



## **My Drift**

**Title: World's Most Famous Red-Light Districts**

**Written by: Jerry D. Petersen**

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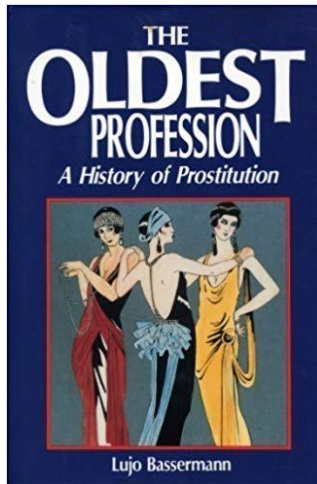
I'm old but not quite dead yet so I find this subject very interesting.

### **What is a Red-Light District?**

Just in case you have lived a sheltered life and don't know what a red-light district is, I'm going to enlighten you. A red-light district is a part of an urban area where a concentration of prostitution and sex-oriented businesses, such as sex shops, strip clubs, and adult theaters, are found. In most cases, red-light districts are particularly associated with female street prostitution, though in some cities, these areas may coincide with spaces of male prostitution and gay venues. Areas in hundreds of big cities around the world have acquired an international reputation as red-light districts. The term red-light district originates from the red lights that were used as signs for brothels.

### **Have you heard the expression, "Prostitution is the World's Oldest Profession"?**

Most people have heard prostitution being referred to as the oldest profession in the world and it is one of them. It was first referred to as such by author Rudyard Kipling back in 1888, however, the trade of money or goods in exchange for sex goes back way before then.



The earliest mention of prostitution occurs in records dating back to 2400 BC. Karkid, the Sumerian word for female prostitute appears in lists of professions from that period. The ancient Mesopotamian religious practices seem to have effectively given birth to the sex trade. The Sumerians worshipped Ishtar, the goddess of love, fertility, and war, born anew as a virgin each morning, only to give way to desire each evening. It is probable that the women in service to this deity would accept gifts of money donated to the temple in exchange for the use of the “sacred powers” of their bodies. One of the earliest surviving codes of law, The Code of Hummarabi, dating from 1780 BC specifically mentions the rights of prostitutes and their offspring, regarding inheritance, and financial support.

**So, is prostitution really the oldest profession?** It is debatable, but most historians say that it would make more sense that the very first jobs were based on the earliest human needs. Therefore, Toolmaker, Hunter, Gatherer, Builder, and Farmer probably came before prostitution.

Regardless, in this article, we are going to look at the Top 10 World’s Most Famous Red-Light Districts. (This list of the top 10 red-light districts are my picks)

We will start in **EUROPE**.

### **#1 De Wallen - Amsterdam, Netherlands**

Amsterdam may conjure images of charming canals, quaint row houses, and Dutch pancakes. Of course, it also has the world’s most famous red-light district — and it’s a major draw on the city’s tourist circuit. In Amsterdam, sex workers occupy windowed cabins along the streets of the De Wallen, a gentrifying part of town that’s home to students, tourists, and sex workers alike. Laws in existence since 2000 have cleaned up what was once a part of town that was plagued by social ills. These days, pimping is illegal, brothels must be licensed, and everyone involved — from the client



to the worker — pay taxes. The city even has a union for sex workers. Additionally, organizations like the Prostitution Information Center offer pro-sex and pro-legalization platforms for sex workers in the city (as well as tours of the De Wallen with former sex workers). The aim is to de-stigmatize those in the industry while empowering workers who choose to engage in this line of employment. Even so, things aren't all rosy in Amsterdam's sex trade — despite the hazy pink glow cast over the De Wallen from its iconic red lights. While the window-bound form of sex work is heavily regulated, ethical concerns still flourish about other forms of street-based sex work, and despite numerous arrests and crackdowns, human trafficking continues to be present in the city.



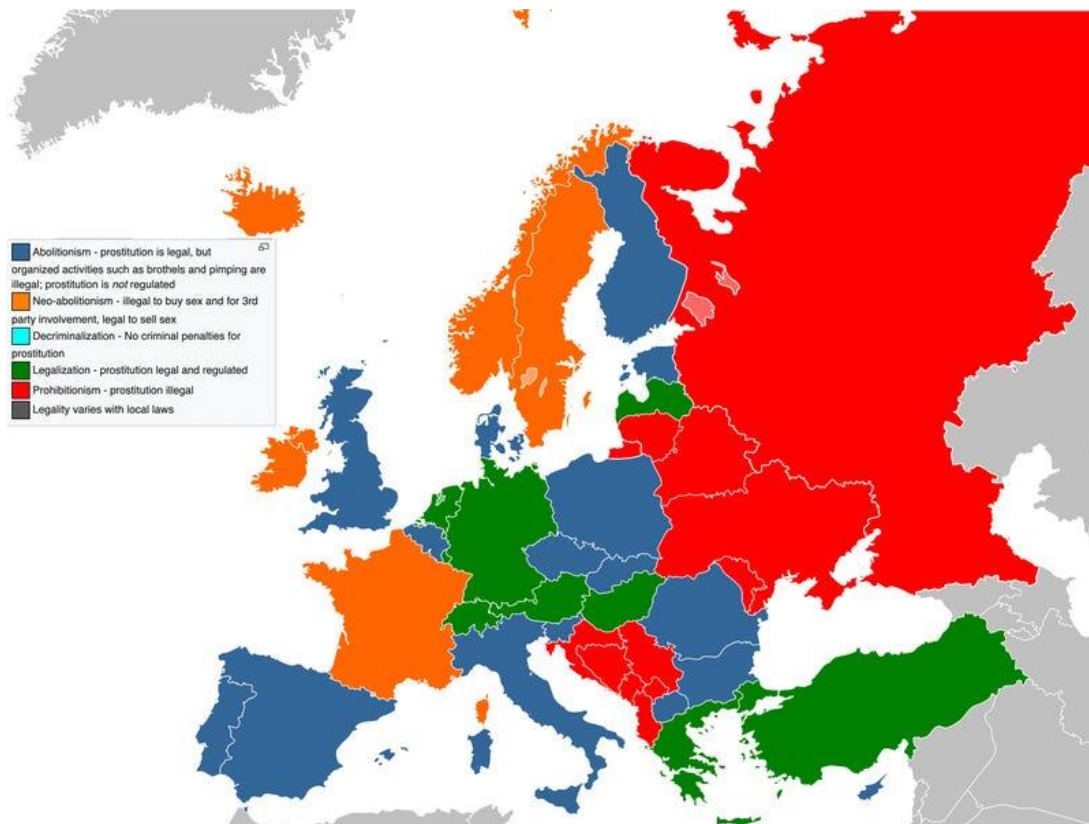
De Wallen has about 300 red-lit windows advertising brothels, sex shows, shops and theaters of the X-rated variety. But make no mistake; this is a tourist destination as travelers of all ages and sexes stroll the streets, shyly peeking into the windows for a tantalizing thrill. But the red lights aren't the only thing attracting tourists in massive waves. De Wallen is also home to a large concentration of Amsterdam's infamous coffee shops. Starbucks these are not. Marijuana and "space cakes" (pot brownies) are sold out of these shops. "Soft drugs" (cannabis, mescaline, psilocybin, LSD, ayahuasca, iboga, and DMT) are also legal.



In the above De Wallen picture I noticed something a little strange. Some of the windows are not red. In fact, if you look closely, you will see blue, green, and purple lit windows. Well, I did some research and here is what I found out:

- A **GREEN** lit window is the same as a **RED** lit window in De Wallen. It just means that prostitution is officially legal in this district.
- A **BLUE** lit window instead of a red one means that the person behind the glass is transgender or a transvestite.
- A **PURPLE** lit window means that there is a transsexual prostitute behind the glass.

As long as we are in Europe, let's learn more about prostitution and the red-light districts in that part of the world. Take a look at this map:



Prostitution is legal and regulated in Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Greece, Austria, and a few other countries in Europe (those countries in green). Prostitution is mostly legal in those countries in blue and orange. The only countries where prostitution is totally illegal are those in red. But, as we know, prostitution goes on in every country in the world.

**Prostitution is big business in Europe!** By most estimates, the number of prostitutes across the European Union's 28 members countries is well over two million.



### **#3 Reeperbahn, Hamburg, Germany**

Europe's 'biggest brothel' is Germany. While sex work was tolerated as early as the 1800s, the government formally legalized it in 2002. The trade has since exploded into a \$16 billion a year business with as many as 600,000 sex workers.



**Revelers on "Große Freiheit" Street in Hamburg**



**Pedestrians walk past various Brothels and Pubs in Reeperbahn**

Hamburg's main sex-trade street is blocked by 12-foot high barricades on either end, and men under eighteen and women are prohibited from entering. The barricades are a major point of contention for feminist activists, who frequently demonstrate nearby.

### **#5 Schipperskwartier - Antwerp, Belgium**

Antwerp has a single red-light district in an area known as 'Schipperskwartier'. This translates to "shipper's quarters" and includes Villa Tinto which calls itself Europe's most high-tech brothel. As the night shift begins, prostitute Andrea Maes put on her leather boots, pressed her finger on a biometric scanner and started posing for potential clients in her neon-lit display window. After matching her fingerprint with the one in its database, the brothel's system clocked her in and flashed her ID number -- A9018 -- to a control room manned by a fellow prostitute. It also switched on the lights in her designer-furnished room -- more boutique hotel than bordello. Andrea was on the job as dozens of men cruised the brothel's 51-window gallery.



**Villa Tinto Brothel**

Villa Tinto, House of Pleasure, is a pioneering example of a widening European drive to legalize prostitution, while combating the crime and violence it fosters -- including the explosion in human trafficking in recent years. The brothel opened in January 2005 with the help of the Antwerp city council, the police and the prostitutes themselves as part of a "tolerance zone". The Belgian government views the three-block area as a test case as it considers national legalization -- a move to wrest prostitution from the control of organized criminals and bring in some lost tax revenue.

### **#6 Pigalle - Paris, France**

Paris red light district stretches along Boulevard de Clichy in the North of Paris. The red-light district starts exactly at the border of the 9th District (Pigalle) and 18th District (Montmartre). This is just South of Montmartre (top center on map below). It starts on the famous Pigalle square and goes all the way until Place de Clichy. The adult theaters, cabarets, and sex shops can be found along the main boulevard and on the side streets.



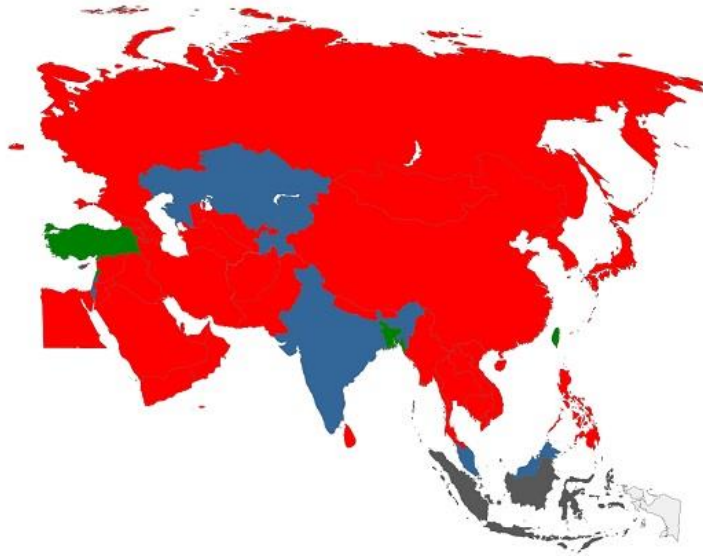
**Pigalle Red-Light District - Paris, France**

Paris red light district is a lot safer than it used to be, the area has changed a lot in the past 10 years. It is now one of the trendiest spots in Paris to go out on the weekend. And most of the filthy bars have been taken over by cool and trendy cocktail bars.

## **ASIA**

In Asia, the main characteristic of the region is the very big discrepancy between the laws which exist on the books and what occurs in practice. For example, in Thailand prostitution is illegal, but in practice it is tolerated and partly regulated, and the country is a primary destination for sex tourism. Such situations are common in many Asian countries.





### **Prostitution in Asia**

According to the above map, the only countries where prostitution is legal are Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, India, and Malaysia. We know that prostitution goes on in all countries, but it is especially tolerated and partly regulated in Thailand, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines.

### **#2 Bangkok, Thailand - There are 3 famous Red-Light Districts in Bangkok: Soi Cowboy, Nana Plaza and Patpong Night Market**



**Soi Cowboy**

More than 30 striptease bars, neon lights, Bikini Babes, and huge numbers of tourists are all concentrated in little more than 440 yards. At night, this street, which is a fusion of Las Vegas and the Amsterdam red light district, is one of the liveliest areas in Thailand, although brothels and striptease bars are the main premises. The name is a tribute to the American, who in 1977 opened the first bar here: it's said that he never took his cowboy hat off.

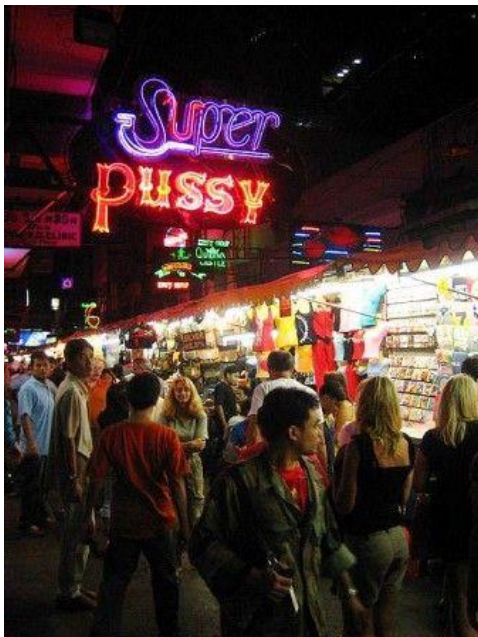
The precise number of prostitutes in Thailand is difficult to assess but most estimates make it about a million with more than half of these working in Bangkok. Sex workers are mostly adult women but there are also many children age 13-17 and homosexual/gay/cross-dressing men.





### NANA PLAZA

The Nana Plaza occupies a three-story commercial building in the Khlong Toei District of Bangkok about 330 yards from the BTS Skytrain's Nana Station. It is the self-described as the "world's largest adult playground". Its name originates from the influential, property-holding Nana family, Lek Nana being the most prominent member. There are over 30 bars on the ground, first, and second floors. Three short-time hotels operate on the top floor. Short-time hotels rent out rooms by the hour to patrons to take a bargirl for sex. Most bar girls in Nana Plaza will leave with customers upon payment of a bar fine.



Patpong Night Market

Patpong is the oldest red-light district in Bangkok located at the heart of Bangkok's sex industry where Thailand's go-go culture started. Patpong Red Light District consists of two parallel streets surrounded by the well-known Patpong Night Market. Patpong red light district opens daily and the action there usually starts at around 7pm.

More than 20 go-go bars can be found at Patpong. There are also many bars of various kinds on both of Patpong's streets. The history and surrounding night market offers an unique experience when compared to other Bangkok's red light districts. There are also sex shows, including ping pong shows, featured on several upstairs bars, but most of them are run by scammers and better to be avoided.

#### #4 Kabukicho - Tokyo, Japan

Kabukichō (歌舞伎町) is the liveliest nightlife entertainment and red-light district in Tokyo. The district covers several blocks of the east side of Shinjuku Station. Kabukichō is the location of many host and hostess clubs, love hotels, shops, restaurants, nightclubs, bars, pubs, cabarets, fetish bars, peep shows and is often called the "Sleepless Town" (眠らない街).



The area also has many movie theaters, and is located near Shinjuku Station, Seibu Shinjuku Station, and several other major railway and subway stations.

#### #7 Angeles City, Philippines

Fields Avenue is the name of a major street running through Balibago area of Angeles City in the Philippines. It is the center of the red-light district and the bar scene of the biggest entertainment district of the Philippines



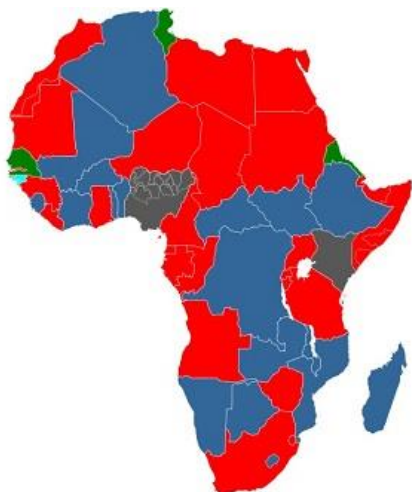
Angeles City in the Philippines



If you're a foreigner traveling to the Philippines and want to experience a great night outside of Manila, then Angeles City in Pampanga is the place to be. Angeles City is located 50 miles north of Manila. It has a growing club scene dubbed as one of the most popular in Asia for its daring and sex positive atmosphere.

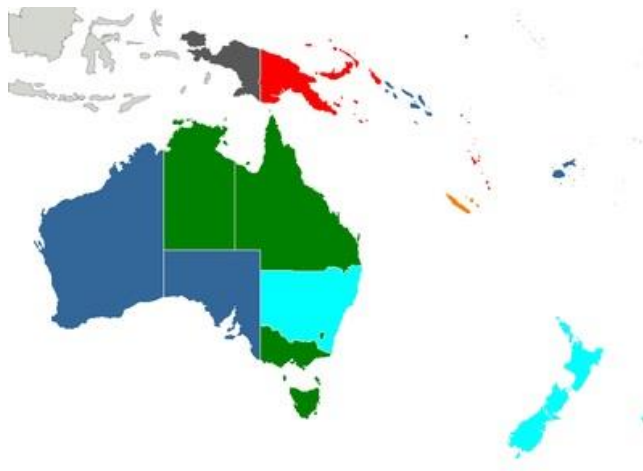
### **AFRICA AND OCEANIA**

Sorry, there are no top 10 red-light districts in Africa or Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).



**Africa**

The legality of prostitution in Africa varies by country. Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire permit the operations of brothels. In other countries, prostitution may be legal, but brothels are not allowed to operate. In most other countries where prostitution is illegal, the law is rarely enforced.



**Oceania (Australia and New Zealand)**

The legality of prostitution in Australia varies considerably between states and territories, which each have their own laws. In Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, sex work is legal and regulated. In Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, and Tasmania, independent sex work is legal and not regulated.

### **SOUTH AMERICA**

As you can see on the map below, prostitution is legal in most of South America. In fact, there are only three countries (Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana – together at top center of map) where prostitution is illegal. However, prostitution in these countries is widespread and the laws are not enforced. This area is one of the poorest in South America and many people turn to prostitution for economic reasons and the lack of other job opportunities. Prostitution continues to receive greater public attention due to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among prostitutes.



**In most of the continent, prostitution is legal, but in countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile, organized activities such as brothels and pimping are illegal.**



**South America**

### **#8 Vila Mimosa, Copacabana Beach, and Ipanema Beach, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

**Vila Mimosa, Rio's largest and oldest red-light district, is a far cry from the glamorous sex scene of Copacabana and Ipanema. Away from the hubbub of downtown Rio on the west side of the city, the entire neighborhood is currently engulfed by construction works; it is easy to miss, unless you know what you're looking for.**



**Vila Mimosa**

**A mixture of ramshackle houses, laundry services, pool halls and bars clutter the main drag, posing as “respectable” businesses. Although prostitution is legal in Brazil, running a brothel is not; each of these establishments therefore holds a legal registration of trade.**

**Despite its unassuming façade, business at Vila Mimosa is thriving. According to the residents’ association, the district receives close to 4,000 visitors a day, generating \$430,000 each month. An estimated 2,000 women work here, providing cheap thrills to a primarily straight, working-class male clientele (male and transgender prostitutes are confined to other quarters of the city).**

**Copacabana Beach**



**Ipanema Beach**

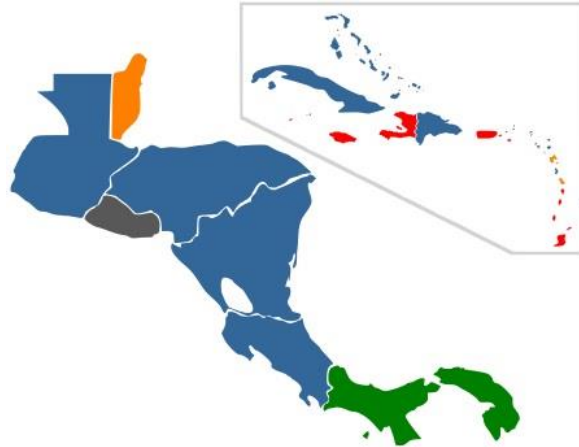


**For a night out on the town in Rio, either Copacabana Beach and/or Ipanema Beach are a good starting point. Sidewalk cafés run the length of these famous beaches and they act as gathering points for tourists and locals, where cold draft beer is the favorite order. Copacabana and Ipanema at night are like an Eastern bazaar. Street vendors will be hawking souvenirs and other merchandise while prostitutes (female, male, and transgender) prowl the broad sidewalk looking for paying customers. Between Copacabana and Leme is the infamous red-light district. In the dark bars and clubs, even on the sidewalks, you will see men openly picking up prostitutes.**



**RIO DE JANEIRO**

## CENTRAL AMERICA and CARIBBEAN



In Central America (Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize) prostitution is legal, but organized activities such as brothels and pimping are illegal; in Panama, prostitution is legal without restrictions.

Prostitution is legal in most Caribbean countries with some restrictions.

### #10 Calle Pedro Clisante, Sosua, Dominican Republic

Calle Pedro Clisante is an area in the beach town of Sosúa in the Puerto Plata province of the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean.



Sosua Beach

To be fair, this isn't an outright red-light district — you won't see sex shows and porn shops lined up side-by-side. Instead, for visitors to Sosua, Pedro Clisante is the town's nightlife hub. Restaurants and bars set up shop along the street, with patrons spilling out all around. Within the mix, of course, are the sex workers that are a fixture in many of the Dominican Republic's beachside towns. Some travelers find them aggressive, others as simply a part of the local scene, and others take little notice. But they are omnipresent, particularly in the areas around the biggest nightclubs. Like



many sun-belt nations where economic inequality is rampant, issues persist here about exploitation, organized crime, and the vast network of social ills that have caused sex work to — legally — flourish. It certainly doesn't help that plenty of Canadians, Americans, and Europeans flock to Sosua flush with expendable cash and a disregard for consequences.

## **NORTH AMERICA**

There are only five countries in North America and only three of these are sovereign states. Here are the countries with their basic prostitution laws:

**Greenland** - Greenland is an autonomous (has the freedom to govern itself) country within the Kingdom of Denmark. Prostitution in Greenland is illegal however the country is subject to the laws of Denmark.

**Bermuda** - Bermuda is an island country with its own distinct national identity but is one of the fourteen British Overseas Territories. Prostitution is legal in Bermuda but related activities such as running a brothel are illegal under the Criminal Code. Many of the prostitutes in the country are from Philippines, Dominican Republic and Panama.

**Canada** - Prostitution is legal in Canada but has many restrictions such as new laws prohibiting brothels, public communication for the purpose of prostitution, and living on the profits of prostitution.



**Prostitution in North America**

**United States** - Prostitution laws in the United States are determined at the state level. The practice is illegal in all but one of its 50 states and is illegal in all U.S. territories. Nevada is the only U.S. state which allows legal prostitution in most of its counties. Currently, 7 out of Nevada's 16 counties have active brothels. Prostitution outside these brothels is illegal throughout the state; prostitution is illegal in the major metropolitan areas (Las Vegas, Reno, and Carson City).

**Mexico** - Prostitution in Mexico is legal. Each of the 31 states enacts its own prostitution laws and policies. 13 of the states of Mexico allow and regulate prostitution. Prostitution involving minors under 18 is illegal. Some Mexican cities have enacted "tolerance zones" which allow regulated prostitution and function as red-light districts.

### **#9 Zona Norte - Tijuana, Mexico**

Zona Norte is a red-light district located in Tijuana, Mexico. It is among the largest red-light districts in North America known for its brothels, which present themselves in public as strip clubs and bars similar to gentlemen's clubs in the United States.

Many bars and strip clubs in Tijuana's red-light district in which women are the feature entertainment also operate as brothels, which offer attached hotel rooms for short intervals of time. Many other bars called "lady bars" function as social clubs where prostitutes look for clients by keeping customers company while drinking over-priced drinks. These bars compare in most respects to the hostess bars in Japan. The red-light district in Tijuana is also known for street prostitution, particularly behind the main strip clubs on Calle Coahuila, in a large high-traffic alley named "Primer Callejón Coahuila".



**Zona Norte Red-Light District in Tijuana, Mexico**

**Illicit drug sales are also common to the red-light district, but they occur largely out of the public eye. Heroin use and theft, not common elsewhere in Mexico, are rampant here in Zona Norte.**

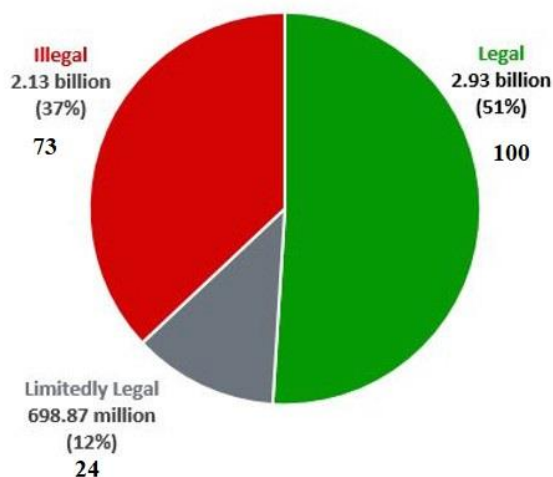


**Zona Norte Tijuana, Mexico**

**Due to its proximity to San Diego, California, it is frequented by US citizens, as well as locals. The district is also known as La Coahuila for the name of the primary avenue that runs through it.**

### **Comments**

**I didn't know that prostitution was legal in so many countries. Did you? And many of the countries where it is illegal have the largest red-light districts (Thailand is the best example) in the world. Today, there are 197 countries in the world: 193 UN members + 2 UN observers (Holy See (Vatican) and Palestine) + Taiwan + Kosovo. Take a look at the following Pie Chart that shows the total population, percentage of countries, and number of countries where prostitution is illegal, legal, and limitedly legal.**



**World Countries and Their Prostitution Policies**



**By the way, #11 on my list of famous red-light districts is the great state of Nevada in the good ole USA. This will be the subject of my next article – you don't want to miss this one!**

**[Bigdrifter44@gmail.com](mailto:Bigdrifter44@gmail.com)**

**[Bigdrifter.com](http://Bigdrifter.com)**