

5 QUESTIONS



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1 With International Women's Day being celebrated on March 8, I wonder if you could talk about the crucial role tourism plays in empowering women socially, economically and politically?

Tourism is a significant economic driver in many countries and can be harnessed as a tool to promote sustainable community development, poverty alleviation, environmental conservation, and gender equality. There are many ways tourism plays into the role in empowering women. For one, it creates a platform for women to access education and training opportunities for those that may not have benefited from a formal education growing up. Tourism creates meaningful jobs and enhances income and can often be seen as an entry into the formal economy. Creating meaningful and engaging livelihoods also enhances income and independence for women.

2 What do you see as tourism's potential to open doors for women and contribute to greater gender equality?

Tourism can have many direct and indirect

opportunities for opening doors for women and reducing the gender inequality gap. Directly, tourism creates opportunities, resources, jobs and livelihoods. It is one of the few industries that can convert transferable skills to ones that can be utilized in the formal economy. For example, cooking a meal to becoming a chef.

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Indirectly, tourism can also alleviate some of the challenging burdens that are too often delegated to women in society. In many emerging economies, it's often women that are in charge of acquiring their household's water, fuel and food. With developing tourism infrastructure for travellers, resources such as water tanks and electrical grids

3 Can you talk about the opportunities that you see for women in tourism?

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Through working with Planeterra, I've had a chance to see many lives of women change through tourism and, in some cases, saved. Tourism can provide an entryway into the formal economy, opportunities to stay and work within one's own rural community, or the chance to move and apply your hospitality skills in other regions. Tourism creates jobs at all levels of management, and it is an industry where you can still thrive by being entrepreneurial and without necessarily needing a higher level of formal education.

Planeterra's first women-led program in Peru, the Ccaccacollo Women's Weaving Workshop,

is now entering its 12th year of partnership with us. Over the past decade, we've observed these women's lives change, and the lives of their children. The members that have been with us since the beginning, are the first generation from this community to see all their children attend university.

Our partners in Tanzania, the Maasai Stoves & Solar Project, are utilizing tourism daily to support and install life-saving clean cookstoves across the Rift Valley. The female stove engineers share with G Adventures travellers the mechanics of a clean cookstove and what their homes would be like with

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Hotel Insider

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avoid compliance to laws, such as the health and safety issues and taxation.

Health and safety is a major concern for the accommodation sharing economy, and there is currently little legislation for enforcement of standards required of hotels by government. This creates potential unsafe or unsanitary conditions for travellers, thus currently many publicly traded companies forbid their employees from using Airbnb.

Duty of care

With such a focus on duty of care in the travel agent industry, what the liability companies can be responsible for is tremendous should injury occur, whereas the hotel industry has been working with partners in the travel sphere for decades to ensure that all health and safety items are clearly laid out. Global Business Travel Association has created standardized templates used by the industry to ensure that companies and their travel managers are able to easily understand the important health and safety measures in place to keep their travellers safe.

Another layer to this is the fact that 80% of Airbnb's rentals in Canada are whole unit rentals and not spare rooms in the same house as an owner. A further 30% of their revenues in Canada are by multi-unit owners that are renting out entire home units that are de facto hotels. [Source: *Hotel Association of Canada, Sept. 27, 2017*] It only makes sense that laws that govern hotels would apply to these types of rentals operating as informal hotels.

In terms of taxation, in 2016, the hotel industry's contributions to consumer taxes based on room revenues were estimated at \$2.2 billion. [Source: *Hotel Association of Canada*] Based on Airbnb's revenue in Canada, the Canadian economy is missing approximately \$85 million in taxes and fees that would be payable by Airbnb.

What about agents?

From the travel industry perspective, the hotel segment of the business is one of the last partners not to restrict or cut travel agent commissions for bookings received. Airbnb currently has no commission program to travel agents for accommodation bookings thus rendering the entire community obsolete from their business standpoint.

Part of the value of travel agents is that they are trusted by their clients, whether corporate or leisure, to furnish them with knowledgeable advice that is relevant to their needs, with a diverse scope of criteria, i.e. safety, health, security, amenities, location, etc., so the client makes informed decisions for their travel and accommodation needs.

It is difficult to see how this value-added service that travel agents provide for clients aligns in any way currently with platforms like Airbnb.

How can an agency trust and stake its reputation with clients on non-vetted accommodation that doesn't comply with much stricter regulation that hotels conform to?

As a segment of the travel industry, the Canadian and global hotel providers simply seek to have governments provide an equal playing field in terms of taxation and health and safety. 191,600 full-time employees in Canada (and partners of the travel agencies) depend on our government modernizing and adapting legislation to reflect the true state of today's accommodation providers.

Eric Barber is the senior director, national sales for Realstar Hospitality, and he contributes a monthly column to Canadian Travel Press that offers an insider's look at the hotel industry.



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and without this locally-engineered technology.

4 How can Canadians support women when traveling abroad?

Canadians can support women when travelling abroad by seeking out women-run and -owned businesses. Do your research ahead of time to see if there are social enterprises that are supporting female job creation, or fostering support for families. One of my favourite things to do prior to travelling, is seeing if there are local women's groups that are promoting female-led tours. When shopping or visiting a market, support enterprises and market stalls that are being run by

chain. As a community development organization, we understand that a significant barrier to success for sustainable development is gender inequality. That is why one of our key areas of focus is fostering women empowerment and greater local decision making by all members of society.

Planeterra has also created a means for women-run non-profits to thrive. In Kandy, Sri Lanka, we've partnered with the Women's Development Centre, to renovate and expand a training café that employs female entrepreneurs in the region. The proceeds from their co-developed lunch program with Planeterra is anticipated to be visited by 3,000 G Adventures travellers this year alone. The proceeds from this meal service will

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a woman, often-enough, supporting a female entrepreneur has the ripple effects of supporting her family's needs as well.

5 Maybe you can tell our readers what Planeterra is all about and some of its initiatives that empower women around the world – for example, the recently launched Sthree Craft Shop and Café in Sri Lanka and Penduka in Namibia.

Planeterra is a non-profit organization that helps empower local people to develop their communities, conserve their cultures, and create humane and supportive systems for their endeavours. Our mission is to improve people's lives by creating and supporting social enterprises that bring under-served communities into the tourism value

support a shelter for abused women and other women training and empowerment programs run by our partners.

Planeterra also recently partnered with Penduka, a women-owned and -run social business in the Katutura Township outside of Windhoek, which employs at-risk women mostly living in the surrounding townships with no schooling background and no access to secure jobs or those suffering from chronic illness or disabilities. Along with direct employment, the handicraft cooperative also contracts the services of more than 300 women from around the country for handicraft creation. We partnered with Penduka to bring more customers to their restaurant, and are helping them develop take-out options for travellers leaving Windhoek on their way to nearby safari reserves.