

Journeying through India: Assessing women-friendliness on a 12 day Train expedition

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Abstract

This research investigates the experiences of women during a 12-day train expedition in India, with a specific focus on evaluating the overall women-friendliness of the journey. Utilizing a comprehensive methodology, including surveys, interviews, and observational analysis, the study aims to provide nuanced insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by women travelers. The findings encompass an in-depth assessment of safety measures, comfort, accessibility, and the cultural factors influencing women's experiences on the train. Identified challenges range from cultural sensitivities to infrastructure gaps, shedding light on the multifaceted aspects of women's travel experiences. The research offers practical recommendations, emphasizing the necessity for improved security measures, and enhanced facilities. Ultimately, the goal is to inform policymakers and train operators, contributing to the creation of a safer, more inclusive, and accommodating travel environment for further such visits.

Keywords

Women-Friendly, Train Expedition, Cultural Sensitivity, Accessibility, Infrastructure,

Introduction

India's vast railway network offers a unique opportunity to explore the country's diverse landscapes and cultures. However, concerns about women's safety on trains have often deterred female travelers. This expedition aims to gather firsthand insights into the experiences of women traveling by Gyanodaya Express in India, identifying areas for improvement in the train premises and promoting women-friendly travel practices.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this research project are:

- To assess the safety and friendliness of train travel for women in India, conducting a 12-day expedition across the country.
- To discover how women centric is our train (Gyanodaya) on the basis of following factors:
 - General Hygiene
 - Toilet Hygiene
 - Safety
 - Privacy
 - Inclusivity

Methodology

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will be employed to gather data, including:

- Interviews: In-depth interviews with women passengers, railway personnel, and representatives of women's organizations will provide personal narratives and expert perspectives.
- Surveys: Structured surveys will be distributed to female passengers to gather quantitative data on their experiences, including safety concerns, amenities, and overall satisfaction.
- Observations: Direct observations of train stations, platforms, and compartments will provide insights into the physical environment, interactions between passengers, and the overall atmosphere.

Expected outcomes

The expedition is expected to generate valuable data on the following aspects of women's train travel in India:

- Safety Perceptions: Understanding women's perceptions of safety on trains, including factors that contribute to a sense of security or vulnerability.
- Travel Experiences: Identifying common challenges and positive experiences faced by women train passengers, including interactions with fellow passengers, railway staff, and local communities.
- Infrastructure and Amenities: Assessing the adequacy and accessibility of train facilities for women, including restrooms, lighting, and security measures.
- Recommendations for Improvement: Proposing concrete recommendations for enhancing the safety, comfort, and overall experience of women traveling by train in India.

Questionnaire analysis

Over a span of 12 days, an analysis of women's train journeys in India reveals a complex tapestry of experiences, reflecting both challenges and resilience. They forge connections with fellow passengers, sharing stories and forming temporary communities. The journey embodies resilience as women adapt to varied conditions, from crowded coaches to solitary moments of reflection by train windows. Challenges like safety concerns and limited amenities persist, underscoring the need for improved infrastructure. Despite adversities, the journey symbolizes the strength and camaraderie of women, transcending the physical distances traveled. It mirrors the diverse tapestry of Indian society, where women embark on a shared odyssey of endurance and solidarity.

The collected data paints a nuanced picture of the socio-cultural dynamics that shape these journeys.

Empowerment Through Connectivity:

The data highlights the transformative power of train journeys for many women. Access to mobile connectivity and digital platforms during travel emerges as a significant empowerment tool. Women utilize this connectivity for work, education, and staying connected with family, showcasing the positive impact of technology on their mobility.

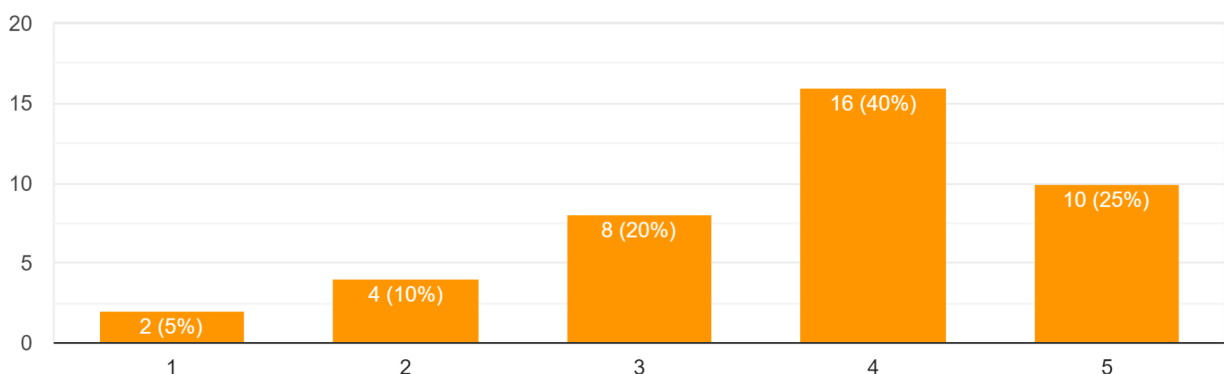
Social Dynamics:

Observations on social interactions during train journeys bring forth interesting insights. Women often form supportive communities, sharing experiences and advice. This social aspect highlights the potential for positive change through community building and awareness campaigns that encourage a collective approach to safety.

Sanitation Facilities:

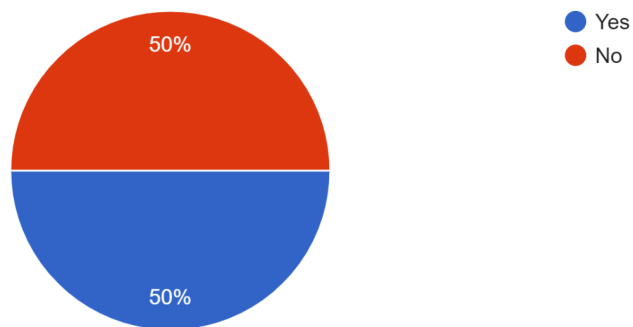
On a scale of 1-5, how comfortable do you feel in terms of safety and security while traveling on this train?

40 responses



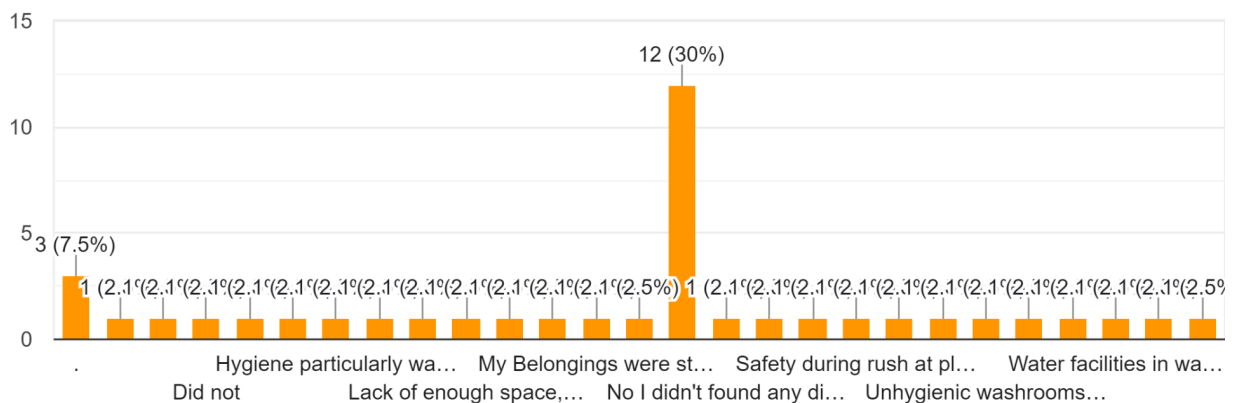
Have you encountered any instances of discomfort during the journey?

40 responses



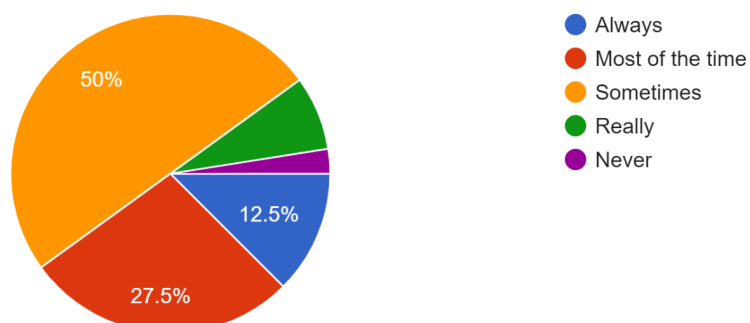
If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, please describe in 2-3 points.

40 responses



How often do you have trouble finding a clean and well-maintained toilet on the train?

40 responses



Historically, inadequate sanitation facilities on trains have been a significant concern for women. Limited and poorly maintained restrooms pose hygiene risks and discomfort during long journeys. Although our train was a special train where they have previous knowledge about the around 800

women only, still there are a lot of upgraded and cleaner restroom facilities for women. However, there remains a need for continued investment in maintaining and expanding these facilities

Dressing Rooms:

The train was not designed according to women's needs and requirements. In our survey almost all women mention about lack of dedicated dressing rooms can be a concern, especially for overnight journeys or long-distance travel. Women may face challenges in changing clothes privately, impacting comfort and modesty. As there were not even curtains in any compartment, some modern trains or specific compartments have started incorporating dressing rooms, acknowledging the need for privacy during journeys. However, the availability of such facilities is consistent across all trains and routes.

Dissemination and Impact:

The report will be shared with concerned organization, travel agencies, and the media to raise awareness and promote women-friendly travel practices.

Recommendations:

1. Enhanced Security Measures:

- Implement increased security personnel on trains and at stations, especially during nighttime journeys, to enhance the overall safety perception for women.
- Introduce surveillance systems in compartments and at stations to deter and respond to any untoward incidents promptly.

2. Cultural Sensitivity Training:

- Conduct regular training programs for railway staff focusing on cultural sensitivity, gender awareness, and ensuring a respectful and inclusive environment for women passengers.
- Raise awareness among passengers about appropriate behavior and reporting mechanisms for any harassment or misconduct.

3. Improved Infrastructure:

- Invest in maintaining and upgrading restroom facilities on trains, ensuring cleanliness, hygiene, and sufficient amenities.
- Introduce dedicated dressing rooms in train compartments, especially for overnight journeys, to address privacy concerns and enhance the overall comfort of women passengers.

4. Inclusive Design:

- Develop and implement train designs that cater specifically to the needs and preferences of women travelers, including well-thought-out compartment layouts, seating arrangements, and amenities.
- Ensure the inclusion of curtains or partitions in compartments to provide privacy for women during their journeys.

5. Community Engagement:

- Encourage the formation of supportive communities among women travelers by organizing awareness campaigns and facilitating interactions during the journey.
- Promote a collective approach to safety, where passengers actively contribute to creating a secure and respectful travel environment.

6. Digital Empowerment:

- Continue to provide and enhance digital connectivity on trains, recognizing its empowering effect on women's mobility.
- Collaborate with mobile service providers to ensure consistent and reliable connectivity, enabling women to engage in work, education, and stay connected with family during their journeys.

7. Regular Feedback Mechanism:

- Establish a systematic and user-friendly feedback mechanism for women passengers to report any issues or suggestions related to safety, amenities, or overall travel experience.
- Use the feedback received to continually improve and adapt policies, procedures, and infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of women travelers.

Conclusion:

This women-friendly train expedition has the potential to make a significant contribution to improving the safety and accessibility of train travel for women in India. By gathering first hand data, identifying areas for improvement, and advocating for positive change, this project can empower women to explore India's vast railway network with confidence and ease. The research could also make recommendations for future research in this area, such as investigating the use of travel expeditions in education and community development programs.