

Gender Makes the Difference

- Worldwide, tourism is a particularly important sector for women, who make up to 46% of the tourism labor force. This percentage is higher than in the workforce in general, where 34 - 40% are women. The numbers of women working in tourism vary greatly amongst countries - from 2% up to over 80%. In countries in which tourism is a more mature industry, women's participation is around 50%.
- There is a significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation of the labor market in tourism. Horizontally, women and men are placed in different occupations - women are being employed as waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners, travel agency sales persons, flight attendants, (90% of the people in these occupations are women), whereas men are being employed as barmen, gardeners, construction workers, drivers, pilots, etc. Vertically, the typical "gender pyramid" is prevalent - lower levels and occupations with few career development opportunities being dominated by women and key managerial positions being dominated by men.
- A huge domestic tourism sector in the hands of women is developing in China, Taiwan and Korea. However, their economic and social inputs are invisible and unaccounted in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of these countries.
- Ecotourism has become an environmentally-friendly economic alternative in countries with high biodiversity. In Costa Rica, the ACA-Arenal project promoted women as tourism entrepreneurs through the creation of ecolodges, zoobreedings (e.g., butterfly farms) and permits to use natural resources for tourism interests (e.g., waterfalls). Hence, ecotourism activities improve local living conditions and broaden and strengthen women's economic autonomy.
- Ecotourism in coastal marine zones is a source of non-traditional occupations for youth and women (e.g., ecolodges, diving tours, boat services for fishing activities) and presents an important opportunity to reform the socio-cultural patterns associated with gender. In Baja California, the training on whale watching for women has increased their knowledge about marine resources and provides them with cash income. These women have now become a role model for new generations.
- One of the collateral negative effects of tourism is the aggravation of social problems like prostitution, drug addiction and sexual exploitation of children. There is also a sexual objectification of women working in the tourism industry. Women are expected to dress in an "attractive" manner, to look beautiful (e.g., slim, young, pretty) and to "play along" with sexual harassment by customers.

The issue of tourism development and gender equality is multi-dimensional. It ranges from the low-profile and persistent issue of disproportionate responsibility for reproduction and community resource management between men and women; the differential and gender-based nature of and consequences of access to social and economic resources; the pervasive reliance on (and at the same time the invisibility of) women's labor in the hospitality sector; and the high profile issues of sex tourism and HIV/AIDS.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

Tourism and Gender
www.rikkyo.ne.jp/grp/sat/en/9801/13hasimoto.htm

Gender and Women's Issues
www.sardc.net/

Tourism Liberalization and GAT
www.genderandtrade.net/

Women's Participation in Sustainable Development
www.icimod.org/focus/gender

Resources Tourism
www.earthsummit2002.org/wcaucus/Resources/tourism/tourism.htm

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William, M.
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Undeniably, there are significant gender biases and inequalities in terms of access to employment and physical and social resources that may predispose women to have greater vulnerabilities and constraints in enjoying the presumed benefits of tourism and ecotourism development.

Interest in sustainable tourism and ecotourism has increased as a result of the criticisms of mass tourism's destruction of the environment. This greening of tourism has increased its significance in economically-marginalized rural areas. The economy of such areas is characterized by small scale, flexible enterprises that are based on family labor. Women often have an important role in family labor enterprises and, therefore, sustainable tourism increases opportunities for women's economic autonomy.

WHY GENDER MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM

- It helps the tourism industry to recognize itself as a particularly good vehicle for engaging in efforts towards the advancement of women. Due to its size, its rapid growth and its extremely diverse and dynamic nature, the tourism industry has enormous flexibility. This can enable the tourism business to develop key initiatives for the advancement of women, serving as a model for other developing industries.
- It creates awareness in a wide variety of stakeholders (*i.e.*, suppliers, consumers) of the realities of gender segregation in the job market and promotes collaborative efforts to address and prioritize problematic issues.
- Women have been encouraged to get involved in independent community-based tourism initiatives, through the promotion of opportunities, professional advice, contacts and networks, training and education, and ready access to credit information. Training and education programs have typically motivated women to move into non-traditional occupations, providing them with new skills and encouraging women to apply for key managerial positions.
- It allows women's free expression and new independence, through their involvement in tourism activities and decision-making processes. In Africa, participation in tourism enterprises not only contributes to decreasing individual and household poverty, but it also modifies the gendered structure of work and the decision-making process within the community. Thus, women who previously felt themselves to be devoid of status and power, gain increased standing and esteem within their society.
- It challenges traditional roles and stereotypes in the workforce and facilitates women's empowerment.
- It promotes the adoption of gender criteria in certification standards for the tourism industry (*e.g.*, identical compensation for identical work, fair opportunities for entrepreneurial women, development of productive women's entities associated with tourism).
- It gives information regarding the involvement of both women and men in the formal versus the informal sector.
- Trade unions and community groups have created community-based institutions whose services help women and men to cope with the double burden of family and household work. A good example of this is childcare facilities, which in turn can create new jobs.
- The governments of countries of origin have engaged in campaigns to educate tourists on women's rights and how to properly respect them in an inter-cultural context.