

Women tap to Tourism

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Introduction

With the introduction of tourism in Maldives during the year 1972 it has brought immense growth and popularity to Maldives. Number of resorts and guesthouses has increased rapidly and today it is the leading economic industry of the country. According to a research carried out by World Travel and Tourism Council (Turner, 2015), 40% percent of the Maldivian economy is being covered from income from the tourism sector.

Nevertheless, the number of women employed in the sector is comparatively less due to varying reasons. Some findings show that Maldivian women are the least employed demographic in the resort industry, only three percent of the total eight percentage of female was working in 2010. This directly accounts for 40 per cent of the Maldivian GDP and for 70 per cent indirectly (Alm & Johansson, 2011).

Factors limiting employment of local women in tourism industry

As per the research conducted by (Alm & Johansson, 2011) based on “Women in Tourism”, there are several challenging factors restricting local women to work in the hospitality industry. Findings reveals that culture, education, women role in family, safety, geographical features, transportation and awareness adds to the factors for preventing local women from seeking employment.

The mentality of Maldivians is that the hospitality is “western” and imposes the negative practices of consuming pork and alcohol, supporting nudity, also allowing extramarital affairs for local women.

Parents are wary of allowing their young girls work in the hospitality field believing that if we girls don't have the possibility of going home every night then it's not safe for us. In such circumstances the girls could possibly get involved romantically with someone from the workplace leading to social complications for the girl and the family.

By disparity, the local men working as resort employees are exempt from these risks. The combination of not being able to come home at night and working at a resort with a significant higher ratio of men to women is considered intimidating.

Present-day Status of women

Nevertheless, in today's era, women of Maldives have managed to overcome these challenges to some extent and have proven that they 'CAN'. As a result, working population of local women in the Maldives tourism sector has been increasing at a rapid rate. Today we have them as from General Managers to managers to supervisor to line staff in various levels of hotels across hospitality industry as well as Tourism Ministry and related authorities. Moreover, we do also have female dive instructors, Safari Owners, guesthouse owners and tour guides as females.

Women towards Tourism

While we celebrate the “progress” women have made in the industry, there still are persisting difficulties in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment in the industry.

WOB Soneva Internship Program

The programme named “Women Tap to Tourism” under WOB has taken the initiative to tackle the challenges that women face in partnership with Soneva. The programme is focused on promoting women entrepreneurship and providing vocational trainings, Social and entertainment programs for the female participants, junior host programs and special programmes for disadvantaged women.

Likewise, Luxury Resort Soneva has signed up with WOB on a partnership to work together on achieving gender quality and diversity in the workplace. The agreement was signed last month between both parties, Ranvir Bhandari, Managing Director of Operations at Soneva, and Fathimath Shafeega Founder and President of WOB.

Step into top hierarchy positions at all levels of the industry and become a part of the leading sector of the nation, helping us prosper further. This drives towards a more diverse and collective mind-set that incorporates a wider range of protective and therefore reaches more sensible national developmental decisions. WOB has made several inroads in their plight diversity and gender equality to the Maldivian workplace.

Conclusion

To conclude I desire all the women who have a curiosity in the tourism field to take part in the program and tap in to tourism to explore the opportunities the industry has to offer and to start out in society.

References

- Alm , E., & Johansson, S. (2011, May). *Women in Tourism*.
- UNWTO. (2010). *Global report on Women in Tourism*.
- Turner, R. (2015). *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2015*.