

# THE SOLO INDIAN WOMEN TOURIST

*Ms. Eshita Gurung*

*Assistant Professor, Tourism and Airlines*

*School of Hotel Management and Tourism,*

*Lovely Professional University*

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the reasons why more and more Indian women are opting to travel solo, and how their experience was. The data was gathered from 20 in-depth interviews which focused on their travel motivations, experiences and difficulties. Indian society being male-dominated where a man being single is glamourized whereas a single woman is stigmatised. Hence, the participants initially had to go through a lot of socio-cultural expectations of the Indian society. One other major constraint was the continuous sexualised male attention. The time that participants can spend on leisure activities was also limited because of their fear for male attack or abuse at the destination. Though none of the factors could stop the participants from going on solo travel.

**Keywords:** Women tourist, solo travel.

## INTRODUCTION

According to data from hospitality chain Oyo, last year, India witnessed an enormous rise of around 133% in bookings done by solo travellers in December 2018 when compared with the same time in 2017. If we go by the Google trends, women comprise the half of the domestic travellers. When asked about the increase, the company acknowledged that solo travelling is on rise, and that the trend has been rising year on year. This change can very well be attributed towards an increasing ageing singles population, an increasing number of single-person households, and, particularly in individualist cultures, a rise in delayed marriages and in childless couples (Laesser, Beritelli, & Bieger, 2009). Though research have found that females want to travel solo to experience that life changing moment, at the same time they have to face with undesired male attention, sexual harassment and violence (Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; Khoo-Lattimore, 2015).

Not only there had been a rise in the research done on solo women travellers, the issue of gender has also been discussed in the tourism literature since mid-1990s. They have not only been studied as producers and gendered hosts (Gibson, 2001), as employees (Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2015; Kan, Shi, Kung, & Zhou, 2014), as providers in sex tourism (Bauer, 2014; Matos et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2014; Ryan & Hall, 2001), but the topic of women empowerment in the tourism industry because of their employment has also been widely discussed (Annes & Wright, 2015; Chugh, 2012; Doran, 2016; Qureshi & Ahmed, 2012; Tamandanil, Bostani, & Miri, 2015, Mrema, 2014).

However, this study focuses on the solo Indian female tourists. In the past, India has always been projected as a host country but according to the recent data now India is considered as a significant tourist generating country. The traffic can be attributed from China, India, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea (Zhou, 2010).

Solo travelling being a western-centric idea most of the studies on gender differences in leisure activities centres around the western tourists (Jonsson & Devonish, 2008; Lin, Wong, & Ho, 2015; Omar, Abooli, Mohamed, & Mohamad, 2014; Richter & Theobald, 1995; Ryan, Henley, & Soutar, 1998; Zhou, 2010), almost negligible research in done on Asian tourist, making the research on Indian Solo women travellers a thing of distant future. Hence, this study will try to put an original contribution towards Solo women travellers, particularly in the experience of the Indian solo women travellers. Hence, with the help of in-depth interview and thematic analysis, this study aims to explore the travel motivations of the Indian solo women travellers and the constraints that they had to overcome.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Elaine Chiao Ling Yang, Mona Ji Hyun Yang, Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore (2019)** in their paper *The meanings of solo travel for Asian women* found that the solo travel for Asian women meant a means of self-discovery but the path for them was different since going solo on a trip for them meant challenging the social expectations of Asian women. To identify the challenges they faced, an in-depth interview was done with 35 Asian solo female travellers from ten Asian countries and were analysed using the constructivist grounded theory. During the course of the study, the participants realised their presence in a totally western-centric idea and how they perceived themselves when they compared themselves to their western counterparts. Thus, the study had focussed on exploring the solo travel meaning according to the Asian women while focusing on how they challenge and negotiate their identities in the heteronormalized, gendered and western-centric tourism space. It is instrumental in providing a critical evaluation of the intersectional effect of gender and race on identity construction for Asian solo female travellers. The study also showed the requirement for a more inclusive tourism space.

**Constanza Bianchi (2015)** in her paper *Solo Holiday Travellers: Motivators and Drivers of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction* used a critical incident technique to collect and analyse the data to understand the main motivators and drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction for solo holiday travellers. The result showed that the reasons were more related to personal feelings of freedom, relaxation and discovery and interaction with other people than with holiday destination factors. It also found that safety and unfriendly service providers were the main reasons of dissatisfaction for solo holiday travellers.

**Karen Elizabeth McNamara and Bruce Prideaux (2009)** in their research *A Typology of Solo Independent Women Travellers* profiled solo independent women travellers in over 21 months at Cairns Airport. The result based on 228 solo independent women travellers revealed that they found Australia to be safe and participated in a number of activities which may have certain level of risk. In the previous researches, solo independent women were found at one end of a travel spectrum as fearful and risk-averse as oppose to risk-takers.

**Sonia Khan (2009)** with regard to the role of gender in leisure tourism did a comparative study which showed that gender plays a detrimental role as women participate in leisure travel. This relative study becomes all the more relative because since time immemorial life has been associated with different roles given to men and women. The study focusing specifically on leisure tourism attempted to investigate the socio-demographic factors like family responsibilities, dominance of spouse and/or family, employment status, and one's gender are dominant in deciding the travel destination and how male and female tourists perceive and deal with what is perceived as constraints.

**Erica Wilson & Donna E. Little (2008)** in their paper *The Solo Female Travel Experience: Exploring the Geography of Women's Fear* took in-depth interview of 40 women in the age group of 19 to 85. Based on Valentine's (1989) thesis, the structure of patriarchal social control to some extent governs the women's touristic experiences, movements and freedoms. The interviews revealed that these women perceived travel fears related to others' perceptions, a susceptibility to vulnerability, a sense of restricted access, and a feeling of being under vision all the time.

## OBJECTIVES

The study aims to understand the motivations and experience, and the hardships that a solo Indian woman traveller faces before, during and after the trip. The study also aims to understand the limit to which being an Indian and a woman affects their solo travelling decisions. And how they dealt with those constraints and

hardships in a patriarchal society which idolises a solo male traveller but questions the morality of a solo woman traveller.

## **METHODOLOGY**

An in-depth one-on-one semi structured interviews were taken so that they are able to talk more freely about their perspectives, struggles and experiences. Though each interview was unique in its own way but they were guided by topics of their solo travel history, their motivations for the same, hardships faced by them during their trip and their overall experience about the trip. And also, how their identity of being women and identity affected the various decisions that they had to take before, during and after the trip.

Some of the participants were selected through convenience sampling whereas other were selected through snowball sampling. Each interview was conducted for a duration of 45-60 min. After conducting 20 in-depth interviews, it was believed that saturation has been achieved. The participants were given the freedom to leave the study anytime if they were not comfortable enough continuing the study. And pseudonyms were used to hide their real identity during the study.

The analysis was completed with the help of thematic analysis for which the interviews were transcribed and re-read several times in order to identify the key ideas. As a result, 145 codes were created which formed: motivations for solo travel, putting oneself on test and various associated travel fears.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The study revealed that all 20 women chose to travel solo because they wanted to experience freedom. 40% of the said though had a well-planned itinerary for their travel, still 60% followed an unfixed itinerary to experience freedom and flexibility. Though more than 50% felt that being born as a male would have given them more freedom in choosing the destinations and the activities that they indulge in at the destination. This becomes a very important deciding factor since the Indian society has always associated the women as a 'weaker sex' who are vulnerable and needs protection. Whereas around 40% felt that their gender was not a constraint which may suggest an occurrence of a more accepting society which sees the woman in equality with the men.

This leads us to another reason why women want to travel solo is to escape the identity and roles which the society has usually associated with them. They wanted to escape their role of being daughters, wives, employees or students and wanted to utilise their time in the trip to introspect their life. Solo travels have helped them to understand themselves more properly, giving them the opportunity to focus on their own well-being than others.

Another reason why they travelled solo was to challenge themselves in an unknown destination. Since, in the Indian society, the female have always been brought up in a protective and conservative environment, solo travel gives them a chance to challenge themselves in which they try to access whether they would be able to overcome the difficulties themselves or they need someone to rely on. Testing themselves in an unknown location gave them the self-confidence and a chance to look at life from a different perspective.

Of all the 20 females, 6 confessed that they had to go solo not because they wanted to challenge something or someone or were looking for freedom but rather opted to go solo because they could not find a companion who could go on a trip with them. This has become a common phenomenon in today's world where we see people busy with their professional life that they are seldom able to make time for other people. But those 6 were not disheartened by this fact, since the lack of a companion gave them more flexibility and freedom on deciding about the destination and the itinerary they wanted to follow.

## CONCLUSION

The paper imparts further literature towards female tourist traveller especially focussing on Indian solo women travellers as there is already dearth of literature about the same. The study has thrown light towards understanding the reasons for the Indian women to take up travel solo. Since the Indian women come from a patriarchal society where they are considered as a 'weaker sex', the Indian solo women travellers have to overcome many hurdles in all the phases of their trip. One of the main difficulties was to explain their friends and families why she wants to go on a solo trip. The main concern of the family and the families was the safety and security of the traveller. The said situation was comparatively easily handled if the traveller was employed. And because of the rapid development and change in the mentality of the society, others who were not employed were also able to convince their families and friends. But even after convincing them, fear was a major deterrent when it came to solo travelling. Many of the participants had previously desired to travel solo but could not muster up the courage to do because they of their fear of the unknown...the unknown destination as well as their own security and safety since they themselves were habitual of the protected environment. But once they had decided upon going solo on a trip nothing could deter their determination. And for this very purpose, some had a very well-planned itinerary for the destination, and some in order to challenge themselves more and with a desire to experience freedom and flexibility chose not to follow any pre-decided itinerary and acted on their wimp. Though many did not have freedom and flexibility in their mind as the main reason to go on a solo travel but was lack of a companion as many people these days are busy with their professional life that sometimes it gets difficult to take time out for their own self. But like said earlier, once these women had decided on going for a solo trip no reason were able to deter themselves from not going. What was common in all these women travellers after their first solo trip was the desire to travel solo more and more and enjoy the destination in their own terms rather than depending on some itinerary or someone.

## LIMITATION

Though the study was able to explore and understand the motivations, experiences and constraints of the Indian women when opting to go on solo travel. What the study lacked was views of the other counter parts. The other counter parts being the women who like to travel with groups as well as the male counterparts. Taking into account these two other parties would have helped to better understand the motivations of the solo travellers as well as the travellers travelling in groups. It would have had also thrown light on different perspective about the constraints like fear and society faced by the Indian women travellers. At the same time, views of the males of the society would have helped to understand their perception about the Indian women travelling solo, and what they think about their motivation, experiences and constraints. This would have helped in making such strategies by different organisations and companies which would help in promoting such services which would further the Indian women participating in solo travelling.

Keeping this in mind, further research is possible to understand if one gender i.e. the female will remain constrained throughout their life and how it can impact the solo travelling market ultimately affecting the tourism industry as a whole. Another research that can also be done is to understand how the discrimination faced by the Indian women solo travellers is different from that of their western counter part which could in the end affect their future travel decisions.

## REFERENCES

- Annes, A., & Wright, W. (2015). 'Creating a room of one's own': French farm women, agritourism and the pursuit of empowerment. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 53, 1-11.
- Bauer, I. L. (2014). Romance tourism or female sex tourism? *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease*, 12(1), 20-28.
- Bianchi, C., (2016). Solo Holiday Travellers: Motivators and Drivers of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18: 197-208.

- Bui, H.T., Willins, H.C. and Lee, Y. S. (2013), "The 'imagined west' of young independent travellers from asia", *Annals of Leisure Research*, Vol 16 No. 2
- Chugh, S. R. (2012). Empowering women through tourism: A study of Kullu Valley. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 1(2), 215-227.
- Doran, A. (2016). Empowerment and women in adventure tourism: A negotiated journey. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 20(1), 57-80.
- Duffy, L. N., Kline, C. S., Mowatt, R. A., & Chancellor, H. C. (2015). Women in tourism: Shifting gender ideology in the DR. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 52, 72-86
- Gamil, R.E. (2018). The Tourist Experience of the Egyptian Solo Woman Traveler: An Exploratory Study. *Review of Tourism Sciences*, Vol 20
- Gibson, H. J. (2001). Gender in tourism: Theoretical perspectives. In Y. Apostolopoulos, S. Sonmex, & D. J. Timothy (Eds.), *Women as producers and consumers of tourism in developing regions*, 19-43
- Goodwin, C. and Lockshin, L. (1992), " The solo consumer: unique opportunity for the service marketer", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 6 No. 3
- Heimtun, B. (2012), "The friend, the loner and the independent traveller: Norwegian midlife single women's social identities when on holiday", *Gender, Place & Culture*, Vol. 19 No. 1
- Jonsson, C., & Devonish, D. (2008). Does nationality, gender, and age affect travel motivation? A case of visitors to the Caribbean Island of Barbados. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 25(3-4), 398-408.
- Jordan, F. and Aitchison, C. (2008), "Tourism and the sexualisation of the gaze: solo female tourists' experiences of gendered power, surveillance and embodiment", *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 3
- Kan, R., Shi, Y., Kung, H. T., & Zhou, Y. (2014). Women's changing social roles in ethnic heritage tourism sites: A case study of Three Gorges Bubusheng Culture Village. *Tourism Tribune*, 29(4), 19-27
- Khan. S., (2011). Gendered Leisure: Are women more constrained in Travel for Leisure? *Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, 6(1), 105-121.
- Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Gibson, H. J. (2015). Understanding women's accommodation experiences on girlfriend getaways: A pragmatic action research approach. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19p.
- Laesser, C., Beritelli, P., & Bieger, T. (2009). Solo travel: Explorative insights from a mature market (Switzerland). *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 15(3), 217-227.
- Lin, J. H., Wong, J. Y., & Ho, C. H. (2015). The role of work-to-leisure conflict in promoting frontline employees' leisure satisfaction: Examining the job demand-control-support model. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(7), 1539-1555.
- Matos, M. A. d., Caetano, K. A. A., Franca, D. D. d. S., Pinheiro, R. S., Moraes, L. C. d., & Teles, S. A. (2013). Vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections in women who sell sex on the route of prostitution and sex tourism in Central Brazil. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 21(4), 906-912.
- McNamara, K. E., & Prideaux, B., (2010). A Typology of Solo Independent Women Travellers. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12: 253-264.
- Mrema, A. A. (2015). Tourism and women empowerment in Monduli District, Arusha Tanzania. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 4(2), 1-14.
- Omar, S. I., Aboali, G., Mohamed, B., & Mohamad, D. (2014). Gender differences in perceived importance and performance of Penang Island attributes. *SHS Web of Conferences*, EDP Science, 12.
- Qureshi, D., & Ahmed, M. L. (2012). Strengthening women entrepreneurs through tourism employment and entrepreneurship of the rural women in Aurangabad. *Journal of Hospitality Application & Research*, 7(1), 54-66.
- Richter, L. K., & Theobald, W. F. (1995). Exploring the political role of gender in tourism research. IN W. F. Theobald (Ed.), *Global tourism: The next decade (pp. 146-157)*.
- Robertson, A. M., Syvertsen, J. L., Amaro, H., Martinez, G., Rangel, M. G., Patterson, T. L., & Strathdee, S. A. (2014). Can't buy my love: A typology of female Sex workers' commercial relationships in the Mexico-U.S. border region. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51(6), 711-720.
- Ryan, C., & Hall, C. M. (2001). Sex tourism: Marginal people and liminalities. *London: Routledge*.

- Ryan, M., Henley, N., & Soutar, G. (1998). Gender differences in tourism destination: Implications for tourism marketers. *Australian and New Zealand Marketing Conference, New Zealand*.
- Small, J., Harris, C. and Wilson, E. (2017), "Gender on the agenda? The position of gender in tourism's high ranking journals" , *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Vol. 31*
- Tamandanil, S., Bostani, M., & Miri, G. (2015). Women empowerment through tourism case study: Zahedan city. *International Journal of Scientific Engineering and Applied Science, 11(7), 255-262*.
- Tsai, C. L. (2006). The Influence of Confucianism on Women's Leisure in Taiwan. *Leisure Studies, Vol. 25 Issue 4*, pp 469-476
- Wilson, E., & Harris, C. (2006). Meaningful travel: Women, independent travel and the search for self and meaning. *Tourism (Zagreb), 54(2)*, 161-172.
- Wilson, E., & Little, D. E. (2005). A "relative escape?" The impact of constraints on women who travel solo. *Tourism Review International, 9(2)*, 155-175.
- Wilson, E., & Little, D. E. (2008). The solo female travel experience: Exploring the 'Geography of women's fear'. *Current Issues in Tourism, 11(2)*, 167-186.
- Yang, E. C. L., Yang, M. J. H., & Khoo-Lattimore, C., (2019). The meanings of solo travel for Asian women. *Tourism Review*
- Yang, E., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Arcodia, C. (2015). Asian women, solo travel: A conceptual framework of risk in the gendered and cultured tourism context. *Cauthe 2015: Rising tides and sea changes: Adaptation and innovation in tourism and hospitality, 781*
- Yang, E.C.L., Khoo-Lattimore, C. and Arcodia, C. (2018b), "Power and empowerment: how Asian solo female travellers perceive and negotiate risks", *Tourism Management, Vol. 68*
- Zhou, J. (2010). Gender, personality, and benefits sought: Examining Chinese leisure travellers. *International Journal of Tourism Sciences, 10(3), 1-24*.