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# Challenges of Rural Women Entrepreneurs Impacting Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs which impacts the sustainability of tourism industry in Oman. Quantitative approach was used in this study where a survey was conducted on selected women entrepreneurs in the rural areas of Al Batinah region. Data were collected from 51 respondents using a Likert scale close ended questionnaire and data was analyzed using SPSS. Regression analysis results revealed the challenges and its impact on sustainable tourism. Implications and limitations of the study are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Women entrepreneurs, Challenges, Sustainable tourism, Entrepreneurship.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism refers to the initiative of tourism industries that helps in acknowledging both the positive and negative impacts of tourism and enhances the positive impacts over negative ones. As opined by Abou-Shouk *et al.* (2021), sustainable tourism is the tourism technique procured by various nations that help those nations in enhancing its ability to keep the sanctity of the tourist destinations intact. Regarding a tourist destination, negative impacts include economic degradation, damage to the environmental peace and sanctity of the place, overcrowding, and so on. On the other hand, positive impacts on a tourism destination include the creation of new job opportunities, conservation and interpretation of cultural heritage, conservation of wildlife, as well as restoration of landscapes (Zhao and Peng, 2019). The concept of sustainable tourism was coined by UN World Tourism Organization. It has been pointed out that the type of tourism that takes the whole account of the present and future environmental, economic, and societal impacts, and derives the responsibilities of all the stakeholders. These stakeholders include the tourists, the industry personnel, the employees of the industry, and the host communities which includes women entrepreneurs. In this study, the challenges of rural women entrepreneurs in the field of sustainable tourism are looked into.

As suggested by Jaafar *et al.* (2020), entrepreneurship refers to the ability-based initiative that helps in developing, creating, organizing, and managing the business while fighting the risks and barriers in order to generate revenue for making a profit. Women entrepreneurship is considered to be the fastest entrepreneurial population growth in the world. Being one of the most important financial powers in the world, Oman is not an exception. In this country, entrepreneurial initiatives are gradually gaining popularity (Font *et al.* 2019). Oman is a country that has been affected due to the crude oil price reduction as the most important

resource that leads to the GDP growth of the country is crude oil. The oil sector of Oman has a significant contribution to the economy of the Middle East, and the reduction in the crude oil price has significantly impacted the Middle Eastern economy. This has acted as one of the most important reasons behind the initiative of the Oman Government to enhance the chances of new entrepreneurship in SMEs and bigger industries.

According to Al Badi and Khan, (2020), the tourism industry has many women in the workforce. However, while conducting an ascending analysis of the industry, it is found that the number of female leaders in this industry is very less. Tourism is one of those industries that has a sustainable future. In this era of the busy schedule that is wrapping up the lives of people, and after the breakout of COVID 19, and due to the lockdown, that was imposed worldwide by most governments, the urge for visiting tourist places has increased among the people (Ghouse *et al.* 2021). On the other hand, every country in this world is to some extent a tourist destination for the people who love to travel. In every country in the world, irrespective of its financial condition, thriving tourism industry is present. Tourism has an unparallel quality to bring harmony among different nations of the world. In any tourist place, various people from different corners of the world meet together, and the cultural competencies get enhanced as well as advancements in the public interrelationships become gradual day by day.

Tourism is one of the most promising industries having a women-based workforce in the world, and due to it being present in most of the countries in the world, it has a large geographic reach (Räisänen, 2018). This industry has the opportunity to bring out the rural women from poverty, enhance their skills, and provide them sustainable employment, and dignified life. However, in some nations, there are social, economic, political, or environmental issues which becomes problematic to the women living in those countries. Rural women, in most societies, are disadvantaged due to the lack of educational opportunities, inadequate maternity benefits, and improper meetings with cultural expectations (Alkharusi and Segumpan, 2021).

It is seen that most women having the potential to be a leader in tourism industries remain busy with cooking, clerical jobs, or serving the family. In case they serve any job, they are generally paid 15 times less than their deserving amount (Wood and Al-Azri, 2019). Furthermore, there is a large number of women, who serve unpaid roles including waitresses, chefs, attendants, and so on in tourism industries, and the main objective remains to support family businesses. However, the number of women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry is very less. The tourism industry has an opportunity to enhance the chances for the women to thrive within the industry and to gain a gradual growth towards empowerment.

### **Research aim**

The research mainly aims at discussing the challenges faced by the rural women entrepreneurs in the Oman tourism industry and finding out the solutions to enhance their chances to progress gradually.

### **Research Questions**

What are the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry?

How can these challenges affect the sustainability of tourism in Oman?

What are the approaches to overcome the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Tourism is no more a marginal sector, and its gradually becoming the primary revenue-generating resource for countries. For many communities, the tourism business has become one of the most important initiatives for enhancing the standard of living (Kabil *et al.* 2022). The global revenues generated from tourism is almost 9 trillion US dollars in the last year and the number of global tourists has become almost 1.5 billion. Among these tourists, almost 3.5 million tourists visited the countries of the Middle East, including Oman. The main objective behind the initiative of procuring sustainable tourism in Oman at its beginning was to align the protection of the natural resources of the country and the development of tourism and tourist destinations.

The belief among the Omani tourism sector is that there remain different components of the business initiative which consists of elements that can be attractive to tourists (Feldbauer and Jeffrey, 2021). Cultivation of these components can be a way of enhancing job opportunities, including managerial and clerical jobs. The preservation and enhancement of local culture simultaneously in the tourism sector is also important. Furthermore, sustainable tourism helps in the revitalization of economic resources among the rural communities by providing different commercial opportunities to the members of those communities. According to Al Hinai *et al.* (2020), there are barriers as well to the successful implementation of sustainable tourism which includes the increment in the number of foreign labours, a smaller number of interested and skilled Omanis in the field of sustainable tourism, lack of investment in the field of tourism, and excessive consumption of environmental resources as well as overcrowding of the tourist destinations changes the traditional lifestyles of the local community.

Women entrepreneurs in sustainable tourism is a rare thing not only in Oman but also in the world. Despite the workforce consisting of women employees, the number of women entrepreneurs in the field is very small. It is seen that financial stability rarely becomes an enabler in protecting women from gender biases. In Europe, just 9 percent of the CEOs are women, and in the USA the figure is almost half, nearly 4.7%. In countries of the MENA region, including Oman, the value is about 1.7% (Almathami *et al.* 2022).

According to Scharfenort (2020), in such a patriarchal country like Oman, men do not like them in the higher position even the women are enthusiastic about education and being empowered. Hence, the tendency of rural women in being entrepreneurs are low. This also led to another issue which is the lack of self confidence in exploring entrepreneurship in a systematic way and a lack of awareness of their rich natural resources as tourist places in their respective villages (Hansrod, 2019). An inexperienced approach to the growth of the tourism sector enhances their chances of failure.

According to Mathew (2019), women, not only in Oman but globally are witnessed to act as the keepers of culture. Women act as chefs, tailors, growers, and homemakers. These little things act as the gateway to traditions and stories. The involvement of these women as tour guides helps in enhancing the beauty of storytelling among travellers. These help the travellers in gaining interest in knowing about the culture of the place (Rehman, 2018). These ultimately result in the betterment of the social culture of the tourist places.

Sustainable tourism development can be approached by seven key elements (Griffin *et al.* 2021) which can help tourism entrepreneurs to sustain tourism development. These are carrying capacity, local community, tourist experience, destination management, seasonality management, managing the demands, and smart destination generation. Carrying capacity refers to the maximum number of people who can visit a tourist place simultaneously. Local community refers to the impact of tourism on the local people of a place, and it includes well-

being, emotional well-being, health, and safety. Tourist experience refers to the success of the tour in satisfying the tourism enthusiastic visitors who come to visit the places. Destination management refers to the coordinated management of all the elements that make up a destination a better place to visit as a tourist and seasonality management is the selection of the best seasons to visit a particular place. Demand management is related to seasonality, which includes the demand for accommodation in a tourist place in different seasons (Alsawafi and Almuhrzi, 2022). Last but not the least is the generation of smart destinations, which includes the better and more sustainable tourist destination generation.

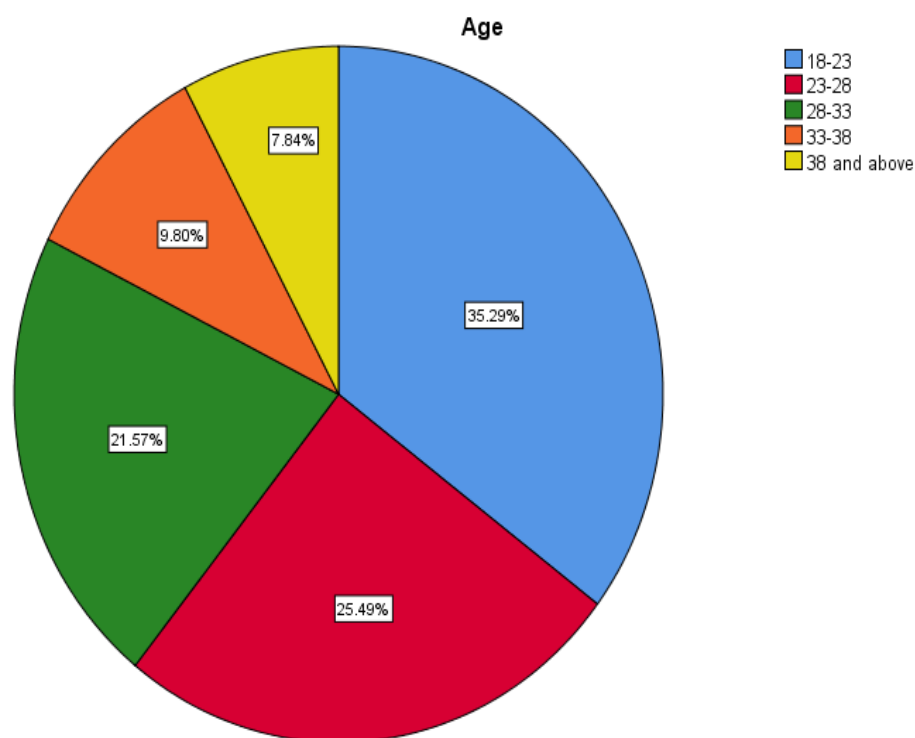
## METHODOLOGY

The target sample for this study consisted of women entrepreneurs at different rural areas in the region of Al Batinah, Oman. A total of 51 responses were collected for this study. The survey instrument was a questionnaire where the first part of the questionnaire consisted of the respondent's demographic information. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of the challenges that these women entrepreneurs faced.

### Data collection and analysis

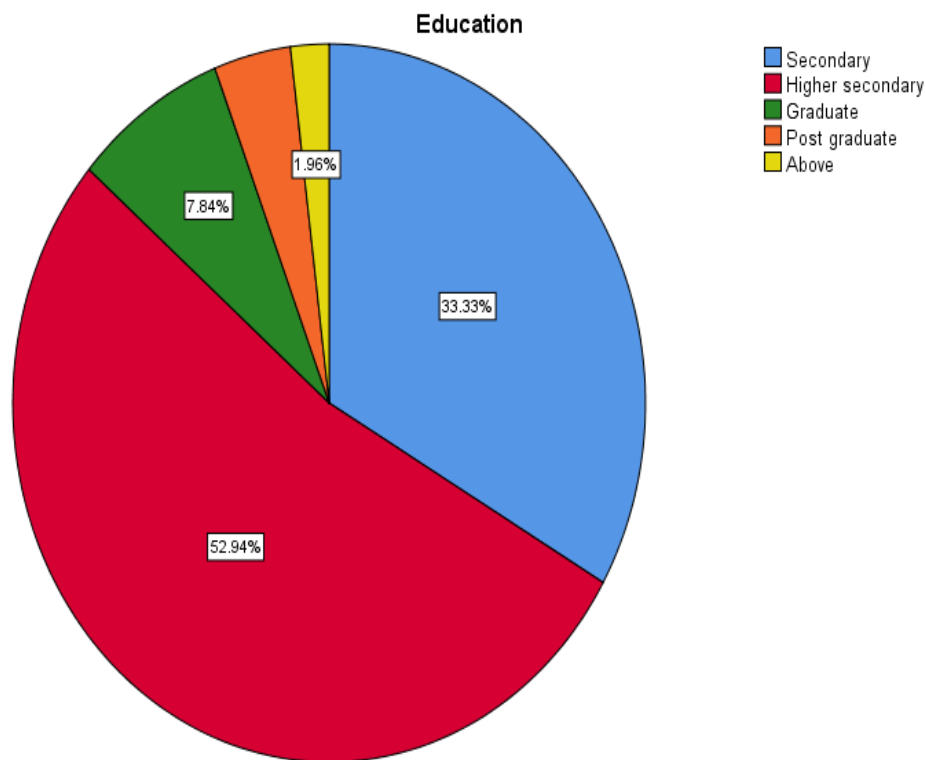
The data collection and analysis method refer to the generation of information-based pattern drawing in a systematic manner. In this research, primary data is collected via the questionnaire method, and the answers are analysed using the SPSS analysis.

### Demographic distribution



**Figure 1: Age**

Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution by age of respondents. 35.29% is the highest frequency rate and can be observed by the participation of women entrepreneurs of 18-23 years of age. Apart from that, the age frequency is high in the case of 23-28 years of aged participants. The lowest frequency of age is observed to be in the age group of 38 and above.



**Figure 2: Education**

Figure 2 illustrates the education level of respondents. According to the data, most respondents have higher secondary education with a percentage of 52.94% and the few have a post graduate education which consist of only 1.96%.

**Statistics**

	Age	Education	The tourist host relationship is one of the main social taboo that impacted sustainability of tourism in oman. Agree or disagree?	Financial resources is considered to be one of the barriers that impacted sustainability in tourism agree or disagree?	Men individuals make a control of women entrepreneurs that create a major problem on sustainability in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Women entrepreneurs are observed to have minimal confidence in handling people abroad. Agree or disagree?	Maintenance of local culture is favorable for women entrepreneurs for enhancement of sustainability in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Women entrepreneurs need to be well educated in this context for avoiding patriarchal aspects. Agree or disagree?	Women entrepreneurs need to work more on resource planning for enhancing confidence. Agree or disagree?	Provision of excellent service to tourists from abroad might be beneficial for increasing competency in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Tourism in Oman is impacted by women entrepreneurs which need corporate renovation. Agree or disagree?	
N	Valid Missing	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	51 0	
Mean		2.29	1.88	2.25	2.27	2.16	2.43	2.33	2.22	2.14	2.25	2.35
Median		2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
Mode		1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1 <sup>a</sup>	2	2	1
Skewness		.698	1.397	.884	.691	.697	.668	.686	.921	.712	.770	.470
Std. Error of Skewness		.333	.333	.333	.333	.333	.333	.333	.333	.333	.333	.333
Kurtosis		-.497	2.942	.130	-.192	-.264	-.374	-.322	.143	.110	-.175	-1.078
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.656	.656	.656	.656	.656	.656	.656	.656	.656	.656	.656
Sum		117	96	115	116	110	124	119	113	109	115	120

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

**Figure 3: Frequency distribution**

Figure 3 depicts the frequency distribution of the present study. In a statistical analysis, frequency distribution discusses the number of intervals between a given variable. According to the views of Mishra *et al.* (2019), a frequency distribution of a study is more or less dependent on the distribution plane of variables. The above image shows the frequency distribution of the study has five important values which are needed for the description of

variables. Variable description of a study is considered to be understood by the mean, mode, skewness and kurtosis. The highest mean value of this study is observed to be 2.43 which is observed in the case of question number 6. Apart from that, the skewness value of the present study is observed to be high in case of the question number 2. Hence, it is clear from the above figure that all of the variables have an equal range of frequency in this context.

**Correlations**

		Age	Education	The tourist host relationship is one of the main social taboos that impacted sustainability of tourism in Oman. Agree or disagree?	Financial resources is considered to be one of the barriers that impacted sustainability in tourism agree or disagree?	Men individuals make a control of women entrepreneurs that create a major problem on sustainability in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Women entrepreneurs are observed to have minimal confidence in handling people abroad. Agree or disagree?	Maintenance of local culture is favorable for women entrepreneurs for enhancement of sustainability in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Women entrepreneurs need to be well educated in this context for avoiding patriarchal aspects. Agree or disagree?	Women entrepreneurs need to work more on resource planning for enhancing confidence. Agree or disagree?	Provision of excellent service to tourists from abroad might be beneficial for increasing competency in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Tourism in Oman is impacted by women entrepreneurs which need corporate renovation. Agree or disagree?
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.890**	.937**	.970**	.964**	.962**	.963**	.964**	.928**	.963**	.957**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Education	Pearson Correlation	.890**	1	.900**	.925**	.894**	.857**	.885**	.928**	.899**	.913**	.846**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
The tourist host relationship is one of the main social taboos that impacted sustainability of tourism in Oman. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.937**	.900**	1	.948**	.919**	.948**	.973**	.958**	.963**	.971**	.918**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Financial resources is considered to be one of the barriers that impacted sustainability in tourism agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.970**	.925**	.948**	1	.960**	.953**	.965**	.966**	.943**	.978**	.951**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Men individuals make a control of women entrepreneurs that create a major problem on sustainability in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.964**	.894**	.919**	.960**	1	.927**	.945**	.952**	.929**	.952**	.949**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Women entrepreneurs are observed to have minimal confidence in handling people abroad. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.962**	.857**	.948**	.953**	.927**	1	.968**	.941**	.929**	.948**	.937**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Maintenance of local culture is favorable for women entrepreneurs for enhancement of sustainability in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.963**	.885**	.973**	.965**	.945**	.968**	1	.949**	.945**	.973**	.942**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Women entrepreneurs need to be well educated in this context for avoiding patriarchal aspects. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.964**	.928**	.958**	.966**	.952**	.941**	.949**	1	.954**	.973**	.935**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Women entrepreneurs need to work more on resource planning for enhancing confidence. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.928**	.899**	.963**	.943**	.929**	.929**	.945**	.954**	1	.952**	.927**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Provision of excellent service to tourists from abroad might be beneficial for increasing competency in tourism. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.963**	.913**	.971**	.978**	.952**	.948**	.973**	.973**	.952**	1	.945**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Tourism in Oman is impacted by women entrepreneurs which need corporate renovation. Agree or disagree?	Pearson Correlation	.957**	.846**	.918**	.951**	.949**	.937**	.942**	.935**	.927**	.945**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure 4: Pearson correlation statistics**

Figure 4 explains the correlation of the study which is the first and the foremost crucial aspect for describing the movement of variables. In Pearson correlation, the linear relationship of variables can be well described. It can be seen from the data above the Pearson correlation linear relationship ranged from 0.894 to 0.967. This denotes that all of the variables have a positive relationship with each other.

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.963 <sup>a</sup>	.928	.922	.352	.928	148.912	4	46	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Women entrepreneurs are observed to have minimal confidence in handling people abroad. Agree or disagree?, Men individuals make a control of women entrepreneurs that create a major problem on sustainability in toursim. Agree or disagree?, The tourist host relationship is one of the main social taboo that impacted sustainability of tourism in oman. Agree or disagree?, Financial resources is considered to be one of the barriers that impacted sustainability in toursim agree or disagree?

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	73.937	4	18.484	148.912	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	5.710	46	.124		
	Total	79.647	50			

a. Dependent Variable: Tourism in Oman is impacted by women entrepreneurs which need corporate renovation. Agree or disagree?

b. Predictors: (Constant), Women entrepreneurs are observed to have minimal confidence in handling people abroad. Agree or disagree?, Men individuals make a control of women entrepreneurs that create a major problem on sustainability in toursim. Agree or disagree?, The tourist host relationship is one of the main social taboo that impacted sustainability of tourism in oman. Agree or disagree?, Financial resources is considered to be one of the barriers that impacted sustainability in toursim agree or disagree?

**Figure 5: Linear regression with model summary and ANOVA**

Figure 5 illustrates the linear regression of variables. In statistical analysis, linear regression analysis predicts the value of one variable based on the values of another variable (Van den Bergh *et al.* 2020). From the analysis, the R value is 0.963 and significant value is 0.000 which indicates that the model summary analysis of the study is statistically significant. ANOVA analysis shows that the value of a sum of squares is 73.937 with a residual value of 1.918. The total value of the sum of squares is 79.647. Significant value is 0.000 which shows that the analysis is statistically significant.

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.991	.992	6

**Figure 6: Cronbach alpha**

In Figure 6 the value of Cronbach alpha is 0.991 which shows that all the variables have a high range of internal consistency.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the rural women-based entrepreneurial challenges towards sustainable tourism development were analysed and the results were evaluated. Different important measures are needed to be taken to enhance the chances of rural women in the successful generation of the sustainable tourism within the country. Awareness campaign for the rural women on being entrepreneurs should be carried out to enlighten these women on the benefit and advantages of being entrepreneurs. Other than that entrepreneurship education should be made a formal subject in the school curriculum to give a good start off for students in becoming entrepreneurs when they graduate. This is an important action that focuses on

educating women. Another vital recommendation is that government should provide support to women in getting access to natural resources in their goals of being entrepreneurs.

As a culturally and historically rich country, if Oman shows a flexible and supportive approach to its rural women entrepreneurs, it will be a big gain to the tourism industry of the country.

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