

Women of the World Travel reflects on inaugural year and looks ahead to 2020 and beyond



Linda Khanna, Director

By Cindy Sosoutomo

TORONTO — Even Canada's most well-known travel companies had to start somewhere at one point, most likely with humble beginnings and an overwhelming drive to succeed. It's during this stage of its evolution that we find Women of the World (WOW) Travel, now entering its second year as a division of Tourcan Vacations.

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After officially launching in fall 2018 and successfully operating two inaugural tours in 2019 to Peru and Morocco, the women-only tour division is looking ahead to 2020 with more wisdom and experience under its belt, and an eye for growth and expansion. Still being led by Director Linda Khanna, who considers herself a hardcore biker and adventure junkie, Women of the World will be hosting five tours in 2020 to Italy (May 16), Peru (Sept. 4), South Africa (Oct. 7), Morocco (Nov. 20) and Costa Rica (Dec. 4), with another five itineraries already planned for 2021 (Northern India, Greece, Ecuador & Galapagos, Croatia, Peru).

Following our company profile in the Aug. 30, 2018 issue of Travelweek, we

checked in with Khanna to see how the division is progressing, what she's learned since launch, and what travellers can expect as Women of the World ventures further in the years ahead.

What travel trends does Women of the World Travel tap into?

WOW tours fulfill a unique but necessary niche for the mature solo traveller. Solo travel was the largest growing

travel trend in 2019, doubling from 27% in 2010 to over 50% today. The mature solo female traveller continues to dominate this growing market.

What can women expect while on a WOW tour?

Our tours are hand-curated, fully-hosted and include a lot of unique experiences, which are often at additional charge with other tour companies. Our hotels are superior first-class and boutique hotels and we aim to use those that are committed to sustainable, responsible tourism. We offer a guarantee share program as well as low single supplements between 13%-22% of the shared cost.

Our repeat client factor is 80%. Our

small groups of ladies bond and form strong friendships, and future tours are put together based on the needs of our repeat clients.

Were there any unexpected challenges that came up in your inaugural year?

There are always challenges with new projects, but I must say our team, both in office and around the world, is like family and really pull together to solve the little inconveniences that happen with world travel. We seem to turn lemons into lemonade!

We had two of our guests' bags displaced on two separate airlines on our recent Morocco tour. In Morocco, when the lost baggage was found, it couldn't be delivered to the hotel room due to security, so guests had to personally claim it at the airport. This posed a challenge for our group as we were leaving Casablanca for Fez, however, by working seamlessly with our partners in destination we were able to locate the bags, and get them to Fez where private transfers were arranged with English-speaking drivers for both ladies to safely get to the airport to pick up their luggage. This entire process was handled without stress and it was nothing but smiles from then on.

Giving back is very important to you. How do you incorporate this mentality into tours?

Each tour has a 'giving back' component, which includes a visit to a project by Enriching Lives International, another division of Tourcan Vacations. Guests are able to interact with communities, schools and hospitals and make a direct impact on improving the quality of life for the local people. They love the fact that each tour strives for sustainable, purpose-driven tourism, and that they're able to give back to the communities we visit.

For example, in addition to the supplies our group donated in the Sacred Valley, we made the gift of 'giving back' even richer by taking the money Tourcan Vacations had donated to our Village in the Andes, dividing it into equal portions for each guest, and giving them a

shopping list for much-needed supplies for the remote Quechua village. At the local market, we bonded together through haggling over sugar, rice and sardines, which we then presented to the villagers. We were moved to tears when we saw they had prepared boiled potatoes – the best they had – to feed us with huge smiles. That, I think, says it all.

What was the feedback from clients after your first year?

For 2019 our inaugural tours went very well, the feedback was fantastic. To quote Wanda Leis, a client of a preferred travel partner, "I've been on three high-end tours with another company and this one was the best. Every little detail was looked after and I had an amazing time." Wanda has already signed up for two additional tours.

Did you learn anything new about women and the way they travel?

Yes, I'm finding most of our ladies want their own room, so making sure to block enough single rooms to accommodate all who don't wish to share is something that is very important. I've also learned how empowering it is to see our groups of ladies connect and how unique and fantastic we all are. On each tour everyone bonded together and my only caution is to beware of possible sore sides from too much laughter!

I find the unique experiences we provide and the interactions that we have with local cultures cause our guests to leave their comfort zones and try things they've never done before. This is one of the factors that drives them to return again and again.

What did you learn about yourself after your inaugural year?

I learned that I must pace myself and develop a team of hosts who share our same values, high energy and passion for catering to every small detail for our guests. My sweet spot is to offer between 10-15 tours a year of various lengths and types for 2021.

As for how I prefer to travel, I love adventure, excitement and being active. But one size doesn't fit all, and as we move into our second year and look towards our third, we're looking to bring in different types of tours to accommodate varying needs, as well as shorter tours and tours to suit every budget.

What grade would you give Women of the World based on its first year of operations?

I'd say I'd give the team an 'A' for the effort, work and marketing put into launching this brand. I've always believed that the devil is in the details, and boy, were there lots of details! I spent many nights awake, strategizing, researching and really understanding the needs of the solo world traveller. There is always room to improve, but the support, dedication and work of the head office team and our suppliers was really remarkable and I'm proud of everyone.

Based on your first year, do you think WOW will achieve long-term success in the industry?

Absolutely! Based on my fundamental belief, 'If you build it, they will come,' I know there is a strong need for these small hand-curated tours for women, where every little detail is looked after. I certainly see this brand growing, and the feedback from our guests and travel agent partners is a key factor to its continued success. The high repeat client ratio is most encouraging and emphasizes the importance of these lady-only tours, where safety, unique experiences and comfort are executed on every tour. **TW**



Khanna leads a tour in Peru