

Deviance and risk on holiday: An ethnography of British tourists in Ibiza

Author(s)

Briggs D, Turner T

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Abstract

Purpose The behavior of British youth abroad has caused considerable concern over recent years. This is because many British youth engage in binge drinking, drug use, sex behavior and other risk behaviors especially in the Balearics, Spain. While research has documented levels of alcohol use, drug use, risk and sex behaviors on these islands, it tends to rely on survey data. This article aims to offer some contextualization to the British youth holiday experience and to examine why such behaviors might take place.

Design/methodology/approach The study uses ethnographic methods (observation, open-ended focus groups) with British youth in San Antonio, Ibiza. Over the course of one week in July 2010, 17 focus groups were undertaken (n 97 aged between 17 and 31). Observations were conducted in bars, clubs, beaches, and general tourist areas.

Findings The data suggest that young people engage in these behaviors not only to escape the constraints of work and family but also because they are exciting. The data also indicate that these behaviors appeared to help British youth construct life biographies which were integral to their identity construction. The findings are also considered within the social context of Ibiza which also played a role in promoting these behaviors.

Originality/value No ethnographic research exists on the topic of

British youth and their behaviors abroad. Previous research is mostly epidemiological survey research which does not adequately consider the social meaning and context for the behavior of British youth abroad.

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