

Planning for Gender Inclusive Tourism in Kochi, Kerala, India: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies

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Abstract

Kerala situated in the southwest corner of India is known as 'God's own country', the tagline of Kerala tourism which was coined by Walter Mendez in 1989. The place is known for its mountains, hills, coastal plains, eco-tourism initiatives and beautiful backwaters. The New York Times selected Kerala as one of the 52 must-see tourism destinations in the world in 2023. According to tourism statistics, Ernakulam district has the highest tourist footfall with in Kerala and Kochi receives the highest number of both domestic and foreign tourists with in Ernakulam district. Kochi is rated as one of the best places to visit in Asia in 2024 by the British luxury travel magazine Condé Nast Traveler in 2023. Despite these accolades, questions remain about the gender-inclusivity of Kochi's tourism – both for tourists and those working in the tourism industry.

According to the 2011 census¹, the male work participation ratio is 57.12% in the Kochi corporation and 56.39% in the Ernakulam district, while the female work participation ratio in Ernakulam and Kochi is significantly lower, at 20.21% and 19.46% respectively. Among the female workforce, 45% do not commute to work, preferring to work near their homes or at home, primarily due to their dual roles at home and in the workplace. Also, women earn just half of what men earn among casual laborers in Kerala, 45.29% wage gap in urban areas and 50.47% wage gap in rural Kerala. These data indicate a significant gender disparity in Kochi and within Kerala. Kochi as a place also faces challenges with cleaner streets and better roads, as waste accumulation is commonly seen on the roads and beaches. Recent incidents highlight this issue, with Russian tourists cleaning Fort Kochi Beach before taking a dip in its unclean waters.

My research aims to enhance gender inclusivity in Kochi – both in the tourism industry and for tourists through targeted planning strategies and proposals. It examines gender inclusivity in Kochi's tourism industry by analyzing and identifying challenges faced by women. The study also assesses Kochi's tourism policies, planning regulations and stakeholder engagement both at state and national levels to identify key challenges and issues related to gender inclusivity. The study employed various methods to evaluate gender statistics in the tourism industry based on gender diversity rates in leadership, employment, entrepreneurship and economic participation of women in the tourism sector. Furthermore, a detailed assessment is conducted at two selected tourist locations in Kochi – Fort Kochi and Mattancherry area, considering cultural nuances and regional variations. These tourist spots were evaluated based on six principles of gender inclusivity, culminating in the calculation of a Gender Inclusivity Index. The paper advocates for strategies and recommendations to enhance gender inclusivity in the tourism sector through targeted planning proposals, policies and stakeholder engagement. The research contributes to policy development and the practical implementation of making tourist spots in Kochi gender inclusive. It emphasizes the need for collaboration between governments, the tourism industry stakeholders, tourists and local communities, thereby strengthening Kochi's position as a must-visit destination.

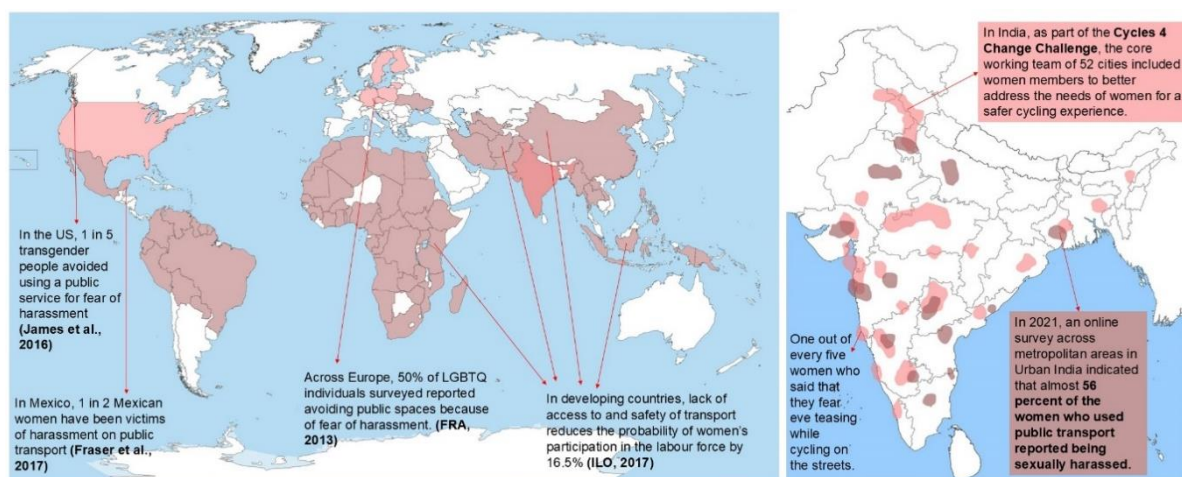
1 The last census in India was in 2011 and is taken into consideration in the research paper

Keywords*Gender, Inclusivity, Tourism Industry, Tourists***1. Travel and Tourism****1.1 A Global Perspective**

Every day, we travel for our needs: to the office, to buy daily necessities, and for pleasure to gain new experiences, making it an integral part of our life. Different people have different reasons for traveling; their travel patterns, preferences and concerns vary. In earlier times, travel was largely driven by necessity – for work, in search of better living conditions or food. But today, travel is predominantly driven by the desire for experiential enrichment rather than fulfilling mere necessity. Travelers want unique experiences that allow them to immerse themselves in local cultures and distinct environments.

India, a country so diverse – geographically, spiritually and experientially, makes the place a traveller's paradise. It also makes traveller's wonder whether traveling to India is safe. Like so many things about India, the country's size and diversity make it hard to provide a uniform answer. India is generally safe, but it depends on where you go, what you do and how you get from one place to another.

India is ranked 39th among 119 countries, according to the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024 report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF). In 2024, the travel and tourism sector in India contributed around 9.1 percent to the country's total GDP. This amounted to over 11.10 trillion Indian rupees and represented an increase of nearly 12.1 percent compared to the previous year². While its contribution to economic and social development is widely acknowledged, over the years little attention has been paid to how the tourism industry benefits women and men, as well as to the relationship between tourism and gender equality. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for women, which makes the gender equality perspective highly relevant.

1.2 The current state of gender inclusivity in global and indian tourism

Figur 1: Spatial Distribution of gender-related issues in the global and Indian scenarios. Source: By Author

The spatial distribution of gender-related issues in the global and Indian scenarios (Fig. 1) is taken into consideration. The third most significant motivator for hate crime incidents is sexual orientation. (Marzullo et al, 2009). A study conducted by UN Women, 2016 states that 35% of women have experienced physical

and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, 7.2% by a non-intimate partner³. UN Women reports that 1 in 3 women face some kind of sexual assault at least once in their lifetime⁴. The statistic in India seems to be extremely high. As part of the Cycles 4 Change Challenge in India, the core working teams of 52 cities incorporated female members to enhance the understanding of women's requirements for a safer cycling environment. The perception survey revealed a significant concern, with one in every five women expressing fear of eve-teasing while cycling on the streets. In 2021, an online survey across metropolitan areas in Urban India indicated that almost 56 percent of the women who used public transport reported being sexually harassed. All these statistics indicate a deficiency in gender-inclusive infrastructure and informed human resources at tourist destinations and throughout various aspects of tourism.

2.3 Case studies and best practices

Best practices were analyzed in different aspects of gender-inclusive tourism planning. In terms of accessibility, Bhuvaneshwar is gathering gender-disaggregated ticket data for evidence-based decision making. Safety audits and perception surveys were conducted on the transport infrastructure to enhance customer experience and gender inclusivity. The E-ride initiative employs exclusively women and transgender drivers. In London, initiative called Transport for London (TfL) utilizes big data analytics and conduct perception surveys to examine travel patterns and the challenges encountered by users across various communities. Implementing accessible bus stops, clearer maps, a diverse transportation workforce, prioritized seating for the elderly and women, offering real-time bus schedule updates, and designated entry doors for other vulnerable riders and pregnant women on buses represent some of their exemplary initiatives. In the City of Bolzano, Italy, Gender Task forces, Safety audits, and Walkability assessments were conducted. Pink taxis (Taxi Rosa) offer a specialized taxi service exclusively for women during the evening and night hours, providing discounted rates when public transportation is less available. Pink Parking (Parcheggi Rosa) is reserved for women around the city at easily accessible, well-lit, and near-exit garages. In terms of communications and ICT, Bogota has the SafetiPin App allows women to record where they perceive safety or insecurity within the city. Training for transit staff on women's safety concerns and plainclothes officers were implemented to visibly arrest people caught sexually harassing women on public transit. In the Khayelitsha area of Cape Town, participatory design was implemented. Women's participation was key to project design and implementation, providing high-quality overhead lighting and easy-to-maintain materials contributed to a 30% increase in pedestrian activity. In Barcelona, Spain, it serves as a notable model for integrating the perspectives of LGBT people into municipal planning. They have dedicated LGBT Resource Centers offering centralized information and guidance, specialized services, increased LGBT recognition and visibility, and public space monitoring programs to increase safety and perceptions of safety. In Vienna, Austria, the local women's commission organized night walks within an inner district to pinpoint areas of concern, resulting in enhancements such as wider sidewalks, improved lighting and ramps to enhance accessibility for people with wheelchairs and strollers⁵. They have a "Fair Shared City" initiative to highlight the importance of equality. A fairness check was created to ensure different user group's needs are addressed. Implementing gender-inclusive tourism planning best practices has fostered a safe and secure environment for both residents and tourists, ensuring that the diverse needs and perspectives of all individuals are considered in the development and management of the destination.

Similarly, various international and Indian case studies were also analysed for an inclusive tourism industry. The best practices revealed a variety of strategies and initiatives that aimed at promoting gender equality and women empowerment within tourism industry from leadership and decision making to

³ WHO, 2013

⁴ United Nations Women

⁵ World Bank, Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning Design

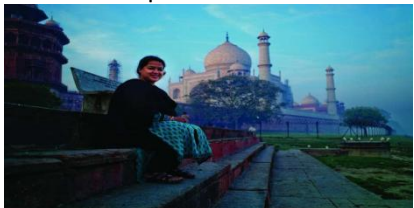
entrepreneurship, education and community engagement (Table 1). These range from comprehensive policy frameworks to localised community driven efforts.

- **Leadership and Decision-Making:** The Leadership Task Force for Women's Empowerment in African Tourism focuses on integrating gender issues into African tourism strategies, and improving career opportunities for women in the sector and promoting female role models. Peak DMC, India, a destination management company has implemented a robust mentoring system, a zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct, and flexible scheduling resulting in a significant increase in female tour leaders in tourism sector.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Ride 4 a Woman, Uganda is a non-governmental organisation that empowers local women struggling with poverty, HIV and domestic violence through skill development and income-generating activities. Despite several challenges, it has made significant strides in boosting women's economic independence through starting their own businesses in sewing, basket weaving, and running homestays. Also, the European Union Policies have the European Union's Small Business Act, 2008 focuses on improving access to finance for women, prioritising work-life balance, expanding entrepreneurial networks and supporting women-led enterprises in tourism sector. The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, aim of increasing the share of women-led companies, encourages members to collect sex-disaggregated data and produce annual updates on the state of women entrepreneurs nationally⁶.
- **Education and Training:** Gender Equality in Tourism Plan of the province of Valencia, Spain is a strong example of the collaboration needed to integrate a gender perspective in tourism policy. The training covered a variety of topics – from an introduction to gender issues, gender equality and tourism at the global and local levels.
- **Community Engagement:** Ride 4 a Woman works with and for women in Uganda. It is a non-governmental organisation focusing on community development beyond entrepreneurship. The NGO addresses gender-based violence and provide micro-loans, training, all helps into economic empowerment of women while building their self-confidence and networking helps in psychological empowerment.

Table 0-1: International and National Best Practices

Aspect	Best Practice	Key Elements	Impact
Leadership & Decision-Making	Leadership Task Force for Women's Empowerment in African Tourism	• Integration of Gender issues • Role models • Career opportunities	Promoted women's leadership in African tourism strategies 

6 UNWTO Global Report on Women in Tourism, Second Edition, 2024

	Peak DMC, India	• Mentoring system • Flexible scheduling • Zero-tolerance policy on harassment	700% increase in female tour leaders, leading in female representation 
Entrepreneurship	Ride 4 a Woman, Uganda	• Skills training, • Income-generating activities • Micro-loans	Empowered 300 women, improved economic independence 
	EU Policies (Small Business Act, Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan)	• Access to finance • Entrepreneurial networks • Work-life balance • Increasing the share of women-led companies • Encourages members to collect sex-disaggregated data	Supported women-led enterprises, improved work-life balance 
Education & Training	Gender Equality in Tourism Plan, Valencia	• Training for public sector workers • Gender-focused curriculum	Advanced gender equality in tourism, despite challenges with LGBT integration 
Community Engagement	Ride 4 a Woman, Uganda	• Domestic violence shelter • Gender-based violence training, • Cultural activities	Enhanced women's self-confidence, addressed community-specific challenges 

Source: UNWTO Global Report on Women in Tourism (SECOND EDITION)

3. Tourism Landscape: India

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), India ranked 24th in the world for international tourist arrivals (ITAs) in 2023, with an increase of 31.9% in ITAs from 2022 to 2023. In 2024, India recorded 2,509 million domestic visits. The Table 1 explains the travel and tourism rankings of India.

Table 0-1: Travel and Tourism rankings of India

Year	Ranking	Rank	Total Countries	Criteria
2024	Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI)	39th	119	Based on five main sub-index or parameters: Enabling Environment, Travel and Tourism Policy and Enabling conditions, Infrastructure, Travel and Tourism Demand Drivers, and Travel and Tourism Sustainability sub - index.
2024	Quality of Life Index by Numbeo	65th	142	Safety Index, Health Care Index, Cost of Living Index, Purchasing Power Index, Property Price to Income Ratio, Traffic Commute Time Index, Pollution Index, Climate Index derived from crowdsourced data
2023	Global Peace Index	126th	163	Based on India's high level of militarization, nuclear capabilities, and internal conflicts
2023	Global Finance magazine	91st	134	Rating system built around healthcare infrastructure and economic strength
2022	World's Safest Countries rankings produced by Berkshire Hathaway Travel Protection	37th	42	They have tracked India's relative safety for four years. Ranking based on safety among the most popular countries for travellers.

Source: World Economic Forum, Numbeo, Global Finance magazine, Berkshire Hathaway Travel Protection

3.2 Kerala: A Global Tourism Powerhouse

Kerala has gained significant recognition in the global tourism sector within India. Tourism in Kerala constitutes 10% of Kerala's GDP. It also contributes to 23.5% to the total employment in the state. Table 1 below show the rankings and recognitions of Kerala in tourism sector.

Table 0-1: Travel and Tourism rankings of Kerala

Year	Ranking	Rank
2023	The New York Times	Kerala as one of the 52 must-see tourism destinations in the world
2022	Time magazine	Kerala among 50 'extraordinary destinations' across the globe to explore in 2022
2019	CNN Travel	19 best places to visit in 2019
2012	Travel and Leisure Magazine	Kerala among "One of the 100 great trips for the 21st century"

Source: The New York Times, Time magazine, CNN Travel, Travel and Leisure Magazine

According to district-wise tourist arrival data 2019, Ernakulam district had the highest footfall of both domestic and foreign tourist arrivals⁷. Destination-wise tourist arrival data from 2018 shows that Kochi city and Fort Kochi had the highest number of tourist footfall in Ernakulam district⁸.

Table 1- 1: Travel and Tourism rankings of Kochi

Year	Ranking	Rank
2023	The British Luxury travel magazine Condé Nast Traveler	Kochi as one of the best places to go in Asia in 2024.
2019	Lonely Planet	Kochi among the top 10 cities to visit in 2020
2018	Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)	Kochi as a World tour destination in Kerala

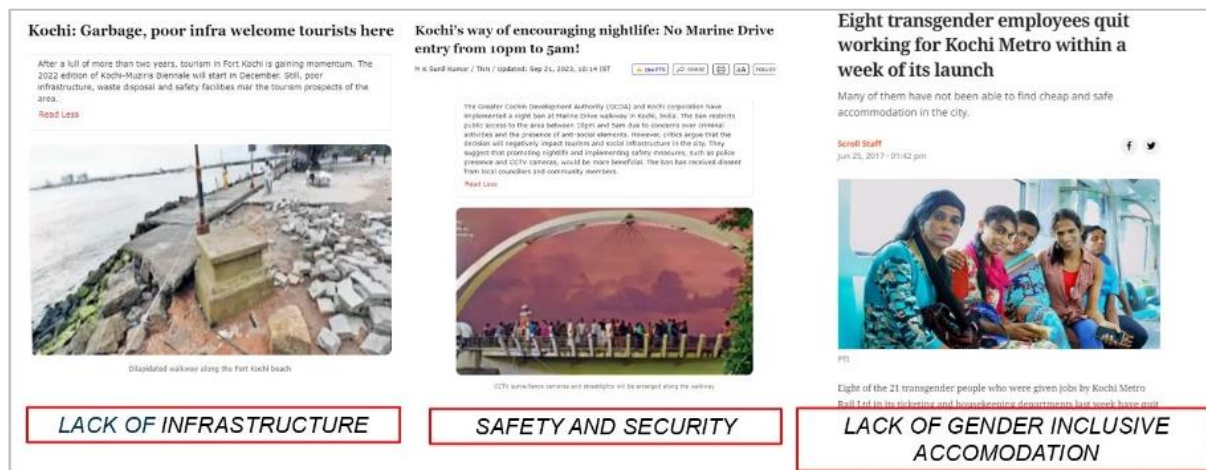
⁷ District wise Tourist Arrival 2019

⁸ Destination wise Tourist Arrival in Ernakulam District 2018

2015	World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) Council	Kochi selected as the first city in India to join the Beijing-headquartered World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) Council
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Source: Condé Nast Traveler, Lonely Planet, Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR), World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) Council

Despite all these rankings, questions remain about the gender inclusivity of Kochi's tourism sector. Recent newspaper reports suggest there are deficiencies in Kochi's tourism offerings.



Figur 2: Newspaper clippings highlighting the lack of infrastructure and inclusive measures in Kochi for both residents and tourists. Source: Media

Consequently, there exists a pressing need for research within the tourism sector on gender inclusivity in Kochi.

3.4 Research Methodology

The research begins with an extensive background study, covering four key areas: understanding the concepts of gender, inclusivity and tourism, analysing the tourism policies, schemes, guidelines and therefore gender inclusive planning for tourism development in a city, assessing current gender issues in planning for gender inclusive tourism with special reference to space, infrastructure and human resources and finally exploring good practices on policy and regulatory framework for gender inclusive tourism in Indian and International case studies. The background study culminates with the preparation of a conceptual framework for both tourism industry and for tourists and tourist spots. To better understand Kochi's tourism scenario, both primary and secondary data collection methods were employed. The study examines gender inclusivity in Kochi's tourism industry by analyzing and identifying challenges faced by women. The study also assesses Kochi's tourism policies, planning regulations and stakeholder engagement both at state and national levels to identify key challenges and issues related to gender inclusivity. The study employs various methods to evaluate gender statistics in the tourism industry based on gender diversity rates in leadership, employment, entrepreneurship and economic participation of women in the tourism sector. Furthermore, a detailed assessment is conducted at two selected tourist locations in Kochi – Fort Kochi and Mattancherry area, considering cultural nuances and regional variations. These tourist spots are evaluated based on six principles of gender inclusivity, culminating in the calculation of a Gender Inclusivity Index. This paper advocates for strategies and recommendations to enhance gender inclusivity in the tourism sector through targeted planning proposals, policies and stakeholder engagement. The research contributes to policy development and the practical implementation of making tourist spots in Kochi gender inclusive. The research emphasizes the need for collaboration between governments, its stakeholders, tourism industry, tourists and local communities, thereby strengthening Kochi's position as a must-visit destination.

4. Kochi

Kochi is situated on the southwest coast of India, in the southern state of Kerala, is known for its cultural diversity. According to 2011 census, Kochi is the only first-order urban agglomeration in the state, with a population of 602,046, and with 296,949 males and 305,097 females⁹. With an area of 94.88 square kilometers, Kochi has a population density of 6,346 persons per square kilometer. Kochi had a sex ratio of 1,030 females per 1,000 males. The overall literacy rate is 97.36%, with a female literacy rate of 94.72%. While the workforce participation ratio shows a significant gender disparity, with 19.46% for females compared to 57.12% for males¹⁰.

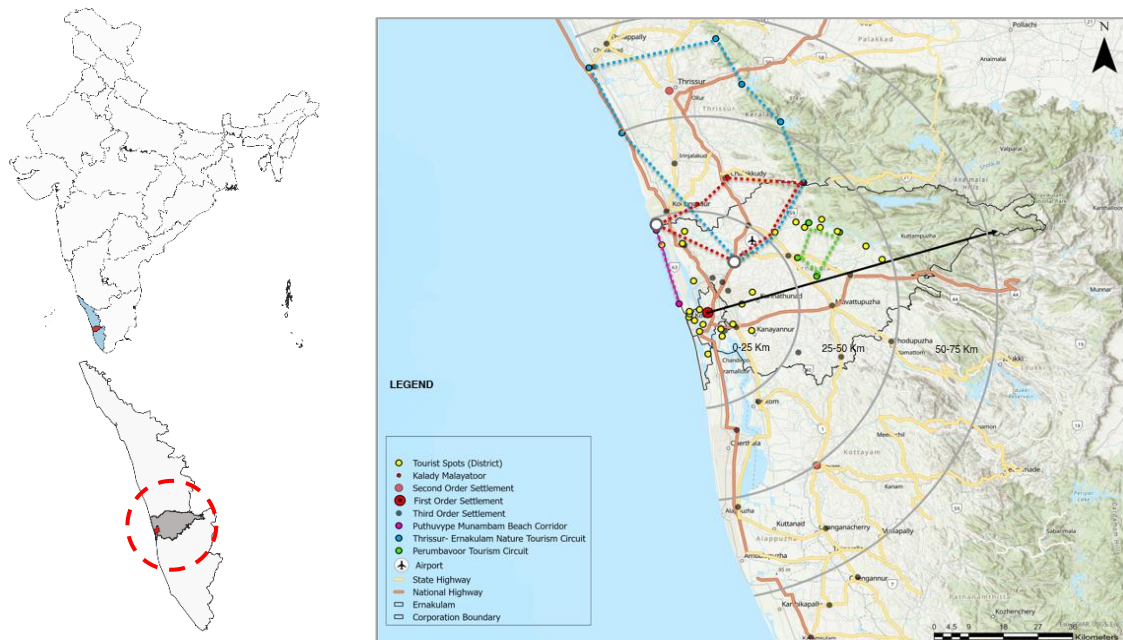


Figure 1: Regional Setting of Kochi City and Ernakulam District Tourism map. Source: Tourism Department

4.2 Tourism Significance

Fort Kochi is considered as the most visited tourism destination in the state. Kochi city though doesn't have designated tourist circuits, but it acts as a base for five regional tourism circuits that are spread across Ernakulam district and are interconnected to tourist attractions in neighboring districts.

4.3 Transportation Network

Kochi is well connected by air, road, rail, metro, and water. The Cochin International Airport (CIAL), the largest and busiest airport in Kerala, is situated 28 km north of Kochi city. Kochi acts as a major node in the North - South Corridor of the National Highway (NH) system. The city is connected by NH-66, NH-544, NH-85, NH-966B, NH-966A, State highways (SH)-15, SH-41, SH 63, and SH 66. Kochi has two major railway stations within its corporation limits: Ernakulam Junction and Ernakulam Town. Kochi Metro Rail Limited currently has 21 stations in phase 1, out of which 12 stations are within Kochi city. There are passenger boat jetties and the Water Metro project is developing 15 identified routes connecting 10 islands along a network that spans 78 km, plying to 38 jetties. Despite this comprehensive network connectivity, there is a lack of integration among the different modes of transport, making it challenging for tourists to navigate easily.

⁹ The last census in India was in 2011 and is taken into consideration in the research paper

¹⁰ Master plan for Kochi Municipal Corporation Area-2040

4.4 Cultural Significance

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is India's first international contemporary art biennial, primarily held in Fort Kochi's historic quarters across nine venues. The inaugural 2012 edition showcased works from 89 artists representing 23 countries. The 2018 statistics revealed significant economic impacts: 60% of Biennale visitors were new to Kerala, local traders experienced a 50% increase in business, and both inbound tour operators and the hospitality sector saw rising demand.

5. Status of Gender Inclusivity in Kochi's Tourism Industry Sector

5.1 Entrepreneurial Landscape

Gender-responsive policies and frameworks are important for empowering women in Tourism industry. Policies promoting entrepreneurship in India and Kerala from 1988 to 2023 were analysed, showing progress in promoting women entrepreneurs. To better understand this progress, a few specific schemes were examined.

The gender-wise distribution of beneficiaries in the Assistance Scheme for Handicrafts Artisans (ASHA) from 2018 to 2023 shows 67% female and 33% male beneficiaries. However, there have been only three beneficiaries of the ASHA Scheme in Ernakulam over the past five years (2018-2023), despite the abundance of handicraft units and artisans. The low number of beneficiaries in Ernakulam could be attributed to several reasons: lack of awareness about the ASHA scheme, stringent eligibility criteria, challenges in accessing the scheme, and inadequate implementation and monitoring.

Women's tourism entrepreneurship is often held back by lack of access to technology, information, business skills, education, and training. Additionally, markets for women's tourism products are often small and insufficiently diversified. As these sectors are characterized by limited growth, women entrepreneurs are unable to grow from micro and small enterprises into medium-sized or large productive businesses. Consequently, women entrepreneurs are concentrated in low-productivity and informal sectors. The graph below shows the participation of male and female employees in different job sectors under the Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), data from 2018 to 2023.

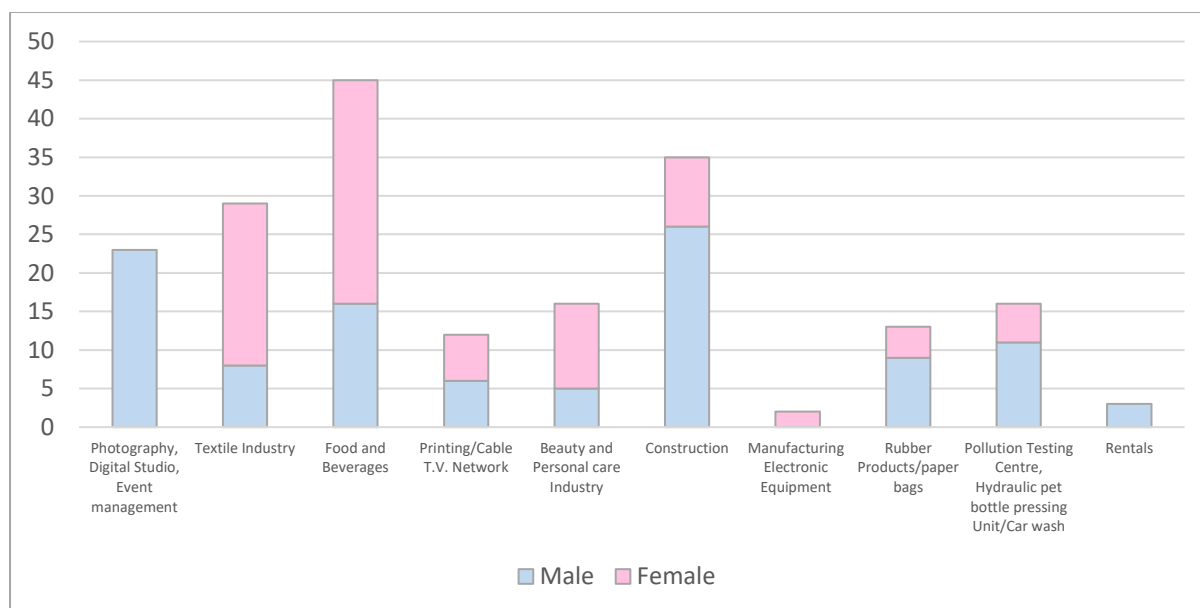
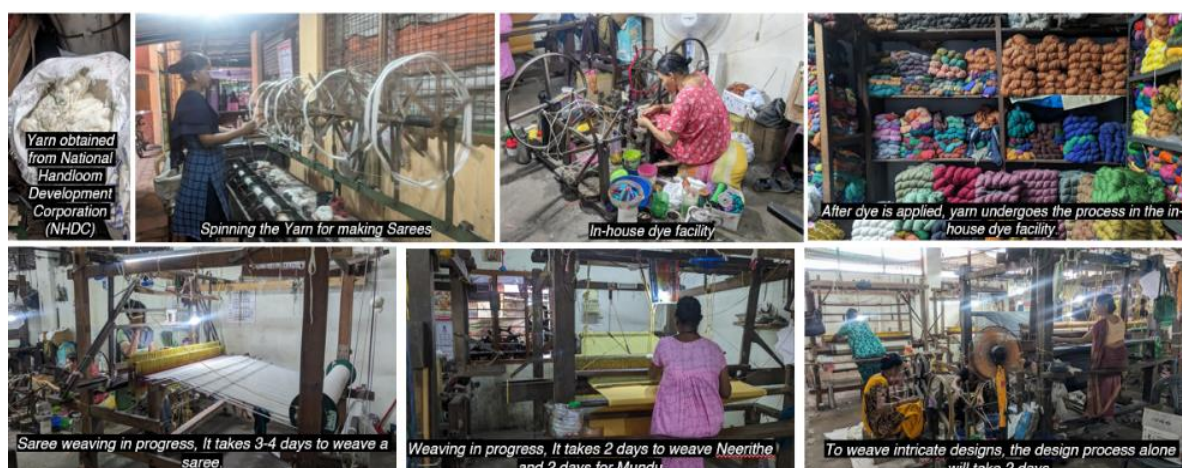


Figure 2: Empowering women: a graphical representation of Kochi's diverse entrepreneurial landscape – PMEGP Scheme. Source: Industries Department



Figur 3: Empowering Women in Kochi's Tourism Sector. Source: By Author

5.2 Community Engagement

Community-based programs by Kudumbashree¹¹ have been crucial in empowering women in Kochi through training and skill development, providing loans, and business support, though there are gaps persisting in tribal and coastal areas. Initiatives such as the Snehitha Calling Bell Weekly Celebration¹² and the Sthreepaksha Navakeralam campaign¹³ have seen high female participation, contributing to both economic and psychological empowerment of women¹⁴. However, broader outreach is needed to include underrepresented and gender diverse groups. Gender diversity in these programs is strong, with Snehitha Calling Bell and DDU GKY¹⁵ classes achieving 66% and 61% diversity rates, respectively, demonstrating effective gender inclusion in community engagement¹⁶.

5.3 Employment Sectors

Kochi's tourism sector shows significant gender disparities in employment, with women notably underrepresented in various areas. Male dominance is evident in transport services like taxis and auto-rickshaws, while female participation remains minimal. The Kochi Metro Rail Limited (KMRL) is an exception, with an 80% female workforce, in contrast to sectors like Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), where women's participation is much lower. The KSRTC opened the position of conductors and drivers for women candidates in 1992. But till 2023, only 5 women KSRTC Drivers are there in Kerala. There is a decreasing trend of women's participation within the transport sector which could be attributed to unsafe working conditions, operational tiredness, differing working hours and lack of gender inclusive infrastructure within organizations.

Women are also underrepresented as hosts in accommodation, largely due to societal and safety concerns. While KMRL shows good gender diversity, with an 80% diversity rate, other sectors like Auto Drivers, Tour

¹¹ Poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala.

¹² The scheme aims to ensure the protection and security of individuals living alone or in isolated places

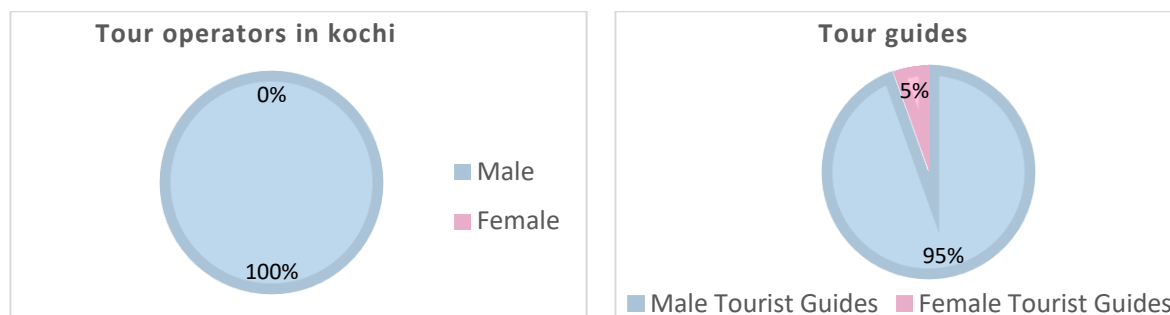
¹³ The scheme aims to address the issues of dowry and oppression of women

¹⁴ Kudumbashree, Ernakulam

¹⁵ The scheme focuses on providing vocational training, capacity building, and employment-related skills to empower beneficiaries for better livelihood opportunities.

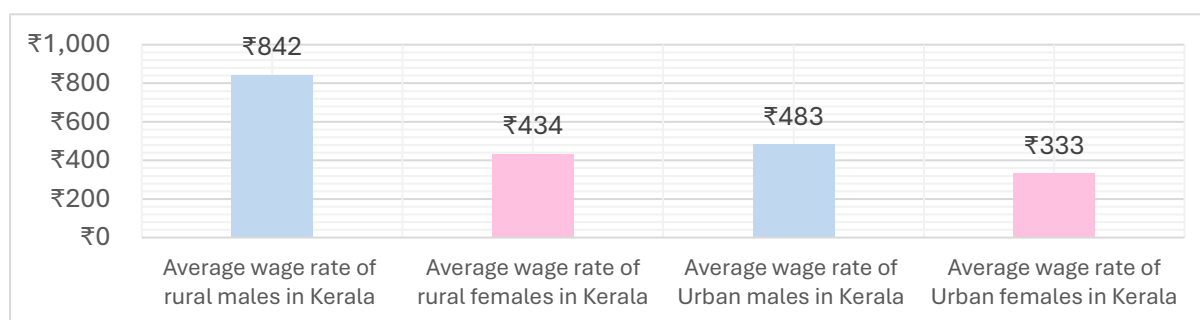
¹⁶ Kudumbashree, Ernakulam

Operators, Tour guides and Women Bartenders have poor representation, some with 0% diversity, highlighting the need for greater efforts to achieve gender parity in tourism employment.¹⁷



Source: India Tourism Kochi

Kochi exhibits gender disparities in workforce participation, with males at 57.12% and females at 19.46%. Among women workers, 45% prefer working near home or at home, primarily due to their dual responsibilities. Additionally, women in casual labour face a 46% wage gap compared to men¹⁸.



Figur 4: Gender Pay Gap in Kerala 2023. Source: National Statistical Office Survey

5.4 Education and Training

Kerala's tourism sector benefits from strong educational institutions like the Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) and Food Craft Institutes (FCIs), which offer specialized training and skill development. However, programs like the Yuve Weave Training Scheme reveal a significant gender imbalance, with predominantly female participants. This trend of high female enrollment highlights the need to address gender imbalances in training and promote diverse representation in skill development programs for a more inclusive tourism workforce (Figure 5). While training and education opportunities are available, the ownership distribution index in industries based on the Prime Minister Employment

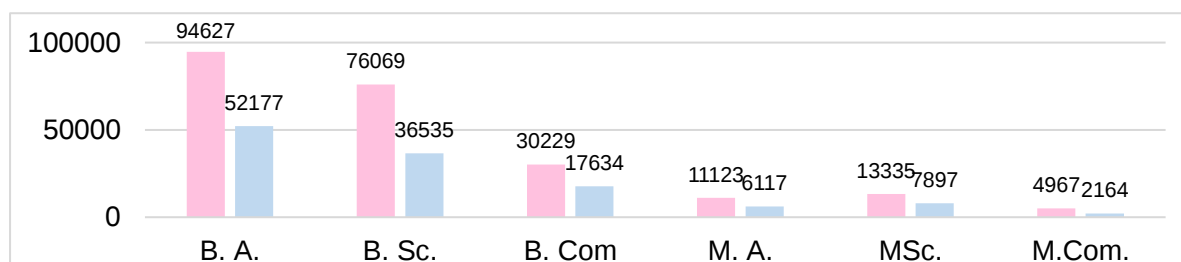


Figure 3: Enrollment of students in Arts and Science Colleges in Number. Source: Directorate of Collegiate Education

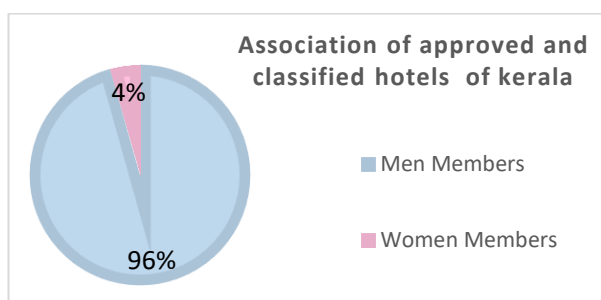
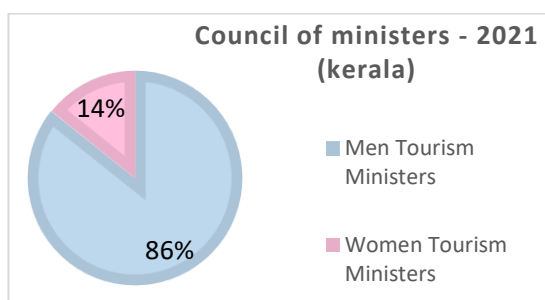
¹⁷ Gender-Sensitive Reforms in Public Transport, A Case of Kerala, 2021

¹⁸ National Statistical Office Survey

Generation Programme (PMEGP) shows moderate gender diversity, indicating very few female ownership but also highlighting a gap in translating these skills into ownership roles, leaving room for more balanced distribution.

5.5 Leadership, Policy, and Decision-Making

Leadership, policy, and decision-making in Kochi's tourism sector show significant gender disparities. Gender representation in leadership roles within this sector is notably low. Historical data reveals that no women have held ministerial positions related to tourism in Kerala over the past 50 years¹⁹. As of 2021, only 14% of government ministers in Kerala were women; their most commonly held portfolios are Health, Woman and Child Development, Higher Education and Social Justice, and Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development. This stark underrepresentation underscores systemic barriers and gender discrimination, emphasizing the need for policies that promote greater female leadership and decision-making in the sector. The Association of Approved and Classified Hotels of Kerala has only 4% representation of women among its committee members (2021-2022)²⁰. Gender diversity in leadership roles remains poor, with only 17% of women representation on the Kerala Tourism Infrastructure Limited (KTIL) Board of Directors. The tourism association for travel operators has zero representation of women in leadership positions and 9% on the Kerala Travel Mart Society's Managing Committee, indicating substantial gender disparity in decision-making positions²¹.



Source: Information and Public Relations Department , Website of Association of Approved and Classified hotels of Kerala

Tabel 1: : Gender Diversity Rates Across Various Sectors in Kerala's Tourism and Related Industries

ASPECTS	INDEX	SECTOR	SUBSECTOR	GENDER DIVERSITY RATE (Out of 100)		
				Percentage	Gender Component	Gradation as per range
Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship Equality Index	Schemes supporting Entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurship Support Scheme	57%		Moderate
			Assistance Scheme for Handicrafts Artisans (ASHA)	67%		Good

¹⁹ Information and Public Relations Department

²⁰ Website of Travel Operators Association Kerala

²¹ Website of Kerala Tourism Infrastructure Limited

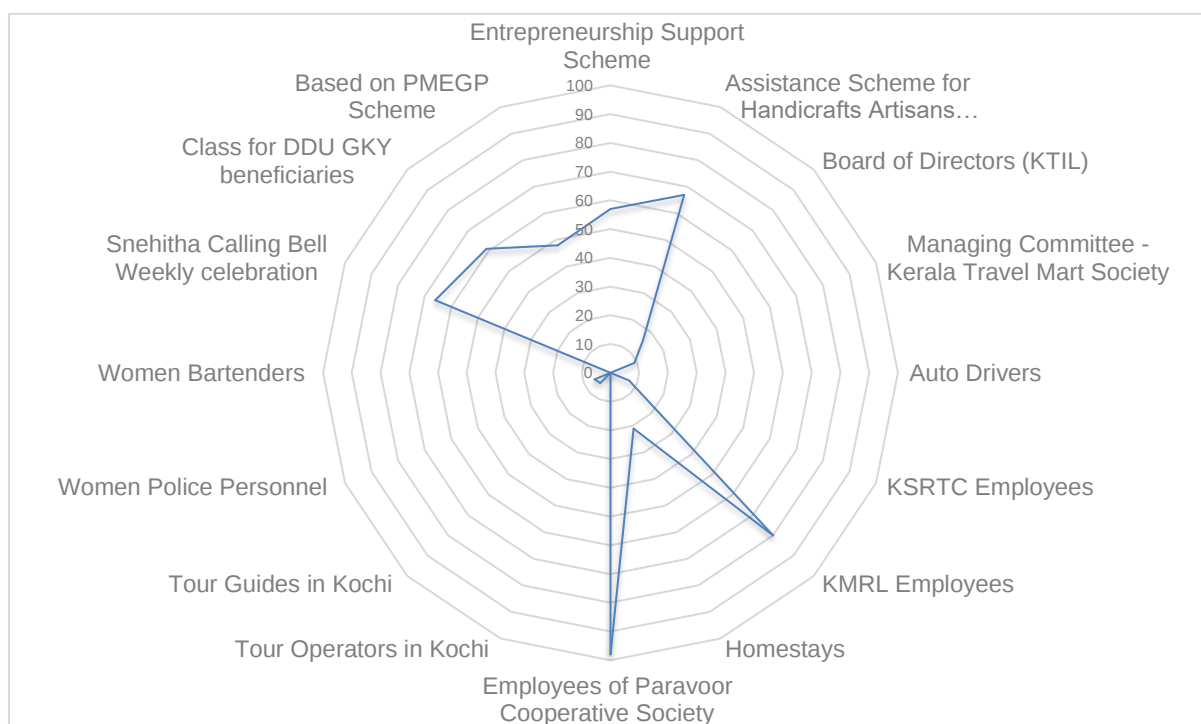
Leadership, Policy and Decision-Making	Leadership Representation Index	Organisations under Government of Kerala	Board of Directors (KTIL)	16%		Poor
			Managing Committee - Kerala Travel Mart Society	9%		Poor
Employment	Representation Index	Travel and Transportation	Auto Drivers	0%		Poor
			KSRTC Employees	7%		Poor
			KMRL Employees	80%		Good
		Accommodation and Food Services	Homestays	21%		Poor
			Employees of Paravoor Cooperative Society	98%		Good
		Tour Operators	Tour Operators in Kochi	0%		Poor
		Tour Guides	Tour Guides in Kochi	5%		Poor
		Safety and Security	Women Police Personnel	6%		Poor
		Hospitality Industry	Women Bartenders	0%		Poor
Community Engagement	Community Engagement Index	Gender Programmes by Kudumba shree	Snehitha Calling Bell Weekly celebration	66%		Good
			Class for DDU GKY beneficiaries	61%		Good
Economic participation	Ownership Distribution Index	Industries	Based on PMEGP Scheme	48%		Moderate

Index

	Female		Male		Good (>66%)		Moderate (34 -66%)		Poor (<33%)
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Source: By Author

The analysis reveals significant disparities in gender diversity across Kochi's tourism industry and related sectors. While certain entrepreneurship schemes and community engagement programs show promising gender diversity, leadership representation remains notably low, with women severely underrepresented in key decision-making roles. Employment representation is highly variable, ranging from complete absence in some subsectors to near-total female participation in others, highlighting an inconsistent approach to gender inclusivity in employment across the industry. Gender-sensitive policies and frameworks are vital for empowering women in Kochi's tourism sector.



Figur 5: Women in Tourism Industry in Kochi – Current Scenario. Source: By Author

6. Planning for Gender Inclusive Tourism in Kochi: An Analysis of Policies, Regulations, and Stakeholder Engagement

6.1 Tourism Policies and Their Evolution

Kochi's tourism policies have evolved significantly since the 1970s, reflecting a growing awareness of the sector's importance and the need for inclusive development. The Tourism Development programme established in 1976 marked the beginning of organized tourism planning in the region. Subsequent policies, such as the First Tourism Policy in 1995, emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships. The Kerala Tourism Vision 2025 Strategy Document, introduced in 2000, focused on sustainable tourism development. Recent policies have shown an increased focus on gender inclusivity and social responsibility. The Kerala Tourism Policy of 2012 aimed to deliver a quality visitor experience while being sensitive to the natural environment and local communities. The 2016 Green Carpet Initiative and the 2023 Kerala Responsible Tourism Policy demonstrate a commitment to inclusive social experience and equitable tourism development.

To provide inclusive and accessible transportation services for tourists, in 2014, She-Taxi initiative was introduced by the Kerala State Women's Development Corporation. But this initiative ceased its operations

in 2018 due to financial constraints faced by many women. To provide accessible accommodation facilities, Ente Koodu (My Nest) project was started in 2015, where women and children can avail free night shelter facilities from 5pm to 7 am. In 2022, the idea of 'She Lodge' was introduced to provide safe, affordable lodging in Kochi for traveling women started by the Kochi Municipal Corporation. But She Lodge has a ban on senior women over 60 years old, as incidents have occurred where they are abandoned at She Lodge by their children. This limits senior women tourists' access to the facility. In 1973, pink police patrol and pink police control room were introduced under Kerala Police and CCTV cameras were installed. But it was found that the number of Pink Police patrols deployed is found to be inadequate according to the safety audit of streets conducted by SafetiPin in 2017.

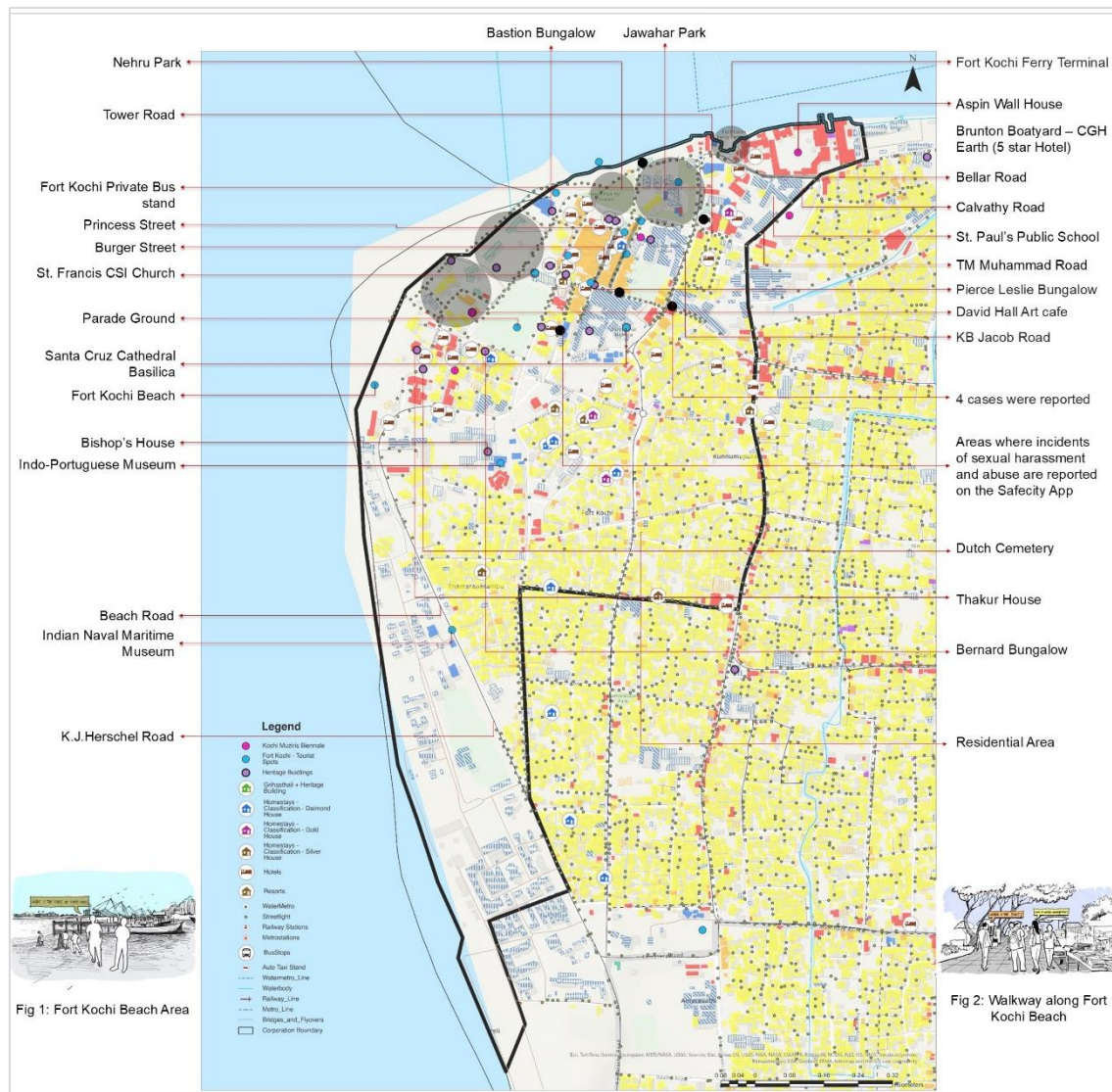
While there are various policies aimed at promoting gender inclusivity, their effective implementation remains a challenge. Crime data indicates that women's safety in public spaces continues to be a significant issue, potentially deterring female tourists²². The complex institutional framework involving multiple agencies at different government levels also leads to coordination challenges in policy implementation.

7. Assessing Gender Inclusivity in Kochi's Tourism: A Focused Study on Two Tourist Destinations

The early settlements of Kochi originated in the Fort Kochi and Mattancherry areas. These regions are distinguished by their historic buildings, both tangible and intangible heritage, and their unique cultural significance.

Fort Kochi, a historic urban settlement in Kerala has long been a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors with its rich cultural heritage and picturesque coastal setting. It serves as the primary hub for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Fort Kochi also hosts a diverse range of tourism activities, encompassing heritage walks, open street festivities, and various other festivals. While Mattancherry presents a tightly woven urban fabric composed of settlement patterns from various communities of the Indian subcontinent. The area boasts significant historical landmarks, including the Jew Town with its iconic Clock Tower, the Cutchi Memons Hanafi Masjid, and the Mattancherry Palace. These sites reflect the area's multicultural heritage and serve as key attractions for tourists.

²² Crime in India-Github



Figur 6: Map of Fort Kochi. Source: Author

Tourist surveys, infrastructure assessments at tourist spots, availability and quality of public amenities and safety analysis were conducted to obtain a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by tourists at Fort Kochi and Mattancherry.

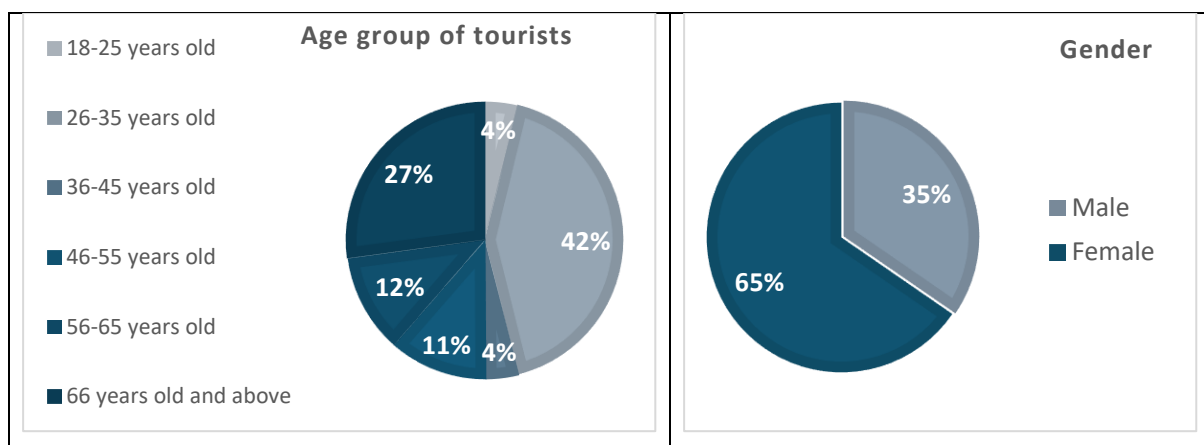


Figure 4: Based on Tourist Survey Source: By Author

The tourist survey employed a random sampling approach to ensure a diverse and representative sample of visitors, with a sample size of 25. The survey spanned 7 days. The tourist demographic in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry is diverse, with visitors spanning various age groups and nationalities. According to the tourist survey, majority of the tourists falls within the age group of 26-35 years, accounting for 42% of tourists, followed by 4% of tourists within the age group of 36-45 years indicating a significant presence of young to middle-aged adults.

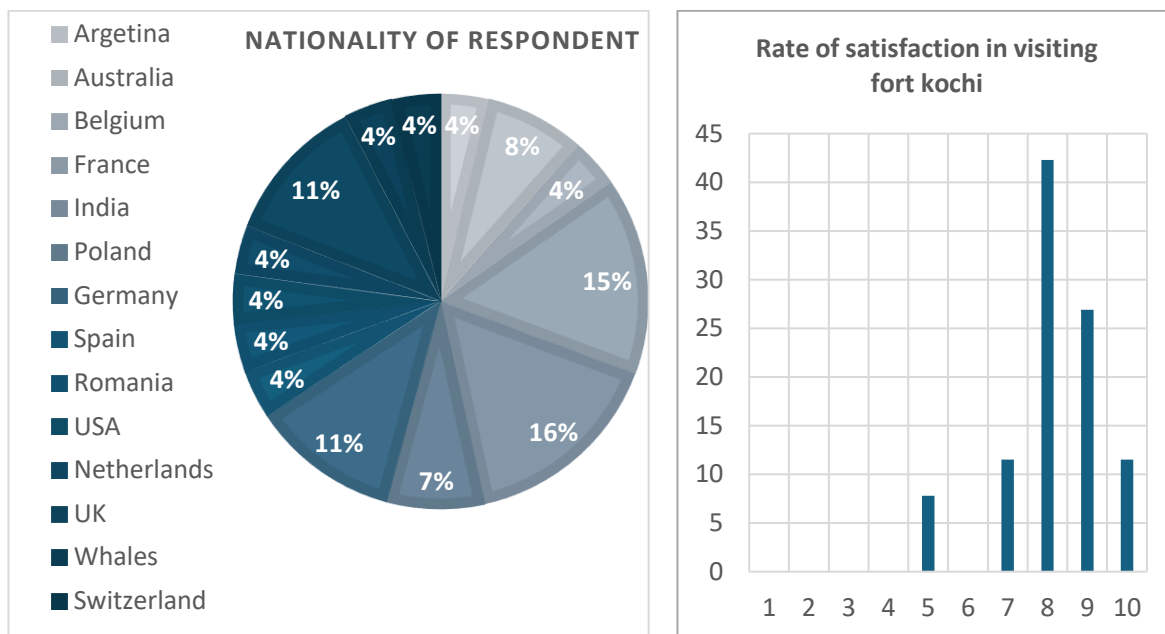
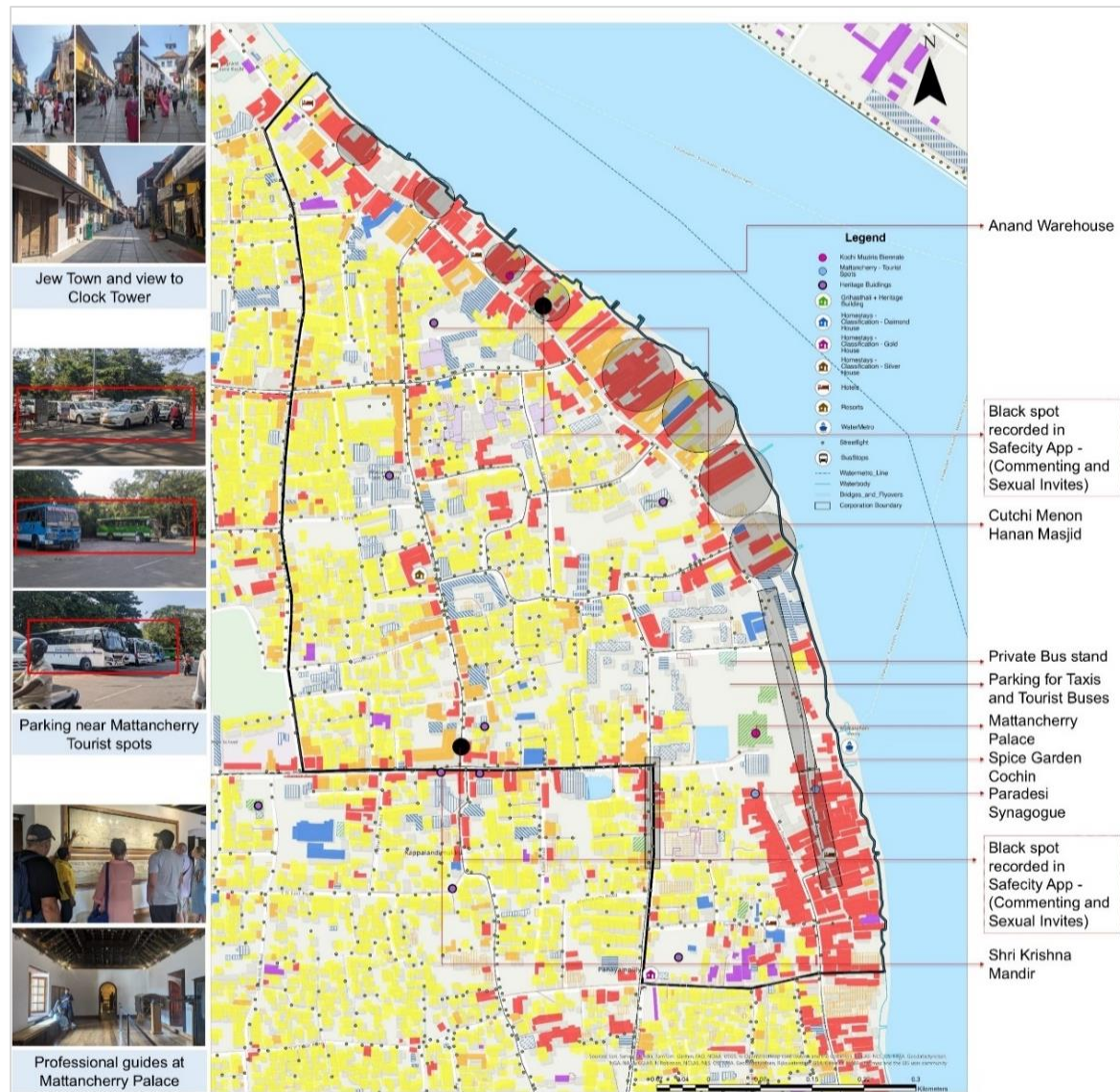


Figure 5: Based on Tourist Survey Source: By Author

In terms of nationality, the survey reveals a broad international appeal. India leads with 16% of tourists, followed by France at 15% and the Germany and UK at 11%. This diverse international mix of respondents highlights Fort Kochi's and Mattancherry's global attraction as a tourist destination, with 55% of the tourists surveyed were male and 45% were female tourists. The survey provides valuable insights into tourist behaviour and preferences. 65% of surveyed tourists are visiting Fort Kochi for the first time, underscores the destination's continuing appeal and the importance of creating positive first impressions. The remaining 35% are return visitors, with many on their second or third visit. This repeat visitation trend indicates a level of satisfaction and attachment to Fort Kochi and Mattancherry among a significant portion of tourists. Most tourists (65%) plan to stay in Fort Kochi for just 1-3 days, with 27% staying for a week, and only 8% planning extended stays of 1-3 weeks. This short average duration of visit suggests an opportunity to develop strategies to encourage longer stays and deeper engagement with the destination. An overwhelming 73% of visitors come for leisure, indicating the area's strong appeal as a recreational destination. Homestays are the preferred choice for 54% of tourists, followed by hotels at 31%, and 15% in hostels, suggesting a demand for diverse lodging options. In terms of Travel Patterns, solo travel dominated at 58% followed by Group travel at 19%, and family travel at 23%, highlighting the need for accommodations and activities suitable for various group sizes. The survey reveals that 62% of tourists do not use public transportation, preferring private taxis as a mode of travel. Within Fort Kochi and Mattancherry, the other primary modes of transportation are: Auto-rickshaws (19%), Bus (11%), Water ways (4%) and Cycling (4%). This data suggests a need for improved public transportation options and infrastructure to enhance mobility for tourists. Another challenge that tourists face during their visit is the shortage of professional tour guides. Tourists mentioned a lack of awareness regarding attractions such as the Kerala Kathakali Centre, Kathakali performances in Fort Kochi, art cafes, kayaking on the backwaters, and wildlife preserves before visiting the destination. It was only upon reaching Fort Kochi that they

became acquainted with these offerings. Tourists show a strong interest in cultural activities. 38% participate in cultural events or performances during their visit. The most popular activities include backwater tours (15%), Kathakali/Kalaripayattu performances (58%), and historic tours (27%). Kochi has transformed into a highly tourist-centric destination, with visitors now favoring smaller, less commercialized locations. This shift has led to Kochi losing its heritage value and becoming overly focused on tourism. The absence of nighttime activities and the commercialization of cultural experiences are notable aspects of this trend. Public spaces often suffer from a lack of cleanliness, with dirty fishing nets being a common sight. Furthermore, the view of the industrial area, including the Vallarpadam



Figuur 7: Map of Mattancherry. Source: Author

International Container Transshipment Terminal and Cochin Port, detracts from the scenic beauty of Fort Kochi.

7.1.3 Major Issues Affecting Tourist Experience and Gaps identified

There are several critical issues that impact the quality of the tourist experience in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry. The Vypin-Fort Kochi Jankar Ferry is the shortest route to get to Fort Kochi from Ernakulam. The Jankar Ferry operates like a shuttle service, with 20-min frequency, starting from 6.30am to 9.30pm.

However, the ferry's limited capacity and frequency lead to congestion, particularly during peak hours. The narrow roads surrounding the ferry terminal worsen this problem, creating difficulties for both pedestrians and vehicles.



Figuur 8: Vypin-Fort Kochi Jankar Ferry and nearby Bellar Road, Source: By Author

The Belar road surrounding Vypin-Fort Kochi Jankar Ferry are narrow and lack proper footpaths making it difficult for the tourists to navigate safely, especially when cars and bikes wait for the ferry, it creates congestion. This is particularly a concern for elderly visitors or those with mobility limitations. The Fort Kochi Ferry Station is a crucial gateway for passengers and tourists to Fort Kochi, but is in poor condition due to inadequate maintenance, with issues like lack of seating facilities while waiting for the ferry, lack of drinking water facilities and poor lighting. There is a lack of informative boards that highlight the heritage and cultural significance of these places for tourists. There are hard pavements near Nehru Park and along the beachside, which make access difficult for tourists with mobility needs and wheelchairs in these places.



Figuur 9: Images of Fort Kochi Ferry Station, Lack of informative boards and Hard pavement near Nehru Park, Fort Kochi

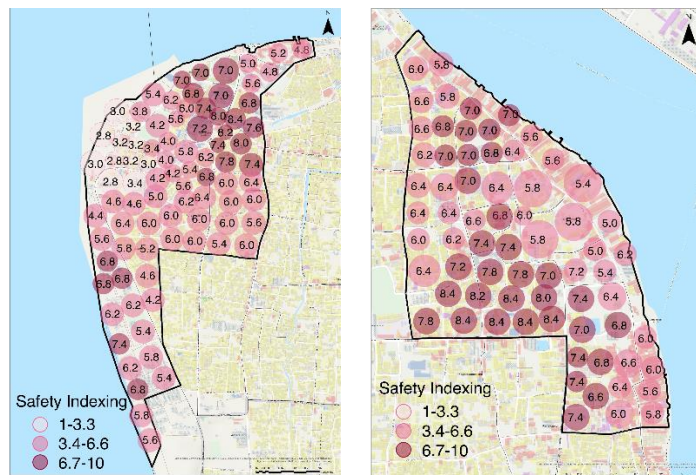
There are inactive and deserted alleys and cul-de-sacs in Fort Kochi become hotspots for safety concerns along with lack of proper lighting and maintenance make these areas feel unsafe for both residents and tourists. The Shrinking of Fort Kochi Beach is another major issue. A decade ago, the width of Fort Kochi beach was around 300m, the width has reduced to a maximum of 30 m due to various factors such as sea incursion, coastal erosion, and human activities like dredging and construction. The shrinkage not only affects the aesthetic appeal of the beach, but also raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of beach-related tourism activities. Fort Kochi and Mattancherry also face challenges with cleaner streets and better roads, as waste accumulation is commonly seen on the roads and beaches. Recent incidents highlight this issue, with Russian tourists having cleaned Fort Kochi Beach before taking a dip in its unclean waters. A JCB cleared waste from the beach area after a group of tourists cleaned the beach, which garnered media attention.



Figuur 10: Inactive and deserted alleys and cul-de-sacs at Fort Kochi, Shrinking of Fort Kochi beach and Lack of seating at the beach front

There is a lack of adequate seating facilities and CCTV cameras near the beach walkway. The stretches of road in Mattancherry lack adequately sized and continuous footpath, posing challenges for pedestrian movement and accessibility. The Jewish Cemetery and other heritage buildings are neglected, highlighting an urgent need for preservation efforts to protect these cultural and historical landmarks. New constructions are altering the character of the streets, neglecting the maintenance of existing heritage buildings. This impacts the city's imageability and its ability to create a strong sense of place. There is an

absence of adequate public restrooms and changing facilities for tourists. There is a lack of safe, women-friendly nighttime activities for tourists in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry. There is a noticeable lack of year-round cultural activities in Kochi, with events primarily confined to the months of October to March, leading to fluctuations in revenue and employment within the tourism industry. The peak tourist season puts increased pressure on the existing infrastructure, particularly in certain areas of the city. This imbalance between geographical spread of tourism assets and tourism development led to uneven urban development.



'My Safetipin' is a personal safety app designed to navigate urban environments more safely. The app provides safety ratings for different areas based on nine parameters, including lighting, visibility, security presence and walkability. In Fort Kochi, the safety indexing of residential area is in a range of 6.6 to 8.0 while the safety indexing of tourist spots and public spaces is in the range of 2.8 to 5.4. Mattancherry has a safety indexing of 6.6 to 8.4 in residential areas, while tourist spots and public spaces have a safety indexing of 5.4 to 8.4.

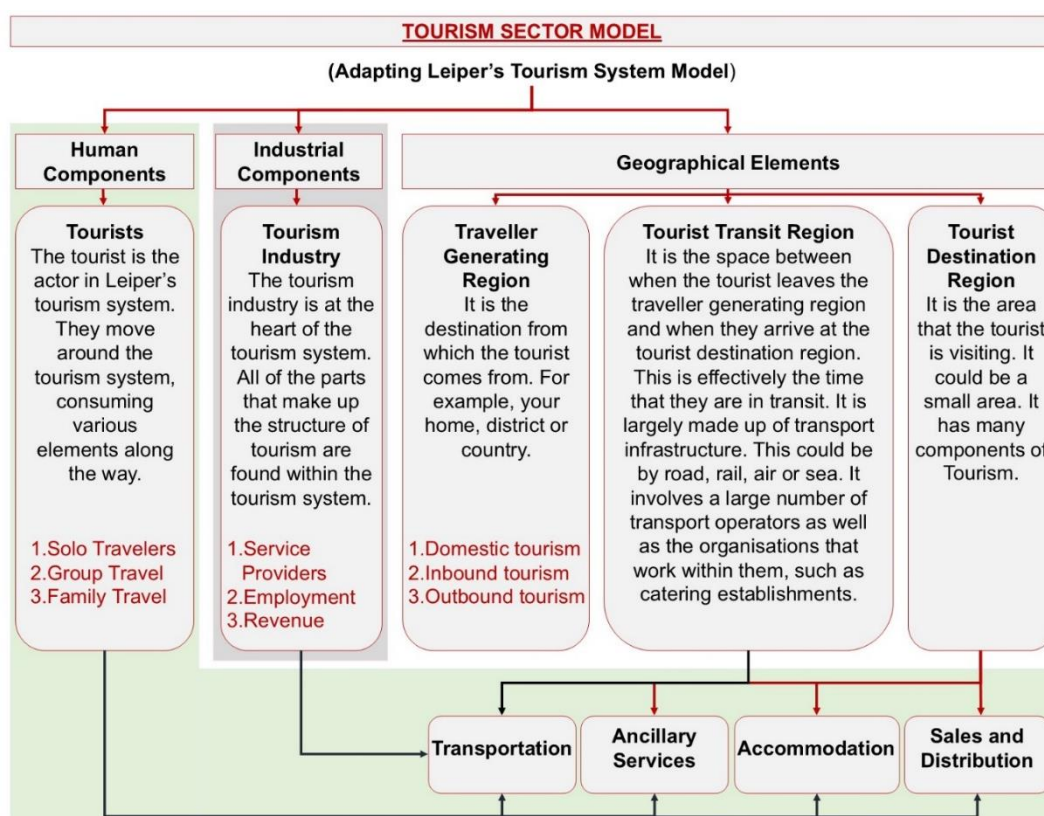
Figure 11: Safety Indexing of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry area

Another challenge that tourists face during their visit is the shortage of professional tour guides. Tourists mentioned a lack of awareness regarding attractions such as the Kerala Kathakali Centre, Kathakali performances happening in Fort Kochi, art cafes, kayaking on the backwaters, and wildlife preserves before visiting the destination. It was only upon reaching Fort Kochi that they became acquainted with these offerings. All these shortcomings need to be addressed to make Kochi a better tourist destination.

2. Strategies for Gender-Inclusive Tourism Planning

2.1 Components of Tourism

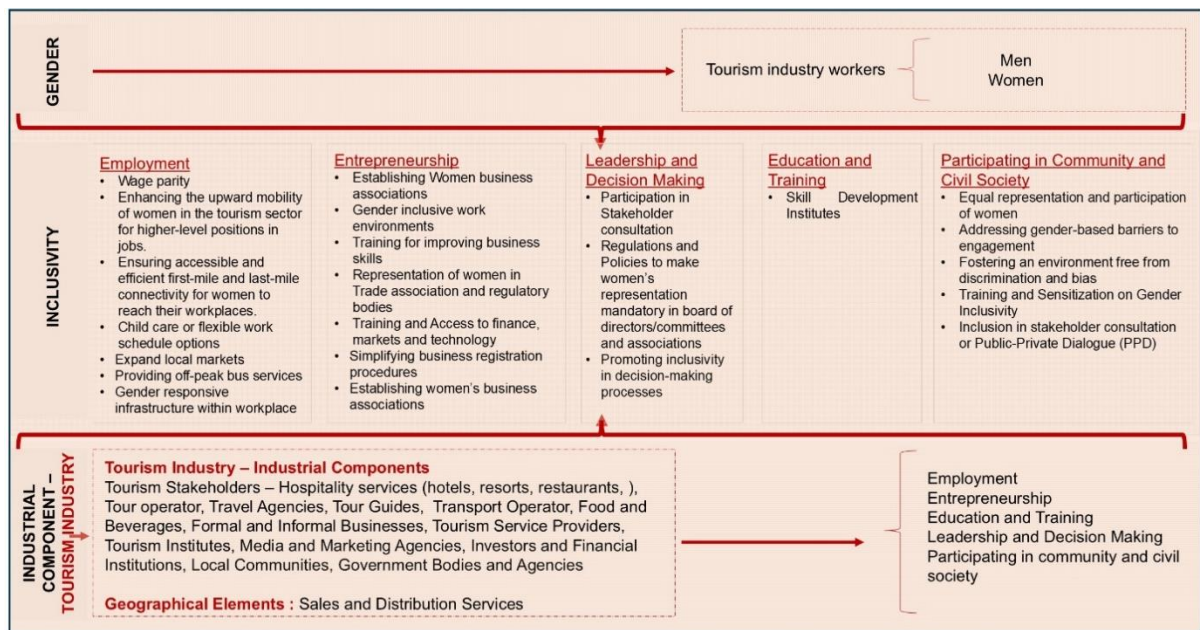
Leiper's Tourism System Model is considered to better understand the components of tourism sector. This model encompasses human components, industrial components, and geographical elements. A gender lens was applied to Leiper's Tourism System Model, and two conceptual frameworks were developed – one for the Tourism Industry and another for Tourists and Tourist Spots.



Figuur 12: Leiper's Tourism model. Source: Source: Unit 6, Tourism system: Components, elements and models, IGNOU

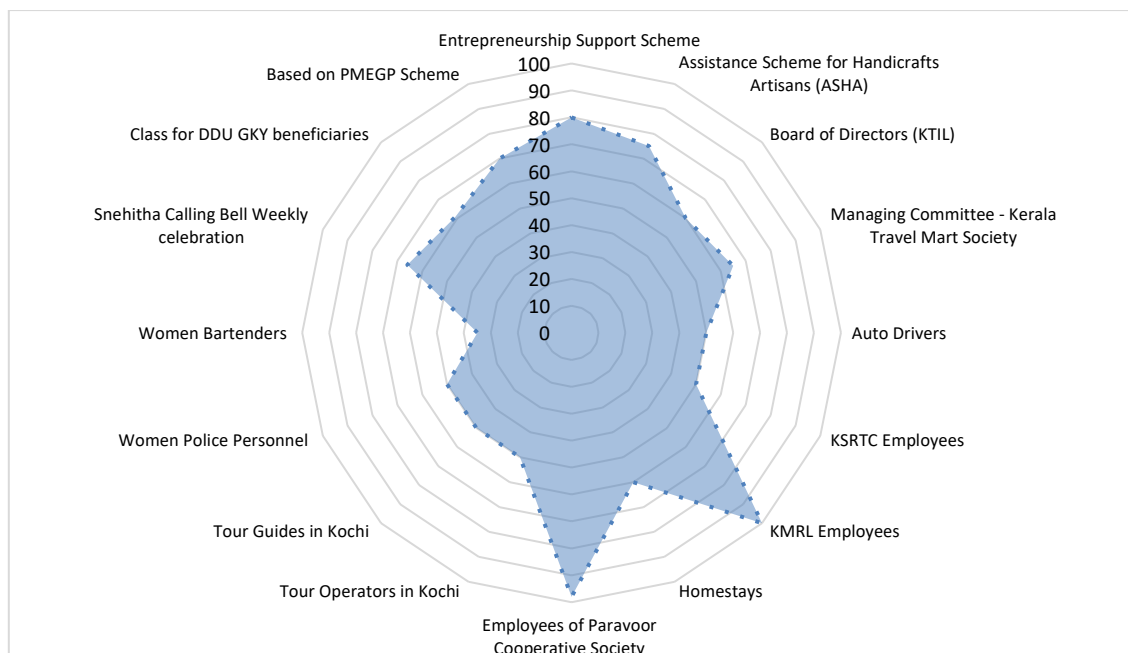
2.1 Conceptual Framework for Service Industry (Tourism)

A conceptual framework has been developed for the tourism industry by applying a gender lens to Leiper's Tourism System Model. This framework is based on four key principles: Awareness, Equity, Empowerment and representation of gender diverse individuals within tourism industry. The idea is to have an increased representation of women and gender diverse groups within the tourism industry. This can contribute to a more diverse and empathetic workforce, leading to a greater understanding of the unique needs and perspectives of tourists. Thus enhancing the overall safety and inclusivity of tourist destinations. Based on the framework, the tourism industry can be broadly categorised into five sub-segments: entrepreneurship, participation in community and civil society, employment in the tourism sector, education and training, and leadership and decision-making. An inclusive and diverse urban workforce can be achieved by implementing workplace flexibility to help women balance both work and home responsibilities. There should be internal committees to address sexual harassment and conduct regular awareness programs to promote a safe working environment. Policies must be developed to eliminate the gender-pay gap, particularly among the casual labourers in Kerala. Regular training programs should be implemented to help women in Kochi to develop business skills, access technology, develop leadership qualities and diversify their businesses. Regular monitoring and implementation of entrepreneurship schemes should be conducted, along with awareness programs about various schemes for the public. Safe commuting should be ensured by improving last-mile connectivity and the integration of different modes of transport. Gender-responsive infrastructure should be provided at the workplace, including adequate sanitation facilities and public amenities like proper street lighting, well-maintained footpaths, CCTV surveillance and visible police presence. Bystander intervention should be increased so that every citizen is aware of their rights and is socially conscious enough to intervene and prevent crimes from taking place.



Figur 13: Conceptual framework for service industry (Tourism). Source: By Author

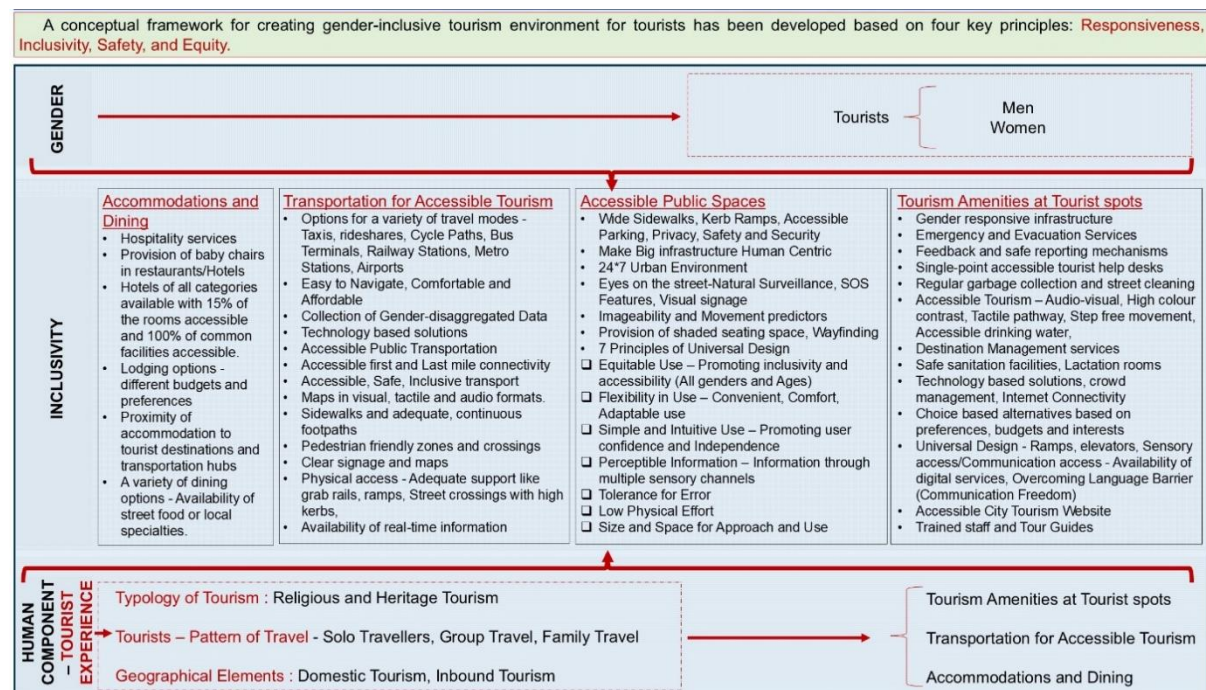
Women-owned tourism businesses should be provided access to finance through credit, subsidies, loans and financial incentives. Networking platforms should be provided to empower women entrepreneurs through capacity building and skill development. Purchase preference policies favouring women-led tourism enterprises should be developed, and partnerships with e-commerce platforms should be established to boost marketing. Local government participation should be strengthened by mandating women's inclusion in decision-making processes. Women's representation and participation in tourism boards, associations and ministerial positions should be increased. These strategies will create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in Kochi's tourism industry, working toward a tourism sector where women are equally represented and empowered, actively contributing to tourism growth and development in Kochi.



Figur 14: Women in Tourism industry in Kochi - Proposed Scenario. Source: By Author

2.2 Conceptual Framework for Tourists and Tourist Spots

Similarly, a conceptual framework for creating a gender-inclusive tourism environment for tourists has been developed.



Figur 15: Conceptual framework for Tourists and Tourist spots. Source: By Author

This framework is based on four key principles: responsiveness, inclusivity, safety, and equity of tourist destinations. The framework is broadly categorised into four sub-segments: accommodation and dining facilities within tourist spots, transportation options and accessibility, quality of public spaces and tourism amenities at tourist spots for a better visitor experience.

The infrastructure improvements in Kochi include the upgradation of transportation systems, including ferry terminals and road networks. Increased lighting, security patrols and emergency response systems are needed to enhance the safety and security of public spaces. Regular safety audits must be conducted to resolve the challenges faced by women while traveling, staying at accommodations and visiting tourist spots. Diverse accommodation options should be provided to cater to the preferences of all tourists, with female-only floors or sections in hotels and women-friendly homestays. Targeted marketing strategies should be developed to attract more female travelers and to promote Kochi as a safe and inclusive destination for all genders. Year-round cultural programming will be implemented to attract tourists during off-peak seasons. A comprehensive urban design strategy will preserve heritage buildings while accommodating new developments, to ensure the place's unique character remains intact. Tourist information services will be enhanced through multilingual signage and well-trained tour guides, making navigation easier for international tourists.

10. Conclusion

Kochi currently lacks comprehensive tourism planning from a gender perspective. To enhance the tourism sector, Kochi must take decisive steps towards creating an inclusive environment for all tourists and integrate women and gender diverse individuals into the tourism industry, prioritizing gender-inclusive measures across all age groups. There exists a positive correlation between increased gender diversity and

enhanced business performance. By adopting a gender lens in tourism planning, Kochi can contribute to India's overall ranking in the global tourism sector, while improving the quality of life of its residents.

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