

Women taking SA travel agencies to new heights

With the arrival of the internet and a host of disruptive technologies, travel agents have been deemed the dodos of the travel industry. It's true, to an extent, as travel agents, as we knew them - acting as agents for airlines, hotels and other travel suppliers in the absence of online travel platforms such as Expedia, Booking.com, etc. no longer exists. If you'd read the papers in the past decade, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the role of travel agent was going the same way as the dodo, and to a large extent you would be right.

According to the Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA), the travel agency you walk into today, however, is a but a shadow of that past, evolving to become a centre for travel professionals that guide holidaymakers and business travellers to travel with peace of mind. Dominated by women, South Africa's travel agencies have further shrugged off perceptions that the industry is doomed to go downhill and fostered a generation of powerful women who are now taking it to new heights.

Here's how three power-house women are flying high to achieve their professional and personal goals:



Carla Nichols

Carla Nichols – leisure consultant, Club Travel

"Although the travel industry is perceived to be very glamorous which it can be, it takes a lot of work."

It's the simple things in life that Nichols enjoys. Family time, travel opportunities and making her client's holiday dreams come true are what make her happy. For Nichols, the travel bug bit young. Coming from a family that travelled, Nichols has been fortunate to travel the world as a travel consultant, but cautions that it takes hard work and passion. The travel industry, says Nichols, is a small, tight-knit industry so people who work in travel rely on each other for support. Many managerial roles are filled by women who have worked their way up the ladder and they are given the utmost respect. Nichols' travel agent background has meant that she can now travel to other countries and work in travel, which she plans to do as she prepares to move to London. Her plan is to stay in the travel industry.

How do you think travel is going to evolve in the next few years?

I think travel is always going to grow, but I do feel that clients are becoming a lot more "travel sawy" and are now open to exploring new/untouched destinations.

What would you say to those who say you're crazy to become a travel agent or work in travel?

Travel is amazing. It opens your eyes to the world and shows you that there is so much more to explore and experience. No single day is the same. You interact with different people every day who want to travel to different destinations so you are always learning.

What are the best benefits of your job in travel?

The best benefit of my job in travel is the opportunity to travel so you can see and experience destinations first-hand. There's no better way to sell a destination to a customer than when you've travelled there yourself.



Michelle Keggie

Michelle Keggie – travel manager, Flight Centre Travel Group

“This job is a purposeful job. We make people’s dreams come true.”

Keggie has led her team to be Flight Centre South Africa’s top shop in KwaZulu-Natal for the last two years. Today, Keggie’s goal of working half-day to spend time with her family has come true and she can think of nothing else she’d rather do. Having lived overseas and worked in travel for over 20 years, Keggie’s heart remained in South Africa and she returned to Durban to do what she loves. She’s since travelled to 15 different countries and says she couldn’t do this a job on her own – she has the backing of an innovative company that constantly reinvents itself and an invested team that is reaping the rewards of focusing on a goal and working hard to achieve it. For Keggie, being a travel consultant is something she envisages for the rest of her life, but she admits you need to be very driven and to look within for motivation if

you’re going to succeed.

How do you think travel is going to evolve in the next few years?

In the future, I predict there will be fewer bricks and mortar stores and travel will be sold in the comfort of people’s homes. Personal contact with the customer is very important offering a more superior service because so much can happen in your travel experience and it’s great to know that you are dealing with someone that is available to you 24/7. This personal contact is a great opportunity for travel agents competing with online travel sites.

What would you say to those who say you’re crazy to become a travel agent or work in travel?

This job is a purposeful job. We make people’s dreams come true, like the lady who hasn’t seen her sister in 15 years. We make that happen by connecting with people from all walks of life. People open up to you when you’re their travel consultant and we have an important role to play in their experience.

What are the best benefits of your job in travel?

Working with people is a humbling experience. You learn something new every day. The opportunity to run your own business without the headache of the business admin and to write your own paycheck are other benefits. Once you’ve built up your client base over a year or two, you’ll enjoy endless opportunities, and you get to enjoy the magic of travel where there is a whole world to explore and discover.



Tamarin Seymour – Travel Counsellors South Africa

“The longer I’m in travel and hear that travel agents are on their way out, the more I know it’s absolute nonsense.”

One of the lucky few women in South Africa to balance her work and personal life, Seymour is an independent travel consultant with Travel Counsellors South Africa. As such, she runs her own business with the support of Travel Counsellors and has time to balance a busy work day with fetching and carrying her kids and indulging her Crossfit habit, which takes centre stage six mornings a week. Family and health inspire Seymour and spending time with her family is the most important thing in her life. Seymour’s dream in high school was to join the travel industry, a decision she has not regretted as she works with travellers who rely on her excellent service and are prepared to pay

for it. According to Seymour, South Africans are increasingly realising the value of working with a good travel consultant as service begins to trump price. In her business, referrals are precious so top-notch service is essential, and the systems and technology provided to me by Travel Counsellors assist me in providing the best product too.

How do you think travel is going to evolve in the next few years?

The longer I work in travel and hear that travel agent are on their way out, the more I know it's absolute nonsense. There is so much information out there and too many things the customer doesn't know, organising travel has become completely overwhelming. The internet is actually making it harder for people to travel.

What would you say to those who say you're crazy to become a travel agent or work in travel?

Being a travel consultant opens your eyes to what's out in the world. We don't live in a box which makes us street smart. The industry is also filled with amazing people. To work in travel, you need to be a special breed of person. Of course, we do have some opportunities to travel, but this is not the main reason you should work in travel. Rather, it's because of the knowledge of the world you acquire and the people you meet along the way.

What are the best benefits of your job in travel?

I love planning things for people. It's a passion, especially if it's their first trip. It's such a special thing to be involved in and you're always going to be remembered as the person who made it happen.

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