

# The future of travel is female

 By [Marianne du Toit-Helmbold](#)

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There's no denying that women are fast becoming the driving force behind the global travel industry.

Recent statistics show that two-thirds of travellers are women and, according to the US Travel Association, more than 11% of adult leisure travellers are solo females. With this in mind, it's no surprise that 80% of all travel decisions and 92% of travel purchases are made by women too.



Image by Natalie Roos. Source: [Destinate](#)

This phenomenon is not confined to any one generation.

Whilst millennials are waiting longer to settle down and want to experience the world before committing to a 9-to-5 job, spouse, or children; retired women who've spent a lot of time over the years building careers and taking care of families are ready to strike out on their own and live their best lives.

For many women it is about leaving their comfort zones, looking for that once-in-a-lifetime adventure, or finding some solitude and getting away from the routine of daily life.

I am sure many women can relate... I certainly can!

## Drivers of female travel

Linda Landers, CEO of Girlpower Marketing, identified some of the big drivers when it comes to female travel.

The first one is **purpose**: Reflection, adventure, culture, escape and learning are only a few reasons women will splurge on a big trip.

Women want **adventure**: The adventure traveller is often a Baby Boomer woman who's stopped counting calories and starting counting experiences.

**Experience of a lifetime**: More and more women are also willing to pay for these grand explorations, seeking a deeper and more fulfilling reward for their hard work.

**Girlfriend getaways**: Whilst solo female travel is on the rise, girlfriend getaways and multigenerational travel are gaining popularity. This allows women to travel in small groups and have a bonding experience with those closest to them.

**Going solo**: It is all about self-empowerment.

In a survey by [Solo Traveller](#) the responses to the question "Why do women travel solo?" support research findings:

46% said freedom, independence and the chance to do what they want when they want

22% said they weren't willing to wait around for others

15% said to challenge themselves and gain confidence

If you want your destination or tourism business to grow, you need to understand the female traveller... she often calls the shots when it comes to making travel decisions and is driving the growth in tourism.

## Women working in the industry

In a clear reflection of its target market, the travel industry's workforce is also largely made up of women.

In South Africa, 70% of the jobs in tourism are occupied by women. And we are no exception to the rule. You'll see similar statistics in most countries with a thriving tourism industry.

However, while women occupy the majority of the jobs, most senior positions are still occupied by men.

A study conducted by the University of Johannesburg established that women typically hold less than 40% of all managerial positions, under 20% of general management roles, and between 5 and 8% of board positions. Once again, these statistics are mirrored internationally. Women still tend to work in the lowest-paid and -skilled sections of the industry and often have to do unpaid work in family businesses or juggle their careers and motherhood, whilst dealing with discrepancies in earnings, sexual harassment and prejudice.

“ Only 5% of women in [#tourism](#) are in senior positions this must change [@MariettedTH](#) [@Destinate\\_co](#) [#wtma18](#)  
[@WTM\\_Africa](#) [pic.twitter.com/AP0D5M1SnZ](#)— Bizcom Tourism ([@Biz\\_Tourism](#)) [April 18, 2018](#) ”

## Preference for entrepreneurship

With this glass ceiling firmly in place, it's hardly surprising that women are choosing the route of entrepreneurship in travel. And crushing it!

Apart from creating managerial positions for themselves, entrepreneurship also offers women a measure of flexibility, which allows them to juggle the various spheres of their lives.

This is certainly true for me.

As a woman running your own tourism business, you are typically not office-bound and able to organise your time in a manner that suits your lifestyle, family commitments and vision.

Of course, this is no walk in the park. Quite to the contrary, in fact!

During a recent panel discussion at WTM Africa in Cape Town on the topic of Women in Travel, an audience member raised the all-important question: How does one balance it all? The truth is one doesn't.

*“ ...as a woman in business, you cannot afford to wait – for funding, for partners, for the right moment. You simply have to be audacious enough to fulfil your own ambitions by approaching people who you think could benefit from your vision and vice versa. ”*

## The future for women in tourism

The dream is obviously to see more women take up leadership roles in the tourism industry. Given all the stats mentioned earlier, this seems to be a most logical evolution.

Unfortunately, progress seems slow and most women do not have the luxury of choice or a network they can tap into to start their own business. They have to wake up in the early hours of the morning, leave their kids behind and travel long distances to their place of work, to clean hotel rooms, worrying about their safety and whether they will be able to pay the bills at the end of the month.

According to the International Labour Office, unskilled or semi-skilled women tend to work in the most vulnerable jobs, where they are more likely to experience poor working conditions, inequality of opportunity, pay and treatment, violence, exploitation, stress and sexual harassment.

As more women step into the world of entrepreneurship and create their own opportunities, it's absolutely crucial that they bring other women into the fold. Having mentors and being a mentor is a central component of being a successful entrepreneur. And, as Nwabisa Mayema, executive director of Nfinity pointed out during the Women in Travel panel discussion, these relationships should be treated with gravitas. If necessary, set up contracts with your mentors and mentees to ensure everyone is bringing something to the table at all times.

She added that as a woman in business, you cannot afford to wait – for funding, for partners, for the right moment. You simply have to be audacious enough to fulfil your own ambitions by approaching people who you think could benefit from your vision and vice versa.

It is crucial to harness the capacity of women to contribute more in economic, political and social terms, providing the right environment, support and training that will allow more women to rise to positions of leadership within the sector.

As women continue to dominate the entrepreneurship scene in tourism, it's only a matter of time before we see changes happening in more official structures too. For this to happen women themselves will have to drive this agenda and bring about the change needed.

It is about time. After all, the future really is female!

Read the [original article](#) on *Destinate*.

## ABOUT MARIETTE DU TOIT-HELMBOLD

Mariette du Toit-Helmbold is an international destination marketing and tourism thought leader, as well as a writer and public speaker on tourism, responsible tourism, destination marketing, brand innovation and digital strategy. She established Destinate, an international specialised destination and tourism marketing agency, after an enviable tenure of 10 years as the CEO of Cape Town Tourism

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