

Exploring the Experience of the Foreign Solo Female Travelers in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka has become an increasingly attractive destination for foreign solo female travellers, offering diverse natural and cultural resources that encourage independent exploration. Solo female travel, however, is not merely about leisure but a gendered practice intersecting with safety, empowerment, and cultural negotiation. The main objective of this study is to examine foreign solo female travellers' experience in Sri Lanka while fostering a more inclusive, female-friendly travel culture. Adopting an interpretivist philosophy and guided by feminist theory, this qualitative study draws on semi-structured interviews with 14 foreign female tourists across Colombo, Kandy, Hikkaduwa, Bandarawela, Trincomalee, Anuradhapura, and Habarana. To identify the key themes, the data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). Findings reveal that Sri Lanka's natural attractions (beaches, wildlife, landscapes) and cultural heritage (historic sites, cuisine, community interactions) strongly motivate solo female travel. Opportunities for adventure and exploration further enrich experiences. The study concludes that feminist perspectives reveal the coexistence of empowerment and vulnerability, as patriarchal norms, safety concerns, and gendered gazes continue to influence women's mobility. The study recommends gender-sensitive tourism strategies, including enhanced safety measures, awareness campaigns, and community engagement, to create a supportive environment for solo female travellers. By embedding feminist insights, Sri Lanka can position itself as a pioneering destination promoting women's mobility, empowerment, and cultural exchange.

Keywords: feminist theory, gendered gaze, Solo female travellers, tourist experience, women mobility