

# Introducing the women of the travel sector

South Africa's retail travel sector employs around 9,000 people, 73% of which are female. This is according to a 2017 industry assessment by the Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA).



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Although not without its challenges, the retail travel sector has evolved into a dynamic hub for young female travel professionals who are leaders in their field and promote travel with #PeaceofMind.

In celebration of #WomenMonth this August, we chatted to a few of the many female travel professionals whose careers are flying high...



## Esmari Leibbrandt, Area Sales Manager, The Travel Corporation

Leibbrandt recently scooped Flight Centre's Top Land Supplier Representative award. Her colleagues describe her as the epitome of a people's person, and she represents six of The Travel Corporations travel brands. Leibbrandt also manages a perfect impersonation of *Suzelle DIY*.

### ***What is needed to attract more skilled female workers to the industry?***

I would have to say, offering more travel benefits upfront. There are plenty of skilled professionals out there who simply lack travel experience and, therefore, avoid the industry. Better maternity benefits is something else to consider...

### ***What advice would you give to young women looking to start or build a career in the travel industry?***

Never give up. Even though the industry can be challenging, experience and passion are invaluable. If you truly work hard,

the world becomes your oyster. It is as simple as that.

***What travel trends do you see for 2019?***

Definitely [a preference for] the Eastern Mediterranean, specifically Turkey, which is becoming increasingly popular.



**Shameema Pillay, owner and manager of a Harvey World Travel franchised agency outlet, East London**

Pillay helped her Harvey World Travel branch raise R22,000 at a recent golf day in June, with part of the proceeds donated to the Eyabantwana Children's Trust as well as Friends of the East London Zoo. Pillay and her teammates also participated in the CANSA Relay for Life in March.

***Have you faced any specific challenges as a female in the travel industry?***

No. I believe our industry is very much female-centred. In East London 80 to 90% of owners and consultants are women.

***Do you think the industry is closing the gap in gender equality?***

No. In my experience, there is still a perception that women are better equipped to manage the travel needs of clients. There is also a belief that women have better organisational and administrative skills and that women are more travel orientated than men, so, in my opinion, we need to feature more men in promotional material and adverts to close the gap.

***How can the travel industry attract more highly-skilled women?***

It would be great if we could bring back some of the incentives [that] we had in the past from airlines, tour operators [and] for all travel staff, whether a consultant, receptionist or those that handle the accounts. This would be a major factor.

***What advice would you give to young women looking to accelerate their career in travel?***

Firstly, you need to have a passion for the industry. This can be a cut-throat industry and you need to possess the ability to deal with immense pressure, 24/7. A family support base is also critical, as some of your family time will be taken up with long working hours, as well as after hours.

**Waseema Raven, Senior Ticketing Consultant, Club Travel**

Raven has grown from strength to strength in her department. Described by her colleagues as eager to learn, hardworking, loyal and meticulous at what she does, her performance has put her error ratio below 1% and helped her win the Exceptional Employee of the year award in 2015/2016.

***How can the industry attract more highly skilled women?***

More travel incentives, but also added opportunities for women to be their own boss, allowing them to have more say in the work output, and being able to work remotely under certain circumstances.

***What advice do you have for young women wanting to build a career in travel?***

Travel is not always as glamorous as it seems from the outside. One has to be tough to handle the challenges and be a go-getter in order to get the best deal for your client. It is an exciting industry, always changing and evolving. It definitely keeps you on your toes, which I love!



***What travel trends are you seeing for 2019?***

Travel to Asia is really picking up with so many affordable packages, not to mention those beautiful beaches, amazing weather, delicious food, and cost-saving gifts for family and friends back home. What more could you ask for?

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