



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

About the Sex Industry in Thailand

Is prostitution legal in Thailand?

Prostitution is NOT legal in Thailand. However, due to the billions of dollars it feeds into the country's tourism industry, prostitution is being considered for legalization.

Where do women in prostitution in Thailand come from?

The majority of Thai women migrating to Bangkok to work in prostitution are from rice farming areas in Northeast Thailand. The majority of women we see being trafficked into Thailand from other countries are coming from Eastern Europe, Africa, and South America.

How old are most of the women?

The age range of Thai women working in the bars is between 17 and 50 years old. The average age is around 27. Although the legal age to work in a bar is 18, many girls start at 17. Younger women also work on the streets or in other venues.

What factors push Thai women to enter the sex industry?

A number of factors may push a woman in Thailand to enter the sex industry.

- **Culture:** In Thailand, a son's duty is to "make merit" for his parents' next life by serving time as a monk. By contrast, once a daughter is "of age," she is culturally obligated to care for her parents. When a young woman's marriage dissolves—usually due to adultery, alcohol, and domestic violence—there is no longer enough support by the husband for a woman to support her parents or her own children. As a result, when the opportunity to work in the city arises, she is often relieved to be able to meet her financial obligations through that work, no matter the sacrifice.
- **Economy:** There are not enough employment opportunities for women in Thailand. In addition, most women from Northeast Thailand have few job skills and are completely unaware of employment options. Minimum wage is too low to meet their financial obligations.
- **Education:** Thai government requires all children to complete 9th grade. However, most women do not have the opportunity to study beyond 9th grade, giving them few options for legitimate work.
- **Spiritual Beliefs:** Widespread belief in "fate" can lead to an acceptance of a woman's "destiny" to work as a prostitute. The majority of women in Thailand are also animists who have participated in many spirit and witchcraft rituals. These rituals are also practiced in the bars, and can keep women bound to the work they are doing.

How are women trafficked into Thailand from other countries? Do they know what they'll be doing?

Sometimes, trafficked women come to Bangkok knowing they will be engaged in prostitution. Other

times, they come expecting to find legitimate work. In general, they arrive on tourist visas for 1 to 3 months at a time, and are rotated around Asia. They arrive with debts that start around \$7000 USD. Many appear to be “free” when working the streets, but they are often controlled by cell phone or by threats of harm to family members. Eventually, some women are able to work off their debt and become “independent.” Others never pay off the debt, and some are even killed.

Are children trafficked in Thailand?

Children are sold into prostitution in Thailand, but not in the large numbers often stated by the media and many organizations. The Thai government has taken the prostitution of children very seriously and has passed laws that have serious consequences to perpetrators. As a result, the number of children in the sex industry in Thailand has decreased. That said, children are still used and sold through underground rings. The venues for these children are not readily known, do not seem to be large scale, and are not easily found or accessible.

Though stories circulated of hundreds of children locked up are urban legends, children *are* in danger of being sexually exploited in communities, families, and through migrant populations. These children are vulnerable to pedophiles and traffickers. Children from neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos are regularly rented or brought by their own family members into Thailand to make money through begging and peddling, leaving these children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

What types of establishments are women in prostitution hired to work in?

- **Bier/Beer Bars:** In these establishments, women are fully dressed and are paid a salary of about \$200 to \$300 US per month. Women entertain customers at the bar. The customer pays the bar a fee of 600 baht (\$18) to take a woman for sex. Most bars have a “quota” of customers a woman must entertain per month, or her salary is cut \$20 per customer she is short for the month. Beer bars are generally operated between the hours of 12pm to 2am.
- **Go-Go Bars:** In these establishments, women in G-string outfits take turns dancing on a stage from 7pm until 2am. Off the stage, they are expected to entertain customers. The salaries vary depending on the minimum quota of customers per month, but are higher than beer bars. Most average 10,000 – 12,000 baht (\$300-\$400) per month for 10-12 customers. Salaries are cut per customer short of the quota. A quota of drinks is also required. Girls who only dance and are not required to entertain customers are called “coyotes” and earn 500 baht per day. They are not required to go with customers.
- **Show Bars:** These establishments are known for a lot of nudity and seduction, and things get progressively more sexual. Many of the go-go bars have shows that start late at night.
- **Other Venues:** Massage parlors, karaoke bars, hotels, discos, streetwalking, escort services, coyote dancing, call-girl services, taxis, and online sites (including social media) are other venues where women might be engaged in prostitution.
- **Pornography:** Pornography is a booming industry that quickly turns the young and vulnerable into prostitutes. There is a strong link between pornography and prostitution, as well as pornography and trafficking.

Where do the men who purchase sex come from?

Foreign men are not the only ones who use women in prostitution in Thailand. Thai men use women in prostitution as well. As much as 80% of prostitution in Thailand caters to local Thai men. The area where NightLight works is a red-light district that promotes foreign sex tourism and is not welcoming of Thai clientele. It caters instead to the foreign business and tourist community.

It is estimated that 7 out of 10 foreign men coming to Thailand engage in the sex industry. Men range in age and come from all over the world, with most coming from North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan. Many countries offer sex tours to Thailand. Central Asian women in prostitution provide services mostly to men from the Middle East and India. In 2012, tourism statistics indicated that about 8 million foreign men participated in the sex industry in Thailand.

Is anything being done to address the demand?

Unfortunately, little attention has been given to the demand side of this issue. NightLight receives quite a few letters from men. Some are angry, some derogatory, some ask for help for “their” girl, and some are confessional. In 2007, YWAM (Youth with a Mission) began a men’s outreach called the MST project. We are thankful that support for addressing the demand side is growing, but much more needs to be done.

About NightLight Design

How do women in prostitution or trafficking situations find out about employment opportunities?

NightLight staff and volunteers engage with women in the red-light district twice a week to build relationship and offer alternative employment. Many women are referred by others who have come to work at NightLight. Some are referred by women still working in prostitution, but who have had some contact with NightLight.

What does a normal work week look like for employees?

NightLight Design employees work from 9am – 5pm, Monday through Friday, with a lunch break from 12 – 1pm. Every day begins with worship. Once a week, each woman is involved in up to two small group sessions that include discipleship, music training, and English. All employees come together for life-skills training once a week on topics such as parenting, health care, and money management. Individual counseling and ministry sessions are incorporated into the work week, as well, and women are given opportunities to develop skills in other special areas such as computers, accounting, record-keeping, purchasing, management, marketing, sales, networking, and public relations.

What kind of salary/benefits do employees receive?

As of January 2017, the government has set the standard for beginning salaries at 9,500 Thai baht (approx. \$300 US) per month. Salaries start at this amount, and raises are given based on fund availability and performance evaluations.

In terms of benefits, medical insurance and social security is provided, as well as a savings plan in which 5% of an employee’s salary is matched by NightLight and placed in an account in the employee’s name. Scholarships are also provided for those who choose to continue their education.

What do employees do with their children while at work?

Only a few children stay with their mothers in Bangkok, as the majority of them live with grandparents or relatives in rural areas. During school breaks, the children often come and visit their mothers at NightLight. In 2007, we began to offer childcare during these school breaks. In 2008, we began to offer daily childcare services for the women employed at NightLight who are raising their children in Bangkok.

Where do employees live?

Most of the women rent a room, sometimes sharing with a friend. This assists them in their transformation and allows us to work with them as they adjust their lifestyles. Shelter is available for women who are in emergency situations, need special assistance, or are homeless. For most, this is short-term until they are able to save enough money for a down payment on a room in a safe location.

Who designs the jewelry?

The jewelry is designed by women employed by NightLight or by staff/volunteers who help run our programs. We sometimes also leverage guest designers who come to Bangkok to design a particular line or product. Global fashion designs and color trends are researched to keep the designs current.

What materials are used for the jewelry?

Materials used include semi-precious stones, pearls, shells, crystals, designer glass beads, silver, and other metals.

Where do you get your materials for the jewelry?

We order materials from local suppliers in Bangkok. The beads come from around the world and are the same as those sold in jewelry and beading retail stores in the US.

How can I buy NightLight Design products?

We love when you shop our products! You can shop both jewelry and apparel online at <http://store.nightlightinternational.com>. We also sell NightLight Design products through home parties, events, and even small boutique stores and wholesale relationships.

NightLight Design jewelry is sold locally in Thailand as well as internationally. In the United States, it is marketed, sold, and distributed through NightLight International and various other partners. For more information about hosting a NightLight Design party, selling NightLight Design product at an event, or placing a custom or wholesale order, please contact jewelry@nightlightinternational.com.

About Getting Involved with NightLight Bangkok

How can I volunteer with NightLight Bangkok?

Check out our current volunteer opportunities here. [Link to section on Get Involved page.]

NightLight Bangkok volunteers spend at least 6 months serving with our team in Bangkok. Volunteers are responsible for providing their own support for travel, lodging, and other expenses incurred. Though this requires preparation and work before coming, the experience is well worth the investment!

How can the church get involved?

The more the church gets involved in addressing the issues of sexual exploitation and brokenness, the more we will see a worldwide impact. There are perpetrators and victims sitting in the pews at church who need a safe place to tell their stories and find healing and restoration in community. Churches all over the world can begin to make a difference by working to offer grace, restoration, and the healing power of Jesus Christ in their own context.

Of course, there are many ways for churches to get involved with NightLight, specifically. We are always looking for dedicated financial and prayer partners in this work. For more information, reach out to bkk@nightlightinternational.com.

What are some specific financial needs of NightLight Bangkok?

General donations to support staff and overhead costs are essential to providing women with employment and holistic care.

In addition, here are some specific expenditures that also enable us to reach out to, rescue, and restore these women:

- Vocational training during a woman's first 3 months at NightLight...\$350/month
- Childcare center salaries, materials, and food...\$1200/month
- Tuition for children...\$50/semester for elementary, \$150/semester for high school, \$250/semester for college
- Free hot lunch for 80 women...\$960/month
- Outreach costs (drinks to spend time with a woman in the bar)...\$5/drink
- Assistance for trafficked victims. . . \$3,000 per person
- Shelter for trafficked women...\$600/month
- Rent and expenses to operate the International Program Center for internationally trafficked women...\$600 per month

In addition, we are seeking funds for the following special projects:

- Retreats for women, staff, and volunteers (100 people)...\$35/person, or \$3500
- Purchase of a building for product assembly....\$355,000

Every gift matters. If you would like to join in supporting and expanding the work of NightLight, please donate here. [Link]