

Women have a unique role to play in the recovery of the hospitality industry

By  Jenna Berndt

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While no sector has escaped the fallout from Covid-19, few industries have suffered quite as much as travel, tourism and hospitality. And for this sector, the impact falls predominantly on women.



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More than 70% of the tourism and travel sector as a whole is made up of women, says Sharmila Ragunan, group marketing executive, Dream Hotels & Resorts.

As a designated chartered marketer, Ragunan has 17 years of experience within the business to business, product management, consumer retail, and tourism and hospitality marketing industries.

"While women make up 60% of all employees in the accommodation sector alone, according to a 2019 Fedhasa statement, they are often under-represented in leadership roles," says Ragunan.

“ It is up to every woman working in tourism to push the boundaries of what is expected of them. So, go out and celebrate the woman that you are this Women’s Month. ”

"Often these women that keep our hotels, restaurants and other tourism-related activities running like clockwork, are the sole breadwinners in their families. They juggle long hours, managing both work and family. During the worst months, the industry has ever seen, many continued to work, even with reduced salaries, because they recognise the vital role that they play.

"We are eternally grateful to every single woman in our Dream Hotels & Resorts family across the country, that continued to show up and pour their heart and soul into their roles."

As the local hospitality sector recovers, albeit slowly, Ragunanan wants to encourage her female counterparts to keep putting one foot in front of the other – and aim for those leadership roles. "As the backbone of the hospitality industry, women have a unique role to play, and hopefully lead its recovery."

Here are three ways women in hospitality can lead the recovery:

1. Stay on top of the trends

It doesn't matter if you work in marketing, are front of house or are in charge of making sure the hotel adheres to the Covid-19 cleaning protocols. Staying ahead of the curve will benefit you and your company by ensuring you're meeting and exceeding the needs of the 'new' Gen C (or post-Covid) traveller.

2. Diversify or find your niche

"Throughout my 17 years in the marketing space, I've realised the importance of diversification or 'niching' your offering. Sometimes you can do both, sometimes only one is more suited."

"But do it because you'll benefit from it. The days of doing something simply 'because' are long gone. Find your why – in your role and as an individual – and let that be your guiding force, whether you're upskilling into a new role, relaunching your tourism offering or refreshing your marketing to get bums in beds."

"For example, Dream Hotels & Resorts has a diversified holiday offering including hotels and resorts, as well as ownership and membership opportunities. This works for the Group as it answers our why – offering our customers a variety of ways to holiday, especially in our current climate. Our vision has remained the same since 1984 - that people are connected through shared memories."

"Our why is to create memorable travel experiences together and connect people for a brighter future. We hold this vision close to our hearts – it's the pride of our organisation that is deeply rooted in Africa."

3. Bring your own leadership style to the table

Harness your strengths. No, we don't lead like men, nor should we. What female leaders bring to the table and to their teams is truly unique.

A message for Women's Day

"It is up to every woman working in tourism to push the boundaries of what is expected of them. So, go out and celebrate the woman that you are this Women's Month," says Ragunanan. "After all, never has a celebration been more well deserved! Let's take the time to really celebrate our achievements as women this Women's Day."

"If I could say just one thing to every single woman in our country, it would be this: if you have patience, perseverance and a positive mindset, there is nothing you can't achieve.

"As for what she'd like to see more of next Women's Month, definitely more women in leadership roles, particularly considering how many women are employed in the sector," concludes Ragunanan.

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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