **World Responsible Tourism Awards** is a Dutch tour operator fighting child prostitution in Brazil as the country gears up for the World Cup. By Lisa Scott

**I**N the pretty coastal towns of Tibau do Sul, Pipa and the city of Natal in northeastern Brazil, where surfers and tourists sunbathe among scattered palm trees, 80 high-school students are busy working as 'agents of change'. Through classroom presentations and interaction with their families and neighbours, they spread the message that being raped and forced into prostitution is not acceptable.

These courageous youths have been trained through a programme developed by TUI Nederland, a heavy-weight Dutch tour operator that has recognised sex tourism is silently growing in this region. The company's bravery raising such a sensitive issue, combined with its groundbreaking child-protection strategies, has earned it the coveted title of overall winner at the tenth World Responsible Tourism Awards.

TUI Nederland's work to protect vulnerable children has never been more necessary. As we approach next year's World Cup, all eyes are on Brazil, a country with an exotic reputation but a dark underbelly. The government is preparing for 2014's influx of visitors by improving its

stadiums and public transport services but it needs all the help it can get to fight the booming sex tourism trade that exploits child prostitutes and is expected to soon be fuelled by sports fans. Even the arrival of construction workers in the 12 host cities reportedly sent teenage pregnancies soaring.

Elise Allart, manager of sustainable tourism for TUI Nederland, set up the project 'Say a collective no to child sex tourism in the northeast of Brazil' in 2010, alongside a host of partners, including Childhood Brazil, Plan Brazil and Plan Nederland. In 2008, Allart travelled to this northeastern region of Brazil, where the levels of poverty are among the highest in the country, and witnessed first-hand the young boys and girls, roughly aged from 15 upwards, waiting for clients on the streets and in bars.

Those too young for the bars – a BBC investigation in 2010 found children as young as seven on the streets there – are controlled by taxi drivers, hotel workers and drug dealers.

Allart's goal is to reach the communities before the exploitation. 'If an upcoming tourist destination is free of child sex tourism the situation



### SETTING THE STANDARDS

The Oman Ministry of Tourism, this year's sponsor of the World Responsible Tourism Awards, has long championed the importance of protecting the environment. Oman is small, about the size of New Zealand, and has a varied, dramatic landscape – remote desert mountains, natural springs, and lush botanic gardens. In recent years, it has restored 24 forts and castles, creating opportunities for local communities, and developed nature reserves such as the Haya Waters Al Ansab Wetlands, which has its own centre for environmental education. In 2010, it published its own policy for sustainable tourism. [www.omanitourism.gov.om](http://www.omanitourism.gov.om)



Agents of change: Children trained by TUI Nederland to raise awareness of child prostitution in places such as Natal (above)

can change at short notice, especially if tourism is growing,' she says.

'When we originally visited Pipa, they said they didn't need our help but prostitution soon entered the village and they have since come to us for help. When it is new you can fight it, when it is embedded it's a different matter. We are not going to Rio – that cannot be solved – not by us anyway.'

TUI Nederland first signed the Tourism Child-Protection Code of Conduct in 2002 but since the 2010 promise it has funded vocational educational programmes, encouraged more than 100 local hotels and

tourism associations to sign the Brazilian Child Protection Code, trained hotels on methods to keep prostitution out of their lobbies, enforced an official referral system for reporting rape and abuse, and pushed for a regional pact between five mayors to actively combat the sexual exploitation of youths.

**C**RUCIALLY, Allart also recognised that fighting demand is as important as stemming supply and last year she teamed up with the Dutch Border Police to launch a hard-hitting poster campaign in three major Dutch airports, asking tourists to report offenders by gathering good-quality information. One poster shouts: 'Who goes solely for the children on holiday? Dutch men who want to entertain themselves with minors in foreign hotels and bars.' Within five months, 27 complaints were logged. A tour operator confronting the issue of its own nation travelling for sex tourism is bold and highly commendable.

One of the ultimate goals, though, is to help local youth benefit from the World Cup instead of just reaping the consequences. The Brazil Youth Economic Employment Programme (a charitable initiative) is helping 700 youths, 150 of whom are considered vulnerable, gain steward jobs during the World Cup. When the 30 days of the tournament are over and the stadiums are silent, it hopes to use the empty Arena das Dunas in Natal as a job training centre that will offer vocational training. TUI Nederland will fund the tourism and hospitality training. What's more, more than 60

### COMPETITION WINNER

Metro readers who sent nominations for the awards were entered into a competition to win seven nights in Gozo with [www.headway.com](http://www.headway.com). The winner is David Toole.

## AND THE OTHER WINNERS ARE...

### BEST FOR THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Village Ways, India and Ethiopia

### BEST FOR CHILD PROTECTION

TUI Nederland, The Netherlands with partners in Brazil

### BEST RESPONSIBLE WILDLIFE EXPERIENCES

Nam Nern Night Safari, north-eastern Laos



### BEST FOR WATER CONSERVATION

Chepu Adventures EcoLodge, Chiloe island, Patagonia (pictured)

### BEST DESTINATION FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Bonito, Brazil

### PEOPLE'S CHOICE CATEGORY

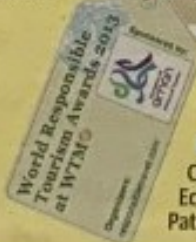
Huilo Huilo Biological Reserve, Chile

### BEST FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CAMPAIGNING

people & places, Britain

### OVERALL WINNER

TUI Nederland, The Netherlands with partners in Brazil



per cent of these youths will be young girls, who would otherwise be forced into prostitution to survive.

During yesterday's award ceremony at the 2013 World Travel Market at Excel London, Justin Francis, managing director of Responsibletravel.com, organiser of the awards, said of the winner: 'It was a really ballsy campaign by one of Europe's biggest tour operators.'

'The issue of child sex exploitation has emerged from the shadows. For too long it has been parked as too hard by many in the tourism industry. It's fantastic that it's now in the limelight.'

After collecting her award, Allart said: 'The very subject of child exploitation is extremely sensitive and we don't want to damage a country's reputation by pointing a finger at it but the world needs to know about the dangers these children are facing. Winning this awards spurs us on to continue the fight.'

Discover more about TUI Nederland, [www.tui.nl](http://www.tui.nl) For more on the World Responsible Tourism Awards, go to [metro.co.uk/responsible](http://metro.co.uk/responsible)