

Travel's female leaders #ChooseToChallenge

 By Jenna Berndt

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While we celebrate Women's Day in August each year, the rest of the world celebrated the power and perseverance of women yesterday 8 March, on International Women's Day...



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Here, female thought leaders in the travel and tourism industry share what their areas of focus were for yesterday and 2021, and what advice they have to other women fighting the good fight in the travel and tourism industries.

What encouragement would you like to give women in travel and tourism?

Sue Garrett, general manager marketing and product at the Flight Centre Travel Group was only 27 years old when she took on her first senior executive role in a very male-dominated executive environment.

"It is a tough and competitive world out there," says Garrett, "and to be recognised as a female leader for your ability, rather than as a token is not always easy. There certainly are times that the glass ceiling becomes very apparent, but instead of using it to limit your potential see it as an opportunity to break through using your smarts, determination and inquisitive approach."

Garrett offers the below advice for other women in the industry:

- Surround yourself with great people.
- Take calculated risks knowing that you may fail - but fail fast, admit to it, learn from it and never give up trying.
- Put your people and their needs ahead of your own - leading from the back has always been something I have believed in.
- Stay humble and open to learning.
- Stay determined regardless of how many times things may not go your way.
- Keep disciplined - most of the great leaders I have ever had the opportunity to work alongside are extremely disciplined in every aspect of their lives.

"The travel and tourism industry has gone through incredibly challenging times since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic – more so than any other industry I can think of," says Dorine Reinstein, Corporate Division Leader at Big Ambitions.

"As a PR and communications specialist for the travel and tourism industry, I have witnessed from the side-lines the grit, determination, passion and courage the women in the South African travel and tourism industry, in particular, have shown.

"I am in awe at how these powerful women – from the cleaning ladies to the CEOs – managed to continue to convey the warmth and hospitality of our industry while dealing with refunds, repatriations, stranded passengers and put their own worries aside to help their clients. Whatever happens next for our travel industry, I'm confident that the women in travel and tourism will have a bright future."

Mummy Mafojane, FCM Travel Solutions operations leader: "It is important to grow and support one another, especially in such difficult times. When women uplift each other, it benefits not only the industry but the nation as a whole."

"Never think you are not good enough," says Chantal Gouws, general manager independent brands at the Flight Centre Travel Group. "We are providers - we hold a different value to our hearts that is unique. We can multitask and ground ourselves on our values. Stay true to yourself, remain humble and remember the sky is the limit. No matter how you feel, get up, dress, up show up and never give up. Tough times don't last but tough people (women) do!"

Nirosha Sidat, business development manager at Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL): "Embrace change and stand up for what you believe in. Women are resilient with the current times serving as the best example. In honour of the 110th anniversary of International Women's Day, NCL is launching a month-long effort encouraging team members to "Step Up, Speak Up, Stand Up, and Never, Ever Give Up." NCL's female leaders are sharing personal messages of empowerment in this video message below:

#ChoosetoChallenge

"Things will bounce back and we will get back to where we were before, if not stronger and better as an industry," adds Bongzi Keswa, leisure marketing manager Flight Centre Travel Group. "Plus, the biggest positive is that we would have opened up South Africa for residents to explore," citing the importance of supporting our local businesses.

"I am extremely fortunate to work with a powerhouse team of women," says Kim Taylor, customer experience director at the Flight Centre Travel Group. "My message of encouragement would be to continue collaborating, having honest conversations and never losing sight of a common goal. When we lean on each other and learn from each other, we can do remarkable things."

"To keep your eye on your goals and vision and realise your value. We are so much stronger, creative, intuitive and tenacious that we give ourselves credit for," says Elmarie Rabe, Marketing Manager Visit Stellenbosch.

"The role of a woman can never be underplayed," says Megan Vorster, Peopleworks general manager Flight Centre Travel Group. "The career woman, the entrepreneur, the mom, the stay-at-home mom, the married, the unmarried, the sister, the niece and all of us that play multiple roles. It's a reminder that we can do anything we set our minds to, without limitations."

Cindy Sheedy Walker, CEO and founder at Extraordinary: "We celebrate our sisters in the industry today, their successes and their tenacity. They contribute so much to this wonderful industry that one is reminded just how far women have advanced and nourished tourism worldwide."

What are you focusing on this International Women's Day 2021?

Riet Goetschalckx, director of sales and marketing at Oceania Cruises: "Travel is a valuable and important part of women's lives all over the world, being able to see incredible sights, experience new cultures and people. Being a part of this vibrant industry and working with global colleagues and communities is a privilege and opening up the world so that it is accessible to women of all backgrounds is so important."

Visit Stellenbosch CEO Jeanneret Momberg: Keep on challenging the status quo, build and share opportunities and mentorship with travel and tourism entrepreneurs. Support each other as we find strength in collaboration and standing together.

Bonnie Smith: "Covid-19 gave everyone a lesson in disruption. Our focus this Women's Day is on the soft skills that are so desperately needed in the travel industry. Travellers now look to their travel consultant for up-to-the-minute information about border control guidelines, safety protocols, departure and arrival requirements and more. But, they will also look to their travel consultant for empathy.

While hard, technical skills will be in demand, travel and tourism is still all about people. Soft skills like empathy, communication and the ability to listen are more important than ever. So, as women in the travel industry, we'll need to be engaged and responsive (especially when things go wrong), and willing to go the extra mile. Grit, adaptability, flexibility – the list goes on. The travel agent of the future is an expert, a specialist, a therapist and someone to lean on.

Sue Garrett: Be kind to yourself - after a year of uncertainty and second-guessing, it is hard to find the right measures of

success as they have shifted so significantly, so don't be too hard on yourself. Be kind to others - everyone is going through what you are. Celebrate your resilience - we are going to keep needing it!

Chantal Gouws: "International Women's Day is a day where we can celebrate and be reminded about all our strong, loving and brave woman in our country and the world. Let's remember all women deserve respect and appreciation for the contribution and value they give. It shouldn't only be one day where women are appreciated."

Dorine Reinstein: "The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "Choose to Challenge" (#ChooseToChallenge). In this past year, the travel and tourism industry's women have emerged as powerful leaders. They have shown us that empathy and understanding are incredibly strong attributes for anyone wanting to rebuild an industry.

"Let's focus on challenging the status quo and rebuilding a stronger and more sustainable tourism industry for all."

Bongi Keswa: It has always been a focus of mine to see and grow with women around me, both in a personal and professional capacity. Supporting each other through various milestones and helping each other navigate through work-life complexities. It's important to have these groups of women to lean on especially during these Covid times.

Cindy Sheedy Walker: Uplifting female staff members is a core value within Extraordinary. Within our operations teams, the female managed properties and divisions outweigh male leadership by three to one.

Kim Taylor: "I believe that the theme #ChooseToChallenge is extremely fitting for this year's Women's Day celebration. My focus this year is reflecting on the resilience of women around the world in the face of an extremely tough year.

"Although there have been many ups and downs and false starts, especially in the travel industry - where we feel we move forward, only to be pulled back by fluid travel restrictions - we don't always focus on our growth and how we have changed in the face of so much uncertainty. Reflection is a powerful tool to realise how resilient we are."

ABOUT JENNA BERNDT

With a curious mind and a love for travel and tourism, Jenna Berndt has over nine years' marketing experience in the travel industry. She is currently a brand owner for leisure travel brands at Big Ambitions, a specialist Cape Town-based travel content marketing consultancy.

Jenna has a journalism degree specialising in graphic design, a keen eye for visual and written communication and is focused on achieving brand goals through content creation and PR, marketing strategy, SEO copywriting and social media.

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