

Exploring Gender Differences in Eco vs Cultural Tourism Experiences Among Tourist Migrants

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Choosing a destination for migrate may rely on objective knowledge, subjective knowledge, or a combination of both. Recent research in the global context showcases that 'gender differences exist' in decision-making in selecting a travel destination. In general, gender is the most basic and crucial factor in decision-making. Gender differences in ecotourism and cultural tourism manifest distinct preferences and engagement patterns across various activities. This study focused on comparing and contrasting ecotourism with cultural tourism from a gender point of view. The research aimed to explore the influence of gender differences on tourism experiences in Sri Lanka. One hundred foreign visitors who traveled to Sri Lanka were surveyed using a self-administered questionnaire with close-ended questions. Additionally, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling approach, and the data was analyzed using the relative importance index (RII). The data was gathered at the Colombo Fort railway station. Data demonstrated that men and women are expecting different things from a tourism experience. The study found that when it comes to ecotourism, women are more likely to be interested in being environmentally friendly and immersed in nature. They have a strong preference for bird watching (RII=0.88), wildlife photography (RII=0.85), hiking (RII=0.82), and. They usually get involved because they want to make absolute links with the environment and the people in their neighborhoods, and they also want to help protect the environment. On the other hand, men tend to approach ecotourism with an emphasis on discovery and adventure, favoring outdoor pursuits like hiking (RII=0.84), camping (RII=0.82), and nature trails (RII=0.8) in various natural environments. They might be doing it because they want to be physically challenged and have exciting experiences in the wild. Women often have very strong preference for historical discovery and cultural immersion in cultural tourism regarding tangible and intangible heritage. Historical and cultural interests motivate visits to historical landmarks and museums (RII=0.85). Additionally, they participate in culinary programs (RII=0.82) and traditional craft workshops (RII=0.8) for exchanging cultural experiences with locals. In contrast, males have a strong preference for cultural tourism activities such as participating in culinary programs (RII=0.68) and visiting cultural landmarks (RII=0.64). Understanding these gender dynamics is crucial for tourism stakeholders to develop inclusive and diverse offerings that cater to the varied preferences and interests of male and female travelers. By recognizing and accommodating these differences, the tourism industry can enhance visitor experiences and promote sustainable practices in both ecotourism and cultural tourism.

Keywords: cultural tourism, ecotourism, tourism gender difference, international tourists, Sri Lanka, tourism experiences