

What does Women's Month mean to you?

 By Jenna Berndt

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We sat down with some of Southern Africa's female thought leaders in the travel, tourism, destination, events and hospitality space to share what Women's Day 2021 means to them, including the best advice they've ever received and the one thing they'd like to see improved in the years ahead...



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What does Women's Month 2021 mean to you?

Bonnie Smith, general manager at FCM South Africa:

Resilience and fortitude and juggling-of-balls successfully. Twenty twenty-one is a celebration of all of us: what we have collectively and individually gone through – and are still going through. A celebration for being brave every day, continually, when the world is changing around you. A celebration of sisterhood and knowing that we are all going through this together.

Sharmila Ragunanan, group marketing executive at Dream Hotels & Resorts:

It signifies a day of celebration of all the achievements of women globally. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the progress

we have made in gender equality, empowerment and women's rights, and the collective work that still needs to be done to refocus and strengthen our resolve to advance the many issues that still affect us as women today.

Mandisa Magwaxaza, managing director of Mandisa Magwaxaza Communications:

This Women's Month I will be relaunching my business which was originally started in 2020, frantically, as I was going through retrenchment, heavily pregnant, and locked down with no sight of what the future would hold.

The future held the promise of clarity, destiny-revealed, and meaningful connections. These three things are the results of 'faithing' it for a year, taking the next step (which was sometimes the only one I could see), and showing up for others to meet their real needs. Culminating into a recipe for success; one that I have identified as a common trait in female entrepreneurs.

This Women's Month, I celebrate femtrepreneurs doing business audaciously and authentically.

Chantal Gouws, general manager at Independent Brands the Flight Centre Travel Group:

To me it's a day to not only acknowledge and honour women for the contributions they make each day to society, but to celebrate our achievements.

Jeanneret Momberg, CEO of Visit Stellenbosch:

We commemorate the role women played in affecting change in our country's troubled political past. We also celebrate strong women, successful women and famous women who have impacted their specific spheres in society. But most of all, we honour ordinary women in our country, who keep families together, provide for their children and care for their communities.

Megan Oberholzer, portfolio director: travel, tourism and creative industries for RX Africa:

For me it's a chance to honour and recognise the impact that women have on society. They wear so many hats from daughter to wife and mom. They are artists, caregivers and directors. Each role that they fulfil is one of importance and they should be celebrated!

What would you like to tell fellow women in your industry?

Smith: It's okay to not always be okay. Change is hard. It takes continuous effort, awareness, attention and discomfort but I'm sure you will agree how good it feels when you move closer and closer to what you want. Stay connected to the outcomes by focusing on the progress. The times we don't want to keep going are the times that matter most.

Magwaxaza: We have the whole world in our hands, ladies. What the world needs now, more than ever, is our nurturing instinct and emotional intelligence. The time for living up to comparisons has passed. We are the generation of women who recognise one another's greatness as allies, not competitors. I am looking forward to seeing us collaborate and connect to recreate a travel industry that is accessible, inclusive, and diverse.

Rosemary Anderson, Fedhasa national chairperson:

Encourage and empower the women in your organisation to grow as far in their skills and qualifications as they possibly can. Let them know their destiny is in their own hands.

Nirosha Sidat, business development manager at Norwegian Cruise Line:

Embrace change and stand up for what you believe in. Women are resilient and we've never seen a better example of this

until the pandemic broke. Each day we are bouncing back stronger than the day before.

Ragunanan: If you have patience, perseverance and a positive mindset, there is nothing you can't achieve.

Momberg: When we as a tourism industry recover from this devastating pandemic, we will again make a notable impact in society, considering that our industry has a female employment rate of more than 60%. The women we employ and empower are the ones that form the backbone of their communities. This should encourage us to stay focussed, stay positive and build back better. We will rise again!

Natalie Tenzer-Silva, director at Dana Tours in Mozambique:

I have found with some of my new (female) recruits that they speak so quietly. I always urge them to speak louder and make their voices heard.

Bongi Keswa, leisure marketing manager, Flight Centre Travel Group:

We've had a tough 18 months as a nation and in many cases as women. Things have changed, having to adjust to this new normal and still persevering is what generally has kept me going. I have watched so many women juggle, home, work and the dynamic of having this in the same space and still striking a balance. Women's Month 2021 is an indicator of yet another milestone marking that we've persevered, we are doing it, we will conquer.

Oberholzer: We are all working towards one goal and that is to create experiences and events that stimulate the economy. We need to support and uplift each other! So often we see other women as competitors, and we try to outdo one another. One act of kindness and word of encouragement can make all the difference to someone – together we can create magic!

Bianca Mazur, Flight Centre general manager:

No matter how demanding and overwhelming our industry may be at times, never forget your passion and determination for the love of travel.

What's the best advice you ever received?

Smith: "The brave may not live forever, but the cautious don't live at all." Take risks, challenge yourself, step outside of your comfort zone and grow.

Magwaxaza: No one's coming to save you. You are the hero you are waiting for.

Gouws: Be honest, be genuine in your leadership and ensure you align passion with purpose.

Oberholzer: No person is better than the next and if you expect someone to do something, you should be willing to do it yourself. Get down in the trenches with your teams. You will gain respect and start to see that each and every role is critical when creating an event. You cannot do it alone!

What one thing would you like to see improved in the year to come?

Smith: For the #TravelBoom to start. For business travel to regain confidence in connecting "mask2mask," and not relying on virtual meetings. While we know this will always be a part of the future of business, it's also important to remember the value of connecting with people and experiencing travel.

Magwaxaza: I am looking forward to seeing travel adapt to African buying patterns and indigenous economies. I am looking forward to seeing more travel content in more indigenous languages of Africa.

Anderson: I would like to see in schools' LO classes (and carried through into as many other subjects as possible) where female children are taught that the only person who they can rely on regarding financial matters (once they are adults) is themselves and they should not think that they will be able to depend on a partner/husband one day to "look after them." They should know from a young age that they need to get the best education they possibly can.

Momberg: I would like to see more support for female enterprise development. This will lead to strong, independent and thriving women creating much-needed job opportunities through sustainable business growth.

Tenzer-Silva: In Mozambique, people are physical – you normally kiss on both cheeks even in the business environment. I hope that soon we will be able to revert to that, or at least giving a hug. I no longer want to give virtual hugs and kisses!

Oberholzer: An improved and even playing field between men and women in the workplace – whether it be pay, getting assigned to key projects or being a spokesperson. In addition, I would like to see a more sustainable approach to events as well as a greater support of female led initiatives and communities. World Female Ranger Day is just one of the many initiatives out there and we need to shine a light on more causes like this.

Mazur: I am sure most of us envision a similar scenario, for me, the ultimate advancement would be the substantial growth and prosperity of South Africa's economy.

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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