

PREVENTING ORPHANAGE TOURISM

A Practical Guide for the Tourism Industry



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1. ORPHANAGE TOURISM

Certain activities that may appear beneficial to local communities can have the opposite effect. Myanmar's tourism sector is growing at an unprecedented rate and causing an increase in local orphanage tourism. Increasing this sector of tourism could violate the rights of thousands of children.

In Myanmar, most orphanages do not have child protection policies regulating how tourists and children should interact, putting the children at risk. There are also impacts to the tourism sector. If orphanages become tourism attractions expect to see more orphanages and the "recruitment" of more orphans.

Increased numbers of foreign tourists visiting destinations with high levels of poverty can easily lead to orphanage tourism developing in those areas. Orphanage tourism has driven unscrupulous practices and trafficking of children in other countries. It is an extreme example where organizations or businesses may - deliberately or unintentionally - cause far more harm to local people and communities than they realize, in an attempt to extract donations from well-meaning tourists.

What is Orphanage Tourism?

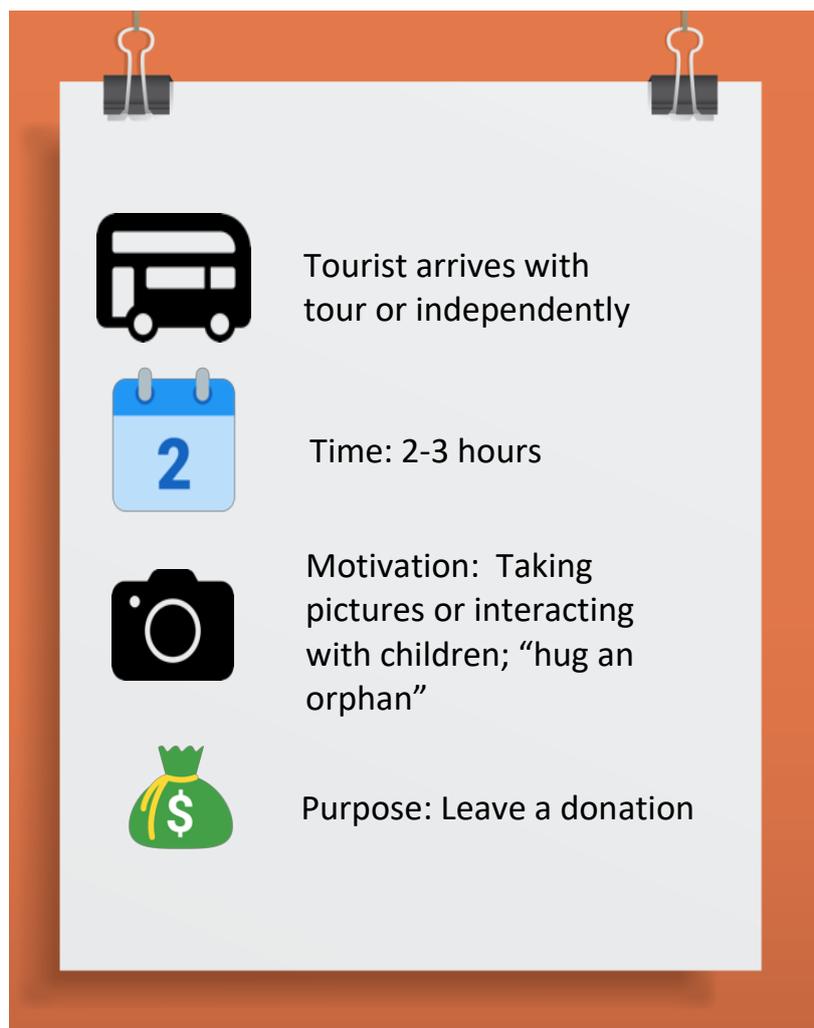
Orphanage tourism is a form of tourism that promotes and encourages visits to child care facilities as attractions for tours and tourists. At its most basic, orphanage tourism can mean visiting an orphanage as part of a scheduled tour that also involves more conventional activities such as sightseeing.

Snapshot: Orphanage Tourism

Orphanage tourism seems like a good idea. Well-meaning travelers can give their time and donate money to facilities that need donations and support. Orphanages can make money to support the children in their care and tourists have an authentic experience in the country or region they are visiting.

Unfortunately, studies on residential institutions show that despite the good intentions of tourists, orphanage tourism does more harm than good. Sometimes the good thing to do is not the right thing to do.

How does a typical tour to an orphanage look like?



Who is the Average Orphanage Tourist?



This will generally be a one-off trip for these tourists – considered “once in a lifetime”

Age	25-44 (42%)
Gender	Female (66%)
Goal	Experiences that are engaging, personal, memorable and authentic – looking for deeper meaning in vacation experiences
Reason for travel	Believe travel is one of the most important experiences in their lives (71%)
Other Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Target trips around food, culture and sustainable tourism• Educated• Electronically savvy• Socially networked• Seeking more unusual destinations

Information Box:

Why Do Tourists Like to Visit Orphanages?

Tourists want to see what life is like for very poor people. One way they are able to do that is through visiting an orphanage.

- Tourists believe they are doing the right thing. They believe that visiting an orphanage is the best thing they can do to help.
- Tourists may hear from friends or family that have visited the region that they “must” visit an orphanage.
- Visiting an orphanage allows tourists to get very unique photos from their trip – helping them appear “more authentic” and in tune with the current situation in areas around the world.
- Giving to children makes tourists feel good. They feel good when they can make an orphan smile.
- Due to the popularity from Cambodia, Nepal and northern Thailand, visiting an orphanage has become an expectation when travelling in the region.
- People think that visiting an orphanage is okay because they have no intention to hurt a child – but if an orphanage is letting anyone in, without knowing who they are, this could post potential risks to the child’s safety and well-being.

Regardless of their intentions tourists should not be allowed to visit orphanages!

2. ORPHANAGES IN MYANMAR



73% of children in Myanmar's orphanages have families.



Increasing numbers of children are unnecessarily placed in temporary and long-term care.



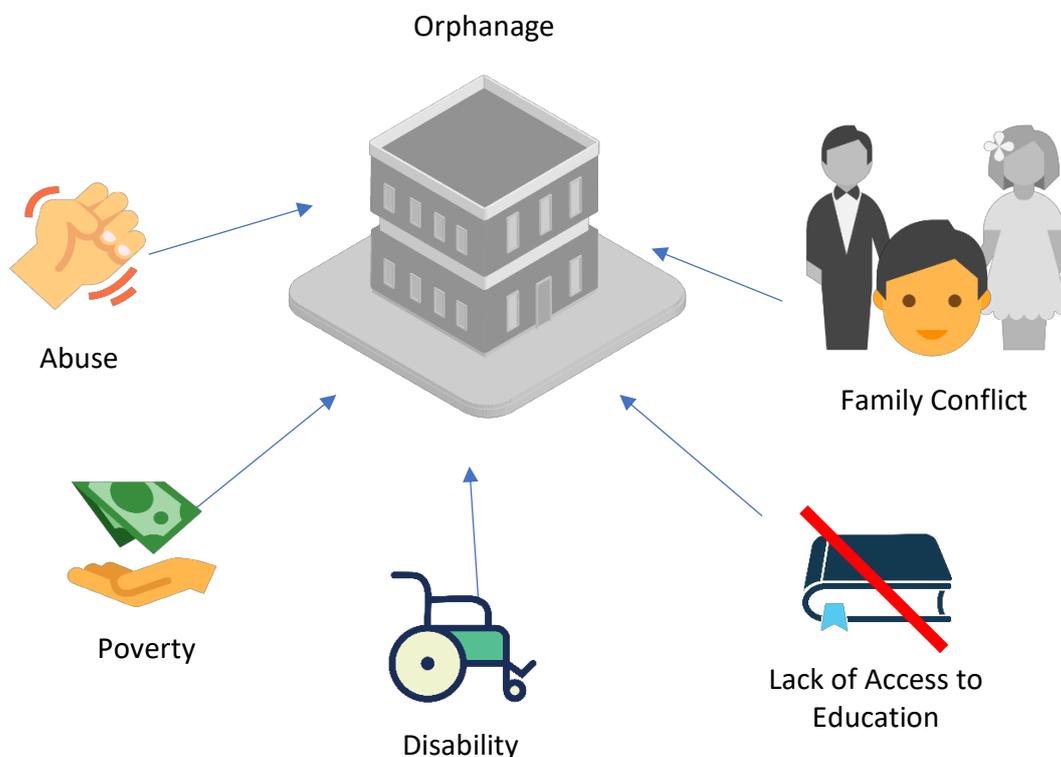
Family care is much better for children's development - many organizations are working to help build stronger families so fewer children will be put in orphanages. However, visitors financially providing for orphanages make these institutions an appealing option to struggling families.

3. THE ORPHANAGE MYTH

Many tourists don't understand the real situation of children in orphanages.

In Myanmar, according to the assessment led by the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) with support of UNICEF, in 2010 only 27% of the children living in orphanages have no living parents, the remaining 73% still have living family. The term "orphanage" is misleading – creating images of children without family to care for them.

There are many reasons that a child may be living at an orphanage.



The majority of children in Myanmar's orphanages are there because of extreme poverty, lack of access to quality education, family breakdown, parents believing that the child will have access to better food, shelter and education. But over 100 years of evidence shows that even in cases of extreme poverty, a poor family is still infinitely better than putting a child in an institution.

Whatever the reason, all children in orphanages have faced difficult circumstances. We should not create the demand for more orphans.

Learning Checklist



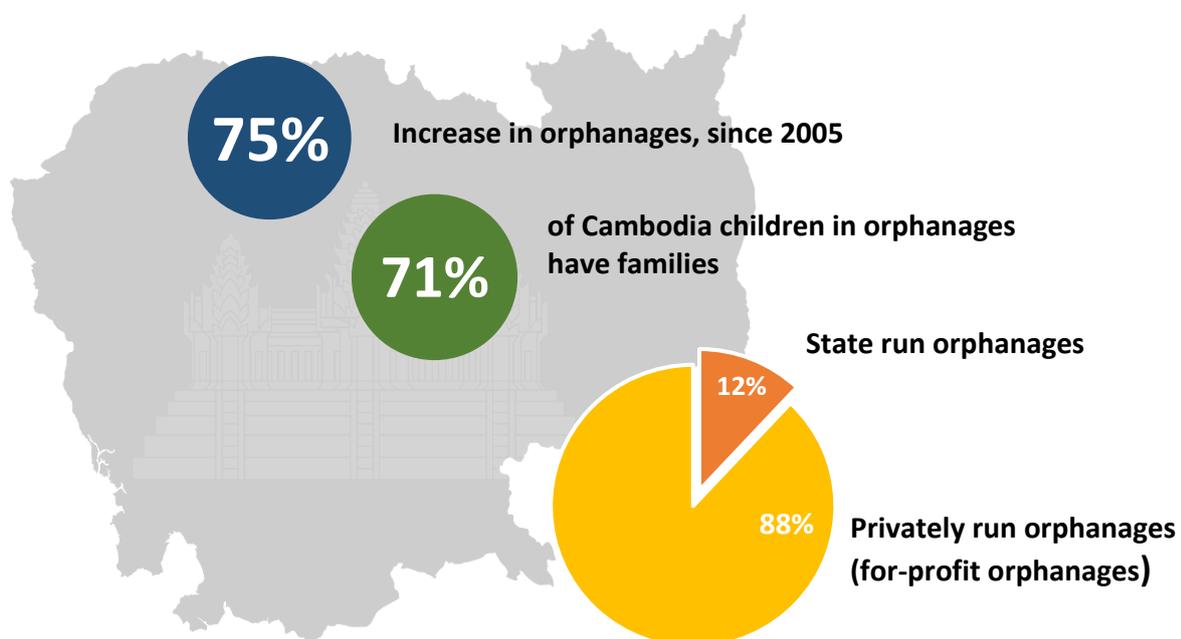
- Orphanage visits encourage child care facilities to become tourist attractions.
- Orphanage tourism becomes a problem when institutionalized care of children becomes a business.
- Tourists should be aware that orphanages are not tourist attractions, and this practice is not encouraged.



4. ORPHANAGE TOURISM IN CONTEXT

When travelling to Southeast Asia, it has become a common practice for tourists to request a visit to an orphanage. Tourists want to enter the orphanage to play with the children, teach them songs or help with their English. They want to feel like their presence has made the children happy and their lives better. Ideally, they will give a small donation when they leave.

Cambodia's Experience



Travel Trend



Orphanage tourism is a growing travel trend. Tourists are becoming more aware of the world around them and how people live in different settings. There is a growing interest for financially privileged (rich) tourists to visit impoverished communities for the purpose of witnessing poverty first-hand. These trips are justified as educational and tourists try to help alleviate the poverty.

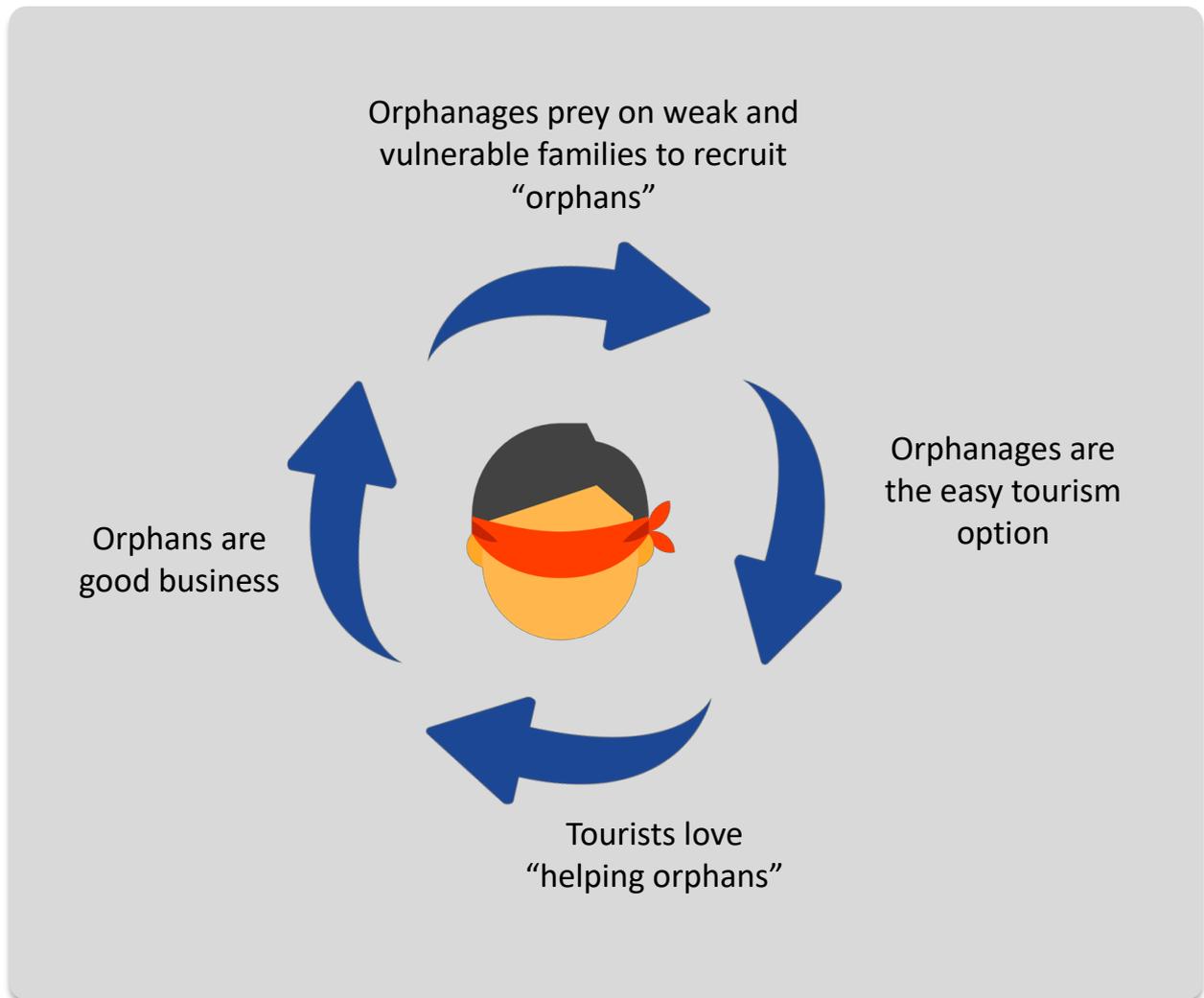
Learning Checklist



- Tourists' demand for orphanage visits drives the orphanage tourism business.
- The growth of orphanage tourism business leads to increased number of children being unnecessary separated from family.
- Orphanage tourism has caused a dramatic increase in orphanages in Cambodia.



5. THE ORPHANAGE TOURISM CYCLE



6. NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Placing children in institutional care, especially for profit, takes away children's fundamental rights. The right to live with their family; the right to be well protected from all forms of abuse, violence, and exploitation; and the right to participation. Lacking these essential requirements severely impacts their emotional, social and psychological development. Even short visits to orphanages are harmful to children. They take away their right to privacy in their own home, harming children's development and well-being.

Stranger Danger



Most orphanages do not do background checks of their visitors nor have any rules on how visitors interact with children. This allows predators access to vulnerable children. Many orphanages in Myanmar are unable to effectively monitor and regulate how visitors interact with children. Visitors are able to spend time alone with children, creating potential risks of abuse. Sometimes facilities allow children to leave with strangers that enter the facility.

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Orphanage tourism raises child protection concerns.

Orphanage tourism raises child protection concerns that can leave a long-lasting effect on the child's development and well-being.



*Information Box:
Tour Operators are Gatekeepers*

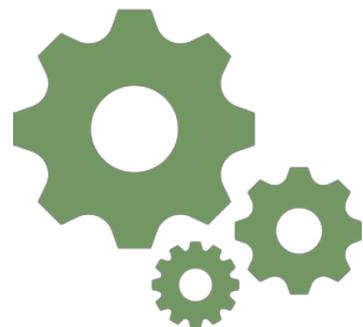
Currently, it is impossible for the government to control visits to both registered and unregistered child care facilities. Tour operators and guides have an opportunity to serve as the first line of defense in preventing orphanage tourism.

Tour operators are the gatekeepers for tourists entering Myanmar's tourism industry and can have a major impact on determining more appropriate ways to channel tourists' motivation.

Learning Checklist



- Orphanage tourism raises child protection concerns which might have a long-lasting effect on the child's well-being and development.
- Orphanages do not conduct background checks on visitors and orphanage tourism can expose children to predators.
- Tour operators have to act as gatekeepers to prevent orphanage tourism from increasing and to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their family.



7. CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES

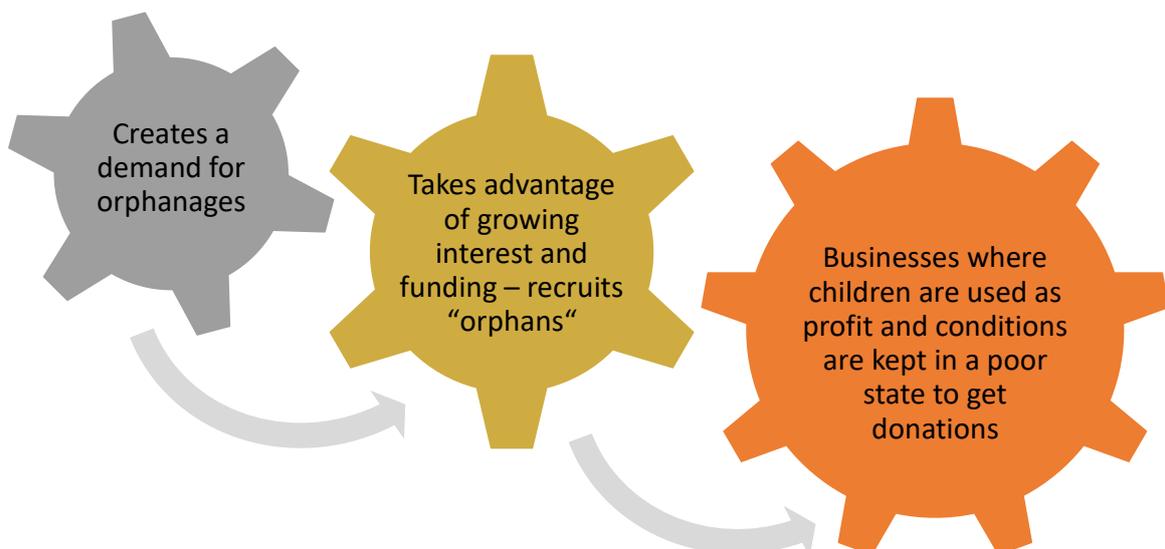
Child protection policies are rules and regulations on how tourists, visitors and orphanage staff interact with children in facilities. They are to ensure that no harm come to children.

Child Protection Policies are Just ONE Tool to Protect Children

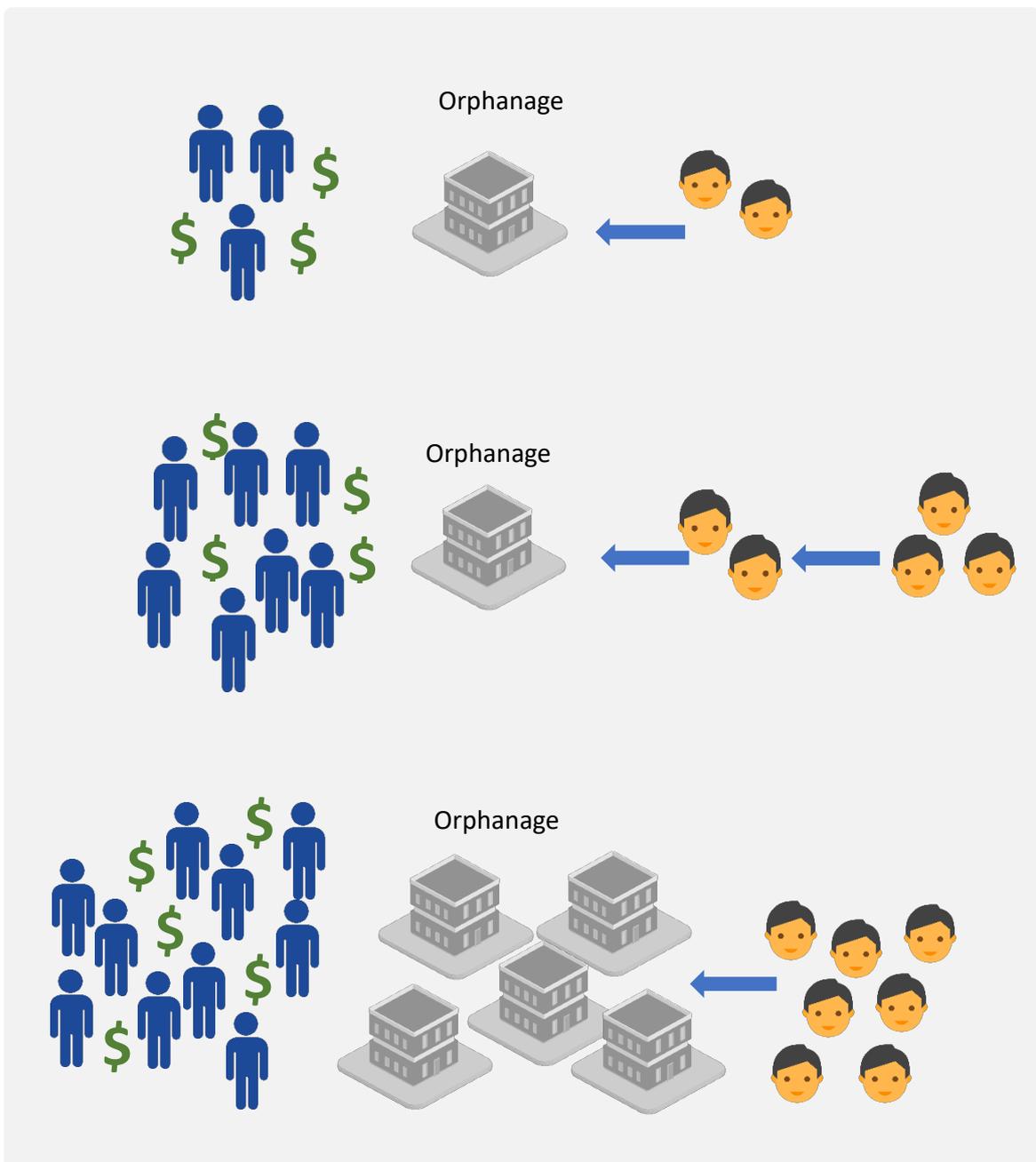


Be aware that while child protection policies can help prevent abuse or exploitation at orphanages, they do not mean that just because an orphanage has a child protection policy that you should bring tourists. While child protection policies are **one** tool used to protect children, preventing orphanage visits in the first place is the best solution.

8. RISKS OF ORPHANAGE TOURISM



The international practice of visiting orphanages in the developing world is becoming so common **it is creating a demand for orphanages for tourists to visit.** An increase in the number of orphanages will increase the number of children separated from their families, unnecessarily. As the demand for orphanages increase it will create a demand for children to be “orphans”. **Orphanage tourism will create more “orphans” out of children who have families.**



9. HELP PREVENT ORPHANAGE TOURISM

Encourage tourists to learn before they help. Many tourists are simply unaware of the negative impacts of visiting orphanages. They think it is the right thing to do.



Orphanage tourism promotes the unnecessary separation of children from their families and will only increase the number of orphanages in Myanmar.

Information Box: Children are not Tourist Attractions

- Children living or studying in orphanages should not be made to interact with tourists.
- Orphanages are not zoos and should not be exposed to tourists' visit.
- Put child protection first, do not bring tourists to orphanages.
- Children living or studying in orphanages should not be made to interact with tourists; they should not be required to show gratitude for tourist donations.

10. ROLE OF TOUR GUIDES IN PREVENTING ORPHANAGE TOURISM

Tour guides and operators have an important role in preventing orphanage tourism. They are the persons on the ground that people seek out to show them the best attractions and sights.

FIRST STEP: Remove orphanage tours from itineraries and encouraging tourists to visit other attractions.

Do's and Don'ts for Responsible Community Travel



Do

- Learn about the impacts of orphanage tourism
- Support local social enterprises and local businesses
- Show support for communities by giving through local networks
- Visit local communities to understand life in Myanmar



Don't

- Go to orphanages or schools
- Expect to visit an orphanage simply because you are in the region
- Give money directly to children
- Disrupt children's learning by visiting a school

Creating an Authentic Tourist Experience

Tourists want to feel like they experience the “real” Myanmar:



Tourists have a genuine interest in the lives of other people and want to see what their life is like:

Tour ideas: Exploring a local community



Tourists have a genuine interest in local culture:

Tour ideas: Observing traditional crafts being made, teaching how to make tea leaf salad



Tourists want to eat where locals eat:

Tour ideas: Taking tourists to local tea stands, food stalls



Tourists want to experience a sense of belonging in the place they visit:

Tour ideas: Visiting social enterprises and local businesses

Key Points to Remember



Orphanage tourism encourages the unnecessary separation of children from families.



More tourists create more orphanages which create more “orphans”.



Most orphanages do not have rules to protect children in their care.



Help Raise Awareness About How to Prevent Orphanage Tourism

Remove orphanage visits from tour itineraries – if the tourists want to visit an orphanage they should be advised otherwise.

Find Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working in your area and encourage tourists to visit them.

Educate other tour guides and the tourism industry in your area about the dangers of orphanage tourism.

Encourage orphanages in your area to develop child protection policies.

Checklist

Talk to Tourists About Visiting Orphanages

- Be comfortable and confident
- Ask questions
- Don't be judgmental – tourists might not know the negative impacts of visiting orphanages
- Determine the intentions of the tourist – What do they want to experience?
- Explain why visiting orphanages or schools is bad for children
 - Places of learning – children should not be disturbed
 - Visiting orphanages encourages building more orphanages
 - Orphanage tourism can lead to trafficking of children
- Offer alternatives
 - Explore local communities
 - Use local networks to find good organizations to support
 - Visit social enterprises and local businesses



Support Social Enterprises



Hla Day

- Social Enterprise working with Myanmar artisans, disadvantaged groups and small local businesses to design, develop and sell quality handmade products
- 81 Pansodan Street, Yangon, Myanmar
- +95 9452 241 465 | info@hladaymyanmar.org



MyME: Myanmar Mobile Education Project

- Provides a mobile classroom to working children who are unable to attend school
- 7 U Ba Kyaw Street, Tarmwe Township, Yangon, Myanmar
- +95 9795 784 380
- info@mymeproject.org

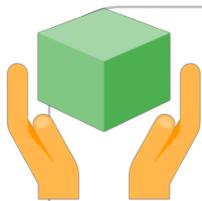


LinkAge

- Restaurant and social development program, provides vocational training for street kids
- 141, 1st floor, Seikkantha Street, Yangon, Myanmar
- +95 9451 933 034
- contact@linkage-restaurant.org

How to Choose an Organization to Support

- ◆ How does the business contribute to positive social or environmental issues/outcomes?
- ◆ How is the business funded (private, NGO, donors)?
- ◆ Do they have a child protection policy and/or a Code of conduct?
- ◆ How does the business make profit?
- ◆ How is money reinvested back into the business/community?
- ◆ What partnerships does the organization/business have?



Are there local organizations or social enterprises in your local community that are a better alternative to a tourist visiting a school or an orphanage?
Write these down here:



Responsible Tourism Protects Children