THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract. *The importance of the tourism industry in economic growth, employment, and the promotion of cultural relations has been recognized. A significant part of the workforce in tourism is made up of women. This involves hospitality, entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and the sustainable development of tourism.However, women still face socio-professional challenges in the field of tourism, despite their significant involvement.*

The primary aim of this research is to study the various socio-professional challenges and prospects of women in tourism. The research relied on the qualitative study of seven contemporary scholarly works on gender, tourism and hospitality management, and sustainable development of tourism.This study investigated a number of obstacles women encounter in tourism. These include: the gender and income gap, impediments limiting women's ability to rise to senior positions, socio-cultural biases, and the glass ceiling.Moreover, this study aims to demonstrate that the tourism industry is an arena in which women can obtain employment and entrepreneurship, achieve economic independence, and enjoy the prospects of career advancement.In this regard, the role of educational and occupational training within tourism, as well as inclusive management and gender equity frameworks, is essential for the industry.

The research contends that an improvement in gender equity and the provision of leadership roles to women may aid not only in the advancement of the industry's sustainable development, but also the competitiveness of the tourism sector.

Keywords: *Women in tourism, gender equality, tourism industry, hospitality industry, women empowerment, leadership opportunities.*

Introduction

The tourism industry is among the fastest growing sectors in the global economy and is a significant engine of job creation, cultural exchange, and sustainable development. Women make up the majority of the global tourism workforce. Their roles cover hospitality, tourism management, entrepreneurship, cultural heritage, and customer contact. In many of the countries, tourism is a means of women achieving financial participation, economic independence, and career advancement. In spite of women's increased participation in tourism, gender inequalities continue to persist.Women are typically funneled into low paying, low status jobs. Men dominate higher status roles and managerial positions. Barriers such as gender inequalities and work balance issues, along with safety and access to training and education inhibit both the progress women can make and the progress the tourism industry can make. Research suggests that for the tourism industry to develop sustainably a more gender balanced approach to management and employment within the industry needs to be adopted.Women's involvement in tourism helps boost the local economy and community. However, more research still needs to be conducted into women's roles in the tourism industry, especially in

the context of developing countries and sustainable tourism. This research aims to investigate the problems and extend the roles women can have in tourism, with a focus on the barriers that can be removed through management and leadership, and a greater emphasis on women's needs in the industry and greater education. This study has the following research questions:

- What opportunities do women have in the tourism industry?
- What obstacles can women face in the tourism and hospitality industries?
- What opportunities do women have in tourism, in regard to economy and employment?
- How do you think tourism management and policies can affect gender equality and the position of women in tourism?

The research focuses on the analysis of gender related tourism and development and recent systematic reviews and studies.

Literature Review

It is demonstrated in recent studies that women comprise a major force in the advancement of the tourism industry and the promotion of sustainable tourism. Women can be found in all branches of hospitality services, preservation of culture, entrepreneurship, client relationships, and community-based tourism initiatives. Gender inequality is a large gap in the tourism sector. Tourism-related studies have shown women's involvement in accommodation, preparation of food, handicrafts, and selling souvenirs (Tristanti et al 2022). These women also help in preserving local customs and fostering the development of tourism. However, women are relegated to less desirable, low-income, and low-skill job positions.This situation is caused by the lack of training, education, and language and professional barriers. Gender inequalities and imbalances sustain the low level of participation and advancement of women in the tourism and hospitality industry (Yudhistira and Robaka 2025). In their systematic review of the literature, Yudhistira and Robaka identified gender pay gaps, the integration of work and family life, cultural prejudices, and the lack of opportunities to assume leadership roles as key barriers women face in the tourism industry.Women are still few in number at all management and executive levels. It is shown by Kaldybay and Tanirbergenova (2026) that women play a very important role in the tourism industry of Kazakhstan and its sustainable development. The research covers women in tourism management, entrepreneurship, tourism air services, and women in the public sector of tourism.
While women participate in the tourism sector, there are obstacles to the advancement of their careers and the attainment of equal opportunities in access to decision-making roles. Viewing tourism from the sociocultural perspective, Permyakova and Polukhina (2026) acknowledge gender stereotypes within tourism. The authors state that tourism is a reflection of social and cultural gender inequities.Even with the rise of independent women's tourism, female travelers deal with the same cultural barriers, safety concerns, and inequitable tourism experiences. The role of education and training in tourism advancement is examined by Tsoy, Zulfakarova, and Nadjmiddinov (2025). The authors agree that qualified human resources are the foundation of a nation's tourism advancement and competitive, sustainable economic growth. The authors also claim that modern educational frameworks, digital literacy, and international partnerships introduce new pathways for women in the tourism industry.Donierova believes that a greener economy in Uzbekistan is a gateway to women's economic empowerment. The research highlights the significance of flexible work arrangements, improvement of skills through training, and the progressive employment pathways within the tourism sector for enhancing women's involvement in sustainable sectors. Ali, Grabarski and Konrad (2022) concentrate on women's participation within the tourism and hospitality sectors. Their research

indicates that organizations with women's senior management roles are more likely to be conducive to women's career advancement. The authors suggest that the advancement of women in managerial roles is a positive outcome of organizational development and equity in the tourism sector. The bulk of the literature shows that women are a crucial element for the development and sustainability of the tourism industry.

But continued gender-based distinctions, some employment inequities, pay gaps, and inadequate levels of representation in the upper tiers of management have all contributed to limiting women's full involvement in the tourism sector. The available body of literature indicates a greater demand for management policies that are inclusive, the implementation of leadership initiatives for women in tourism, and equal access to education for women in tourism to make their participation in the sector more empowered.

Methodology

This research is anchored on qualitative methods and literature review. The research centers on the review of contemporary literature on the position of women in the tourism industry. The authors of the selected literature were reviewed in order to determine the issues and prescribing literature on women in the sectors of tourism and hospitality, and tourism management. The research is interested in repeated patterns that speak to gender asymmetries, the availability of leadership roles, career advancement, employment in tourism, and the empowerment of women.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the selected studies illustrates that women are integral to the tourism workforce and contribute to building the tourism infrastructure, hospitality, and the economy in a sustainable manner. There are numerous dimensions to the accommodation, catering, crafts, and customer service sectors, not to mention tourism and cultural entrepreneurship, that women are involved in. Particularly in developing economies, the tourism industry creates notable employment opportunities and, therefore, a means of economic empowerment for women.

Yet, the studies examined reveal that gender inequality in the tourism industry remains a major concern. Most of the studies indicate that women are mostly viewed as labor for low-paying, low-skill jobs, while men are seen as filling the higher roles in the industry.Inadequate career progression and the imbalance of women in decision-making positions continue to adversely impact the career growth of women in tourism.

The studies have further illustrated that the participation of women in tourism is mainly influenced by the existing social and cultural practices as well as gender-based stereotypes. Women are still expected to fulfill their traditional roles, which include the managing of the family, and this greatly restricts their freedom and ability to work. In addition, women in tourism and other related activities may have safety issues, along with unequal treatment in their activities.

Additionally, the analyzed studies highlight the potential of more women participating in tourism as a result of training and the provision of the relevant skills. The development of tourism, particularly sustainable and green tourism, provides women with further opportunities for economic activities in their locale.

The research also indicates that management practices within tourism firms that incorporate broad-based management and greater representation of women in senior roles improve the career progression of female staff. Gender-inclusive practices, mentorship opportunities, and employment equity policies have a direct and beneficial effect on the advancement of equality within the workplace and the growth of the firm.

The research results indicate that women are integral to the social and economic processes of the tourism sector. There is a need to address the social, structural and occupational challenges that women encounter within the sector. For the advancement of sustainable tourism and the economic development of countries, it is vital to promote enhanced gender equality in the sector, increased education opportunities, and women's leadership in the tourism sector.

Conclusion

Women are central to the development of the tourism industry via the maintenance of hospitality services, entrepreneurial activities, curation of cultural heritage, engagement with customers, and tourism development. The literature highlights that in many developing countries and rural areas, the tourism sector is one of the best avenues for women's economic empowerment and employment opportunities.

However, the tourism sector is still challenged by gender inequality. There is also limited access to leadership roles, pay disparities, and the influence of cultural and social stereotypes. For women, this is manifested in a nd an imbalance of family and work responsibilities. This hinders women's advancement in career and sector and their active engagement in tourism management and decision-making.

The research highlights that women's improvement in the tourism industry will require education and professional development coupled with inclusive management and gender equity policies. These measures will not only encourage women's leadership, entrepreneurship and professional advancement, but will also enhance the tourism industry and the economy, while improving organizations and making them sustainable and effective.

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