

# Female Solo Travel Experiences: An Autoethnography on Social and Emotional Challenges With Tourism Industry Stakeholders

Afsaneh Rostami<sup>a\*</sup> , Alexander Trupp<sup>b</sup> , & Marcus L. Stephenson<sup>c</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Sunway University, Malaysia

<sup>b</sup>University of Innsbruck, Austria

<sup>c</sup>University of Essex, UK

\*corresponding author: afsaneh.r@imail.sunway.edu.my

Received: 17 March 2024 / Accepted: 27 August 2024 / Published: 28 October 2024

► Rostami, A., Trupp, A., & Stephenson, M. L. (2024). Female solo travel experiences: An autoethnography on social and emotional challenges with tourism industry stakeholders. *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies*, 17(2), 201-212.

Solo travel can contribute to women's social and psychological empowerment, aligning with the broader goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment within the tourism industry. However, there is a lack of studies grounded in personal experiences investigating the challenges and constraints of female solo travelers during interactions with tourism stakeholders. This research note presents an autoethnographic study conducted in Penang, Malaysia, by the first author, documenting and analyzing her personal encounters and emotions during solo travel experiences. The study combines both evocative and analytical autoethnography. Employing an evocative autoethnographic approach extracted three main themes related to emotions: disgust and loneliness, unwantedness and defectiveness, and stress and fear. Through an analytical lens, the study further identifies and examines the inadequacy of social-emotional expertise among tourism stakeholders, particularly concerning women's empowerment and gender equality. Consequently, the study advocates for targeted interventions to enhance tourism stakeholders' social-emotional proficiency. It posits that training and fostering awareness can mitigate gender stereotypes entrenched within societies. This research thus offers valuable insights into the complexities of gender dynamics within the realm of solo travel, emphasizing the pivotal role of tourism industry stakeholders in shaping female solo travelers' perceptions and experiences.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography; Female Solo Travel; Malaysia; Tourism Stakeholders; Women's Empowerment



## INTRODUCTION

Solo travel can empower women socially and psychologically by confronting gender stereotypes, challenging patriarchal norms, and breaking free from traditional

taboos (Hassan & Damir, 2022). Such empowerment gained from women's solo travel aligns with the tourism industry's role in promoting gender equality (UNWTO, 2023). However, the literature indicates gender-based constraints limiting women's choice of solo travel destinations or participation in certain activities (Nematpour et al., 2024; Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang, 2021). Accordingly, the probability of unwanted male attention, sexual harassment, violence, and perceived fear affect female solo travelers' mobility (Su & Wu., 2020; Yang et al., 2016). Moreover, Bianchi (2016) highlighted how unfriendly service providers can dissatisfy female solo travelers.

Consequently, to achieve women's empowerment in tourism, collaboration among governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals is crucial (Baltag et al., 2021). Nevertheless, limited research exists on how tourism stakeholders' practices engender negative experiences during solo travel. This information deficiency hinders understanding tourism stakeholders, whose actions can provoke undesirable experiences for female solo travelers.

Henceforth, there are two objectives of this research note: 1) to decipher the potential negative feelings and emotions of female solo traveling during interactions with other tourism stakeholders, and 2) to examine the shortcomings within tourism stakeholders resulting in the emergence of unwanted experiences among female solo travelers, with a particular focus on gender-related factors. As part of her ongoing PhD research, the first author conducted an autoethnographic study to investigate people's reactions to encountering a female solo traveler and to conceptualize her emotions and experiences in Penang, Malaysia. Subsequently, this research note introduces and highlights findings focusing on the challenges of female solo travel stemming from the actions and practices of tourism industry stakeholders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Although women's desires to travel solo have attracted increasing scholarly attention in the past few years (Alonso-Vazquez et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2019), pioneering works were established almost two decades ago (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Little, 2005). The literature essentially comprises topics such as solo travel motivations (Seow & Brown, 2018), constraints and risks of solo travel (Yang et al., 2018), solo travel behavior across generations (Alonso-Vazquez et al., 2024), heterogeneity in female solo travel by country (Bernard et al., 2022), and solo travel experiences (Su & Wu, 2020). Further research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic led individuals to choose solo travel to mitigate the risk of virus transmission through limited physical interactions (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2021).

Scholars have investigated push and pull factors as motivators for solo travel (Teng et al., 2023; Terziyska, 2021). Push factors encompass internal desires that encourage individuals to embark on solo journeys (Dann, 1981; Hosseini et al., 2021). After initial motivations (push factors) arise, external influencers become pull motivations when choosing destinations (Alonso-Vazquez et al., 2024). Pull factors, as also identified by Bianchi (2016) and Prayag (2010), encompass attractive attributes of destinations. In addition, existing research analyzed women's economic empowerment through tourism employment (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Trupp & Sunanta, 2017) and emotional empowerment via adventure tourism (Saffari & Heidari, 2022). However,

limited studies have analyzed specific destinations' unique resources and attractions for female solo travelers (Sebova et al., 2021).

There is a further gap in understanding how tourism industry stakeholders contribute to deterrent factors in women's empowerment in tourism. Consequently, there is a need to examine how the tourism industry can support women's social empowerment by challenging patriarchal mindsets and respecting women's authority to make their own decisions relating to travel and tourism (Kabeer, 1999).

## METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography as a qualitative research methodology has become increasingly popular among scholars (Cohen, 2012; Stahlke Wall, 2016; Yang, 2013). In an autoethnographic approach, researchers immerse themselves within a social context (Butz & Besio, 2009), scrutinizing their own behavior and experiences to explore the deeper meaning of the phenomenon under study (Ellis et al., 2011). Nevertheless, autoethnography encounters criticism for being individualized, self-indulgent, and lacking systematic methodology, thus, raising ethical concerns (Atkinson, 1997; Ploder & Stadlbauer, 2016). At the same time, autoethnography can potentially enhance sociological understanding, particularly regarding marginalized cohorts in societies (Richards, 2015). Despite a few notable exceptions, autoethnography remains underused in tourism studies (Best, 2017; Cohen, 2019). Notably, Yang (2016) regards autoethnography as a valuable tool for illuminating the "dark side" of personal experiences in solo travel (p. 76), while Tham (2020) conducted autoethnographic research to explore mobilities from the perspective of an Asian male solo traveler during the Rugby World Cup in 2019.

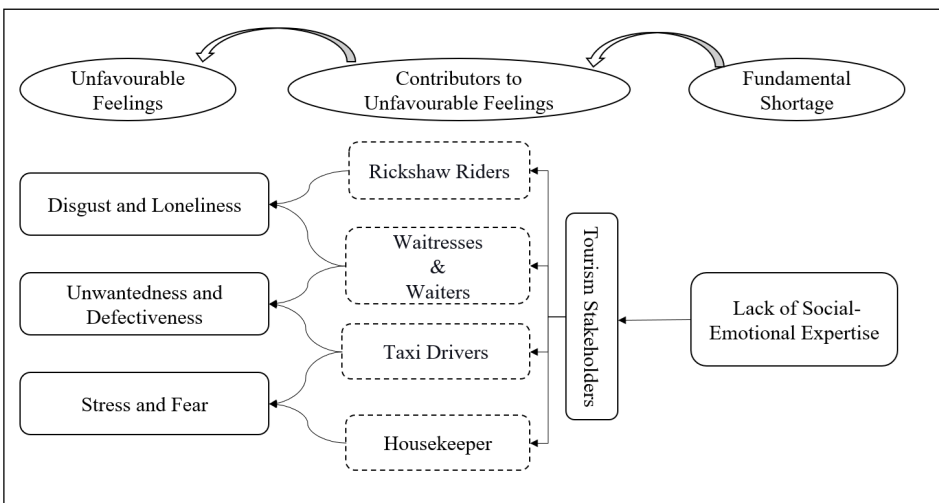
Building on this foundation, autoethnographic studies include evocative or analytic approaches (Anderson, 2006). Evocative autoethnography helps writers come to terms with emotions, especially horrific situations like rape (Chakraborty, 2023), domestic violence (Fletcher, 2018), and illness (Andersen, 2023). Analytic autoethnography contributes to the growth of new topics of inquiry by shedding light on certain elements of studied phenomena that are challenging to study through other means. This study uses both evocative and analytic approaches. In an evocative approach, memories and emotions related to solo travel in Malaysia are expressed. Utilizing the analytic approach, these emotions are then analyzed to identify negative experiences resulting from the interactions with tourism stakeholders in female solo travel. This combination of evocative and analytical autoethnography helps mitigate the criticism of self-indulgence often associated with the method (Stahlke Wall, 2016).

I (the first author), a 35-year-old Muslim Iranian female PhD student at Sunway University, Malaysia, collected the data during my first (solo) trip to Penang, Malaysia, from 16 to 26 September, 2023, a field trip financially supported by my university as part of my PhD program. While exploring solo travel among Muslim Iranian women, I immersed myself in the journey to enhance my interpretive abilities and empathy with interviewees during data collection, employing photo elicitation and serial interviews (Vazquez Maggio & Westcott, 2014; Yang, 2016). My first domestic trip in Malaysia was as a tutorial assistant on a field trip to Malacca City with degree students in June 2023, lasting two nights. This experience sparked my desire to explore another

UNESCO heritage city and tourism hotspot in Malaysia, Georgetown in Penang, which represents an ideal site for studying female solo travelers. The city is known for its multicultural heritage, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, and European roots. I opted for a ten-night stay in a small three-star hotel in Georgetown. Penang hosts numerous attractions. I focused on visiting museums, temples, and historic sites, indulging in local cuisine, walking along the streets, and admiring the old buildings. Additionally, I watched the sunset twice at Batu Ferringhi Beach.

My initial intention was to observe the reactions I encountered as an Iranian female solo traveler and document my behaviors and thoughts in various situations. However, my professional background in tourism – holding bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the field, five years of industry experience, and currently pursuing a PhD in hospitality and service management – persuaded me to study the role tourism stakeholders played in my experience. This approach is relevant because it highlights the dual perspective of the researcher, combining personal experience with professional expertise. By documenting the reactions and challenges faced as an Iranian female solo traveler, the study provides a unique, firsthand account of the social and emotional hurdles encountered. Furthermore, my background in tourism allows for a critical examination of how industry stakeholders influence these experiences.

I documented my travel experiences using various data collection methods: taking field notes, audio-recording my emotions and experiences, and taking photos. Though I initially drafted comprehensive memos and field notes during the trip, I revisited this task in-depth upon returning to my university to reflect critically on these observations and experiences. To validate this information, I had to cross-reference and compare manually recorded data with notes and recordings made on my phone and chronologically arranged photos. However, details about individuals and locations have been concealed to ensure confidentiality (Stahlke Wall, 2016). Research data in the form of field notes and diaries were imported into NVivo 14, where open coding techniques were employed to identify key themes (Figure 1) (Charmaz, 2006).



**Figure 1.** Negative feelings and their contributors during solo travelling. (authors’ compilation)

## **EVOCATIVE APPROACH: UNFAVORABLE FEELINGS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO UNFAVORABLE FEELINGS**

This section discusses the negative emotions experienced by the first author as a female solo traveler across different tourism contexts. It illustrates three categories of unfavorable feelings: disgust and loneliness, unwantedness and defectiveness, and stress and fear.

### **Disgust and Loneliness**

#### **Rickshaw Riders or Catcallers?**

While exploring Georgetown's UNESCO Historic Site on the seventh day of the trip, I faced unwanted behavior from two rickshaw riders. An older man, initially talking in a non-English language, attempted to convince me to take a ride in his rickshaw, but I gracefully rejected his invitation. However, his parting words were, "Bye, sweetheart!". Approximately two hours later, as I was heading towards a location in Little India within the same area, another rickshaw rider commented: "Nice to meet you, Princess Diana." Consequently, I contemplated how they dared to catcall me, a female tourist, who was potentially their customer.

#### **Passive Waiters and Restaurant Staff Against Harassment**

I was passing by a restaurant on the evening of the seventh day when I heard a man loudly speaking about the delicious taste of the food at the restaurant. I decided to take food away. As I placed my order, the same man stood beside me, commenting: "You are so beautiful." I responded politely by saying: "Thank you." However, he started leering at my face and body from different angles and loudly repeated: "You are so beautiful; I want to have you right now, but I cannot!" He had conducted this perceived insult in front of seven men, who did not attempt to intervene against his disrespectful conduct, including four restaurant staff and three customers. Feeling isolated and unsupported, I eventually shouted at him: "It is none of your business if I am beautiful. You are so impolite, and you are not allowed to speak about my appearance. Your behavior is disgusting."

As the man left, he continued shouting inappropriate remarks on the street. I questioned the cashier about the man's association with the restaurant, expressing my reluctance to make future purchases. Consequently, the cashier, a young man in his 20s, persuaded me to sit. Then, he expressed his fear of encountering such intrusive men at night, considering them criminals who could harm him. However, his efforts to alleviate my loneliness and defenselessness as well as protect the restaurant's innocence were ultimately unsuccessful.

To observe people's reactions to the harassment of a female solo traveler, I initially remained passive when the impolite man started his annoying behavior. However, stemming from my prior experiences and perceptions of the world (Kamlongera, 2023), autoethnography allowed me to strongly engage in this situation and express my emotions by shouting at him (Bunde-Birouste, 2019). Growing up in a Muslim country

where people, particularly men, are expected to intervene and deter harassers in similar situations, I anticipated witnessing bystander intervention due to Malaysia's similar religion as a Muslim country. Additionally, a belief in assertive responses to harassment encouraged me to take an active role. Hence, holding an in-between position facilitated me to explore the research context and my emotions (Kamlongera, 2023).

### **Unwantedness and Defectiveness**

#### Unfriendly Waiter & Waitress

I perceived a sense of unwantedness because of the behavior of some waiters and waitresses while I was keen on trying food and enjoying the 'vibe' of one local café and another well-known restaurant, both recommended by three friends. During my initial experience on the fourth day, after a thirty-minute wait, the waiter directed me to a table in the kitchen area, where staff moved around to access items. Also, a waitress on the final day told me to sit at a smaller table close to the door even though larger, empty tables were available. She said this was due to a company policy that preferred solitary customers to occupy smaller tables, while the table had limited access to the interior decor and atmosphere of the restaurant. Ghadban et al. (2023) noted that some female solo travelers find solo dining a strange practice. Despite dining solo almost five times a week without issues, these situations made me feel that waiters and waitresses were hesitant to serve solo customers. Such experience could contribute to negative perceptions of solo dining among female solo travelers.

#### Safe Transportation or Interfering Taxi Drivers

Registered taxis are generally viewed as a safe mode of transportation for women when traveling within and between cities (Jafarova et al., 2014). During the trip, I chose to use taxi rides through a popular ride-hailing company. While some drivers offered helpful advice about tourist attractions, others displayed unwarranted curiosity about my personal life, asking questions about my age and marital status, such as "Why are you alone?" and "How do you travel without a partner?"

Two drivers behaved unpleasantly during my trip. On day ten, a middle-aged driver questioned why I, a 35-year-old woman, was single and childless. This was frustrating, as on my last night, another driver around my age criticized me for traveling alone and being single while also seeking my attention. In response, I pretended to have a boyfriend in Canada whom I would join after completing my PhD. These attitudes, including undue excitement about my childless single status, implied a sense of defectiveness for not conforming to the idealized image of a 'perfect woman'.

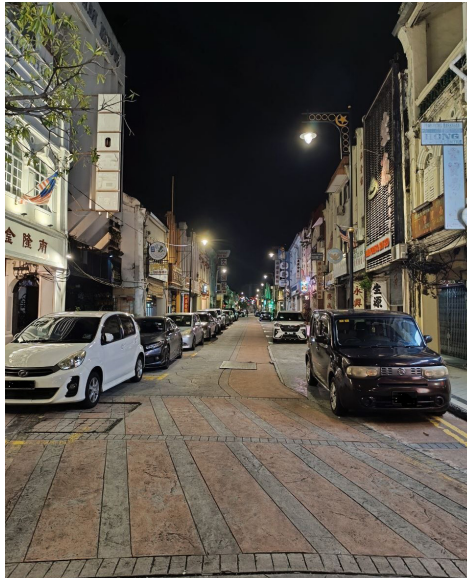
## **STRESS AND FEAR**

#### Housekeeper with Dark Danger Alarm

On the fifth day of my solo travel, a conversation with a female housekeeper in the hotel pantry raised my anxiety about enjoying the nightlife in Penang. She warned

about the risk of drunk drivers at night, though she assured me of the area's safety from theft and robbery due to surveillance cameras. Her cautious tone left me contemplating safety measures, particularly regarding the risk of car accidents while traveling on foot in the evenings. As a result, I felt a sense of fear and unease, even on seemingly quiet streets near my hotel. Nevertheless, Wilson and Little (2005) identified the fear of being in unknown environments, especially at night (Figure 2).

While this section illustrates three categories of negative feelings and emotions, representing the evocative approach of autoethnography, the following section analyzes shortages in the tourism industry concerning female solo travel, fostering an analytical perspective.



**Figure 1.** Quiet street at night in George Town Heritage Site, Penang. (photo by the author)

### **ANALYTIC APPROACH: FUNDAMENTAL SHORTAGES**

My challenging experiences and negative feelings concerning solo travel often result from a fundamental shortage among tourism stakeholders, particularly in restaurants, accommodations, and transportation services, including taxi drivers and rickshaw riders. A lack of expertise in dealing with social and emotional concerns can lead to undesired experiences among female solo travelers. These deficiencies of tourism stakeholders contribute to sociocultural constraints on female solo travel, manifested in unwelcome or unfriendly behavior (Wilson & Little, 2005). It is crucial to note that the negative emotions and experiences mentioned above occurred within direct interaction and communication with tourism stakeholders. Despite my negative experiences triggered by stakeholders' reactions and behavior, I recognized that their actions likely originated from a lack of social and emotional management training in international tourism contexts.

Employee training programs are essential for organizations, offering opportunities to enhance service delivery, customer loyalty, and consumer satisfaction (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). Ana Paula Pais (n.d.), Head of Education at Turismo de Portugal, emphasizes the importance of enhancing social and emotional skills among hospitality and tourism professionals. The attainment of emotional skills involves adopting competencies to cognitively process emotions into behavior involving the use of appropriate language and facial expressions (McBrien et al., 2020). Individuals with high social-emotional expertise demonstrate proficiency in using appropriate language and expressions tailored to specific social situations and interpersonal communications they experience (Yaşar et al., 2023). Such training initiatives can address deficiencies among tourism stakeholders regarding female solo travel experiences.

The inappropriate behavior of the rickshaw riders and the indifference of the restaurant staff suggest that both groups were unaware of the impact of their actions and lacked understanding of appropriate practices, particularly in facilitating anti-harassment strategies. Street harassment is defined as undesired behavior by men, including comments and actions, leading to being insulted, scared, annoyed, and threatened. Therefore, women's mobility in and navigation of public places can be impacted (Kearl, 2010). Kearl (2010) insists on prioritizing safety and countering perceptions of women as sex objects, which is crucial in the promotion of gender equality. Accordingly, she emphasized the importance of increasing public and male education concerning the prevention of female harassment. Therefore, implementing training courses for tourism stakeholders on appropriate conduct towards women and providing guidance on intervening in cases of street harassment could prove beneficial.

Unwanted encounters in cafes and restaurants and intrusive questioning by taxi drivers persist due to the stigma attached to women being alone or single (Alonso-Vazquez et al., 2024). In certain Asian societies, women are expected to have a partner for protection (Seow & Brown, 2018); otherwise, they may face insulting labels like 'leftovers' (Gaetano, 2014; Ji, 2015). Nonetheless, female solo travel actively challenges these stereotypical roles. Consequently, tourism stakeholders should strive to alleviate these challenges instead of exacerbating the daily burdens faced by female solo travelers, given that tourism is recognized as a key engine for women's empowerment (UNWTO, 2023). Thus, training taxi drivers and service staff on diversity, cross-cultural interaction, effective communication etiquette, and delivering services tailored to the needs of women can empower women's status in societies and help abolish gender-based stereotypes among locals and tourists. Cafes and restaurants are suitable places for female solo travelers to connect with others (Neluhena et al., 2023). Hence, fostering a welcoming atmosphere enhances their experiences and increases spending.

Research shows that safety is the primary concern for female solo travelers (Hassan & Damir, 2022), particularly in selecting accommodation (Herjanto et al., 2020). Herjanto et al. (2020) identified criteria female solo travelers use when choosing accommodation establishments. Good service delivery provided by hotel staff, including friendliness and going beyond required duties, was crucial. In my experience, the housekeeper tried to be friendly but unintentionally conveyed intimidating information. This underscores the need for hotels to implement communication guidelines so that staff can be helpful without causing unfavorable feelings.



## CONCLUSION

This study examined underexplored aspects of the tourism industry related to female solo travel. Findings show that a lack of social-emotional skills among tourism stakeholders, particularly in restaurants, accommodations, and transportation services, results in dissatisfaction among female solo travelers. This suggests that certain stakeholders can contribute to sociocultural constraints on women solo travelers by perpetuating gender-based expectations. While existing research has explored women's experiences and challenges (Neluhena et al., 2023; Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang et al., 2019), this study analyzes these challenges directly related to tourism industry stakeholders. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing targeted interventions and training programs that can enhance the social-emotional proficiency of tourism stakeholders, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and empowering environment for female solo travelers.

The findings carry implications for destination managers, policymakers, and stakeholders in the tourism industry. The study pinpoints the importance of gender-specific training for tourism stakeholders to enrich services for female solo travelers, thereby improving their emotional, psychological, and social empowerment. Well-trained stakeholders can serve as a pull factor to attract more female solo travelers to destinations. While Yang's (2016) notable study focused on the risk perception of female solo travelers, our approach of combining evocative and analytical autoethnography facilitated the researcher's documentation of negative emotions and personal experiences, particularly regarding the shortcomings of tourism stakeholders. The ongoing phase of this PhD study involves conducting and analyzing creative interviews, including serial interviews and photo elicitation, with Iranian female solo travelers. Such an approach can capture and distill vivid memories and experiences of female solo travelers with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.



## REFERENCES

- Alonso-Vazquez, M., Yang, E. C. L., Pages Vidal, M. D. M., & Khoo, C. (2024). Going solo during the pandemic: A generational segmentation of solo female travelers. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 27(3), 381-395.
- Andersen, E. M. (2023). As if I was a spacecraft returning to Earth's atmosphere: Expanding insights into illness narratives and childhood cancer through evocative autoethnography. *Health*, 13634593231200123.
- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395.
- Atkinson, P. (1997). Narrative turn or blind alley? *Qualitative Health Research*, 7(3), 325-344.
- Baltag, A. S., Bosman, M., Wilson, A. B., Huisman, J., & Zwaal, W. (2021). Sexual harassment as perceived and experienced by male and female restaurant employees. *Research in Hospitality Management*, 11(2), 85-92.
- Bernard, S., Rahman, I., & McGehee, N. G. (2022). Breaking barriers for Bangladeshi female solo travelers. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 41, 100932.
- Best, G. (2017). Media memories on the move: Exploring an autoethnographic heritage of automobility and travel. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 12(1), 52-66.
- Bianchi, C. (2016). Solo holiday travelers: Motivators and drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18(2), 197-208.
- Bunde-Birouste, A., Byrne, F., & Kemp, L. (2019). Autoethnography. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.). *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences* (pp. 509-526). Springer.

## Female Solo Travel Experiences

- Butz, D., & Besio, K. (2009). Autoethnography. *Geography Compass*, 3(5), 1660-1674.
- Chakraborty, T. (2023). Fletcher Situating the silencing and de-silencing of traumatic memories in 2016 students' protests in Hyderabad, India: An auto-ethnographic analysis. *Cultura & Psyché*, 1-17.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Cohen, E. (2012). Flooded: An auto-ethnography of the 2011 Bangkok flood. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 5(2), 316-334.
- Cohen, E. (2019). Robbed: A serial autoethnography of a tourism researcher as a robbery victim. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 44(4), 507-515.
- Dann, G. M. (1981). Tourist motivation: An appraisal. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 8(2), 187-219.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 273-290.
- Figuerola-Domecq, C., De Jong, A., & Williams, A. M. (2020). Gender, tourism & entrepreneurship: A critical review. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 84, 102980.
- Fletcher, M. A. (2018). We to me: An autoethnographic discovery of self, in and out of domestic abuse. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 41(1), 42-59.
- Gaetano, A. (2014). "Leftover women": Postponing marriage and renegotiating womanhood in urban China. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, 4(2), 124-149.
- Ghadban, S., Kamar, R., & Haidar, R. (2023). Decoding international Solo women travelers' experience: A qualitative analysis of user-generated videos. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2023.100648>
- Hassan, S. B., & Damir, A. K. (2022). Sustainable development and gender equality: Empowerment through solo female travel experiences. In A. Farmaki, L. Altinay, & X. Font (Eds.), *Planning and managing sustainability in tourism: Empirical studies, best-practice cases and theoretical Insights* (pp. 187-203). Springer.
- Herjanto, H., Chilicki, A., Anantamongkolkul, C., & McGuinness, E. (2020). Hotel selection criteria of solo traveling females. *ASEAN Journal on Hospitality and Tourism*, 18(2), 58-73.
- Hosseini, S., Macias, R. C., & Garcia, F. A. (2021). The exploration of Iranian solo female travelers' experiences. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 256-269
- Jafarova, T., Campbell, S., & Rojas, W. S. (2014). AZE: Rapid assessment on sexual harassment in the Baku metro rail-final report. *Philippines: Asian Development Bank*.
- Ji, Y. (2015). Between tradition and modernity: "Leftover" women in Shanghai. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(5), 1057-1073
- Jordan, F., & Gibson, H. (2005). "We're not stupid ... But we'll not stay home either": Experiences of solo women travelers. *Tourism Review International*, 9(2), 195-211.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464.
- Kamlongera, M. I. (2023). 'So what's arts got to do with it?': An autoethnography of navigating researcher positionality while co-creating knowledge. *Qualitative Research*, 23(3), 651-667.
- Kearl, H. (2010). *Stop street harassment: Making public places safe and welcoming for women*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- McBrien, A., Wild, M., & Bachorowski, J. A. (2020). Social-emotional expertise (SEE) scale: Development and initial validation. *Assessment*, 27(8), 1718-1730.
- McColl-Kennedy, J. R., & White, T. (1997). Service provider training programs at odds with customer requirements in five-star hotels. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 11(4), 249-264.
- Neluhena, M., Chandralal, L., & Dahanayake, T. (2023). Female solo travels to south Asian destinations and sustaining loneliness. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584231173508>
- Nematpour, M., Oshriyeh, O., & Ghaffari, M. (2024). Behind the invisible walls: Understanding constraints on Muslim solo female travel. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 50, 101213.
- Pais, A. P. (n.d.). *How can education and training systems contribute to structural changes in the tourism sector?* UNWTO Tourism Academy. <https://www.unwto-tourismacademy.ie.edu/2021/10/how-can-education-and-training-systems-contribute-to-structural-changes-in-the-tourism-sector>

- Ploder, A., & Stadlbauer, J. (2016). Strong reflexivity and its critics: Responses to autoethnography in the German-speaking cultural and social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(9), 753-765.
- Prayag, G. (2010). Images as pull factors of a tourist destination: A factor-cluster segmentation analysis. *Tourism Analysis*, 15(2), 213-226.
- Richards, M. (2015). Turning back to the story of my life: An autoethnographic exploration of a researcher's identity during the PhD process. *Reflective Practice*, 16(6), 821-835.
- Saffari, M., & Heidari, K. (2022). The effect of self-expression on the empowerment of Iranian women adventure travellers. *Leisure Studies*, 41(6), 831-846.
- Sánchez-Pérez, M., Terán-Yépez, E., Marín-Carrillo, M. B., Marín-Carrillo, G. M., & Illescas-Manzano, M. D. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on tourist evaluation and behavioral intentions in Spain: Implications for market segmentation analysis. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(7), 919-933.
- Sebova, L., Pompurova, K., Marceková, R., & Albertova, A. (2021, June). Solo female travelers as a new trend in tourism destinations. Culture and Tourism in a Smart, Globalized, and Sustainable World: 7th International Conference of IACuDiT, Hydra, Greece, 2020. Conference Proceedings (pp. 311-323).
- Seow, D., & Brown, L. (2018). The solo female Asian tourist. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(10), 1187-1206.
- Stahlke Wall, S. (2016). Toward a moderate autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406916674966>
- Su, C.-P., & Wu, T.-C. (2020). The dark side of solo female travel: Negative encounters with male strangers. *Leisure Sciences*, 42(3-4), 375-392.
- Teng, Y. M., Wu, K. S., & Lee, Y. C. (2023). Do personal values and motivation affect women's solo travel intentions in Taiwan? *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-12.
- Terziyska, I. (2021). Solo female travelers: The underlying motivation. In M. Valeri & V. Katsoni (Eds.), *Gender and tourism: Challenges and entrepreneurial opportunities* (pp. 113-127). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Tham, A. (2020). Asian solo male travelling mobilities—an autoethnography. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 14(3), 453-472.
- Trupp, A., & Sunanta, S. (2017). Gendered practices in urban ethnic tourism in Thailand. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 64, 76-86.
- UNWTO. (2023). *Tourism opens doors for women*. <https://www.unwto.org/world-tourism-day-2007>
- Vazquez Maggio, L. M., & Westcott, H. (2014). Researchers' reflections of empathy following interviews with migrants. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 14(3), 214-227.
- Wilson, E., & Little, D. E. (2005). A "relative escape"? The impact of constraints on women who travel solo. *Tourism Review International*, 9(2), 155-175.
- Yang, E. C. L. (2016). Risk perception of Asian solo female travelers: An autoethnographic approach. *Women and travel: Trends, journeys and experiences*. Channel View.
- Yang, E. C. L. (2021). What motivates and hinders people from travelling alone? A study of solo and non-solo travellers. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(17), 2458-2471.
- Yang, E. C. L., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Arcodia, C. (2018). Constructing space and self through risk taking: A case of Asian solo female travelers. *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(2), 260-272.
- Yang, E. C. L., Yang, M. J. H., & Khoo-Lattimore, C. (2019). The meanings of solo travel for Asian women. *Tourism Review*, 74, 1047-1057
- Yang, S. (2013). Surviving as a qualitative researcher in a quantitative world: A personal reflection. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 16(1), 81-85.
- Yaşar, E., Tür, E., & Öztürk, İ. (2023). Examining the relationship between social intelligence and social-emotional expertise: The example of hotel management employees. *Scientific Collection «InterConf+»*, 30 (143), 41-51

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Afsaneh Rostami is a PhD scholar at the School of Hospitality and Service Management, Sunway University, Malaysia. Her early interests in sustainable development, particularly in

## Female Solo Travel Experiences

Iran's agritourism and rural tourism, led her to pursue her passion for gender studies in tourism, with a particular focus on Muslim Iranian female solo travel.

► Contact: [afsaneh.r@imail.sunway.edu.my](mailto:afsaneh.r@imail.sunway.edu.my)

Alexander Trupp is currently a Guest Professor at the Department of Geography at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and an Adjunct Professor in Tourism and Hospitality Management at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University, Thailand. He was the former Deputy Dean for research and sustainability (2021-2024) at the School of Hospitality and Service Management, Sunway University, Malaysia. His research is nested in the fields of social geography, mobilities, tourism, sustainability, and microbusinesses.

► Contact: [alexander.trupp@uibk.ac.at](mailto:alexander.trupp@uibk.ac.at)

Marcus L. Stephenson is Professor and Head of the Edge Hotel School, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Essex, researching in the sociology of hospitality and tourism. He was the former Dean of the School of Hospitality at Service Management and Professor of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Sunway University (Malaysia) (2017-2024). Marcus is co-author of *Tourism and Citizenship: Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities in the Global Order* (2014, Routledge), co-editor of *International Tourism Development and the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Challenges and Opportunities* (2017, Routledge), and editor of the *Routledge Handbook of Tourism and Small Island States in the Pacific*.

► Contact: [ms24480@essex.ac.uk](mailto:ms24480@essex.ac.uk)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by Sunway University PhD studentship. We gratefully acknowledge their financial assistance, which enabled us to conduct this study.

## DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.