travelweek

Fearless explorers

A look at the impact of travel on women worldwide, with Planeterra's Adrienne Lee, on International Women's Day, March 8

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"Tourism can be the first step into the economy for women from underserved communities": G Adventures' Planeterra

TORONTO — As a global ambassador and expert of sustainable tourism, Adrienne Lee, Director of Development at Planeterra, Canadian tour operator G Adventures' non-profit partner, says she understands and has seen first-hand how tourism can positively impact women.

Honouring International Women's Day on March 8, Lee spoke to Travelweek about how sustainable travel and supporting women while abroad can help close the gender gap and improve quality of life for women.

Q. What are some of the more surprising statistics about women in tourism worldwide?

Lee: "According to the UN Women and UN WTO Global Report on Women in Tourism, the tourism sector has almost twice as many women employers as other sectors, and one in five tourism ministers worldwide are female.

"Not specific to tourism, but a stat that I find interesting is that according to UN Women, if men and women played identical roles in labour markets, as much as $28 trillion, or 26%, could be added to the global annual GDP by 2025. That's a lot of change and movement, for everyone!"

Q. What has Planeterra seen in the past few years that suggests encouraging progress for women in tourism-related fields especially in developing countries?

Lee: "All too often women are marginalized in society. Women are expected to take on a heavier burden to maintain and support a family household and girls are often the first to lose out on education, training and resource opportunities.

"Over the past few years, we've seen encouraging progress for women in tourism by seeing more and more opportunities to access capacity building and vocational training, the fostering of homegrown skills, and the building of human capital to promote an entry

Credit: G Adventures

way into the formal tourism economy.

"Meaningful jobs enhance income. Tourism has the potential to be the first step into the formal economy for women who come from underserved communities. Creating dignified and engaging livelihoods also enhances income and independence for women. Women who earn an income create opportunities for themselves; they have greater agency and freedom to determine how money is spent. This strengthens decision-making powers, and builds self-esteem."

Q. Can you tell us about a project that G Adventures and Planeterra has been involved in that furthers opportunities for women in tourism?

Lee: "One program I'm really excited about is a new partnership we recently launched in Kandy, Sri Lanka. We've partnered with the Women's Development Centre, one of the longest standing non-profits in Sri Lanka, to renovate and expand a training café and craft shop that employs female entrepreneurs in the region. It was always a dream of theirs to convert their workshop space into a training centre and space for female entrepreneurs to come together, share, and learn

from each other's experiences. They also wanted to convert this space into a café and serve traditional Sri Lankan food and tea.

"To convert this space into a commercial retail space, Planeterra raised $30,000 to get it off the ground.

"Now the café and craft shop is booming. On their first day of opening to G Adventures travellers, the craft shop alone earned $200 versus $40 from what they were previously making. With continuous practice from G's travellers, the hope is to open this café to be public facing and welcome travellers from all over the globe."

Q. How can travellers support women in tourism?

Lee: "Travellers can support women when travelling abroad by seeking out women-run and owned-businesses. Do 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. Often enough, supporting a female entrepreneur has the ripple effect of supporting her family's needs as well." 🆃🆆