

# Tourism and Crime: key themes



**Edited by**

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## **Blagging Leads and Other Hustles**

 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ  
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

# 7 **Blagging Leads and Other Hustles: British street workers in Tenerife's timeshare industry**

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This chapter includes a discussion of the following topics:

- ◆ Timeshare industry and crime
- ◆ Street canvassing and its freedoms/risks
- ◆ Identity, status and deviance
- ◆ Freelance employment relations
- ◆ 'Personality market'.

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Timeshare in Tenerife is a growing and predominantly British-run industry, whose operations and profitability depend largely on young<sup>1</sup> British migrants working as street canvassers whose job it is to entice tourists to a sales presentation by sales teams on company premises. This chapter is an exploration into the deployment of various 'persuasion' tactics and tricks used by these British street workers, and the illegal activities surrounding selling timeshare by British migrants in Tenerife. It raises questions about employment relations that occur within such a framework and explores how the status quo is maintained by employers by way of their exploitation of the perceived meanings of risk, individualism and sometimes crime/deviance to these particular workers.

Specific attention is paid to the ways in which the unregulated, freelance employment relation characteristic of timeshare canvassing work allows employers to capitalise on the emotional labour, and its subjective aspects, involved in this form of 'extreme' selling. It points to the risks and costs carried by workers who canvass for timeshare companies, showing, in short, that timeshare sales work is risky, exploitative, insecure, stressful and potentially hazardous to health and

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1 'Youth', is a category that presents definitional problems. It is used here to mean people in their late teens to early thirties. The research concentrates on casual/informal work and 'hedonistic' consumption practices which typically attract 'young' people, but which, in Tenerife, are also attracting people into their mid- or even late-thirties.

well being. And yet this is not how it is perceived by the workers. Rather, the subjects of this study imagine their work as having extraordinary qualities that set it apart from 'regular' employment. Their work is often intimately connected to their practices as drug dealers and /or users, as 'hustlers' and survivors, which in turn are connected to their wider migration/mobility narratives. This is a form of migrant labour in which, partly because of its criminal and deviant associations, it is possible to reject a negatively evaluated, mundane 'working class' or even 'under-class' identity, and assert, affirm and express a positively self-evaluated white British individualism.

## The timeshare industry

Timeshare is a form of holiday home ownership. Those who buy timeshare, or join a 'holiday club' pay a one-off sum plus yearly maintenance fees in exchange for the right to spend a set amount of time per year in self-catering apartments or villas in popular holiday resorts. The two most popular forms of timeshare are 'fixed week' and 'floating system'. Fixed week timeshare means that a certain week is 'owned', usually in fixed accommodation, although accommodation and dates may be swapped with other timeshare owners of similar properties throughout the world. The floating system means that a week (or longer) must be booked in advance and must be within a seasonal time band.

The industry began in the early 1960s when a German property developer invented the concept as a result of purchasing an apartment in a ski resort in the French Alps with a group of friends. The group realised that if they pooled their money and shared the apartment the purchase would become affordable. Thus the use of the property was shared between the buyers in weekly intervals, the number of weeks assigned being relative to each member's financial contribution. The timeshare concept lay relatively dormant until the mid-1980s; apparently the victim of 'boiler-room tactics' applied by some 'unscrupulous developers' (Woods, 2001: 71–73). However, a market eventually developed and the high-pressure sales and management methods of the timeshare operators soon earned the industry a bad reputation. In the USA, where timeshare has expanded rapidly in the last three decades, the 'high-pressure sales tactics caught the attention of state legislators, and promoting timeshares as an investment is illegal in most states today' (Woods, 2001: 71–72). In 2003, the European Consumer Centre (ECC) has produced several reports on complaints received in connection with European timeshare and reports that 'Tourists from throughout Europe... are recruited by industry sales reps by means of wholly misleading and deceptive techniques' (ECC, 2003: 3).

Since the early 1980s, European timeshare has also expanded rapidly and in 2001 generated a yearly revenue of €2.4 billion (OTE report, 2003). Europe has the second largest timeshare market in the world after the United States. The dominant market within Europe for timeshare ownership has traditionally been the

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