

Press release: 9 March 2023

Travel Excellence wins award for pioneering gender equality

Travel Excellence, a Costa Rican travel operator, wins the first Gender Equality Champion of the Year Award for the hospitality and tourism sector, on the 8th March at ITB Berlin.

This year at ITB Berlin, the non-profit organisation Equality in Tourism (EiT) announced the winner of their first award, the Gender Equality Champion of the Year, sponsored by the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance. The ceremony on the 8th March celebrated two highly commended runner ups - [AdventureWomen](#) from the United States, and [ETUR](#) from Ecuador. But it was Costa Rican travel operator [Travel Excellence](#) that took home the winning trophy after the award received over 40 applications from organisations across the globe.

Mareike Wielens from Travel Excellence collected the award from Dr. Stroma Cole and award sponsor [Sustainable Hospitality Alliance's](#) Chair Wolfgang M Neumann.

The judging panel for the award were impressed at Travel Excellence's commitment to gender equality. 60% of employees are women, with 58% of management titles also held by women. This comes as a stark difference to the sector's overall representation of women in senior positions. A [recent review](#) of publicly listed companies in the leisure industry found that 42% in mid-level management and 33% in senior management were women.

The organisation publicly recognised that unconscious bias meant they could not make an objective evaluation of the gender inequality within their business. They began to rigorously review their policies and built a plan and legislation that came from the ground up through discussion groups to close gender gaps.

They also formed a Sexual and Work Harassment Committee, and provided training centred around topics such as work/life balance and co-responsibility at home. Travel Excellence ensured masculinity workshops were held that re-visited ways to deal with conflict and how to be a protagonist in the creation of a gender equal society.

Travel Excellence spoke about their work on the panel during the latter part of the award ceremony, stating that they learnt a lot about their company in the process of applying. Wielens felt that the criteria and questions in the application form encouraged them to review existing working practices, and improve the working environment. For future applicants, Wielens advised that future organisations need to "be motivated, feel it, and you'll have the results".

The panel was hosted by Dr. Stroma Cole, Director of Equality in Tourism, and joining Travel Excellence were guests Glenn Mandziuk, CEO of the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, Maud Masiyiwa, Associate of Equality in Tourism, and Domenica Barahona, General Manager of runner up ETUR. The discussion focused on the importance of the award, what more can be done to encourage award participation and what the sector can do to embrace gender equality as a whole.

In 2021, EiT won the ToDo Award for Human Rights in Tourism at ITB. This initiated the idea of creating a new award, aimed at promoting gender equality in tourism by rewarding leaders in the field, in celebrating their excellence and identifying best practices to drive improvement.

The concept of the award derived from the 2018 publication Gender Equality and Tourism: Beyond Empowerment. The book focused on women's involvement in tourism, highlighting common

Responsible hospitality for a better world

experiences and the possibilities for meaningful change. The stories from the women interviewed highlighted that tourism can improve gender equality, but that empowerment comes from a collective responsibility and shared vision. The award therefore shines a light on organisations that are leading the way and inspiring others to follow.

Equality in Tourism (EiT) is a non-profit organisation working to promote gender equality in tourist destinations around the world. The organisation works across different sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry, bringing together people with a shared vision to tackle inequality. The team promotes information-sharing, networking and research, as well as the development of pilot projects that can be replicated or adapted across the tourism industry.

With sponsorship from the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance and ITB, the award will continue to celebrate innovative businesses for their gender equality work for the years to come.

Glenn Mandziuk, CEO of the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, comments: *“It’s an honour to sponsor such a prestigious award for Equality in Tourism. Celebrating organisations who are addressing the need for gender equality within the sector, is a priority and this year’s winner is very much deserved. The award aligns with our Pathway to Net Positive Hospitality, addressing fairness in the industry when it comes to people. I’m certain that as the awards mature, we’ll be acknowledging more winners, like Travel Excellence who we’re awarding today.”*

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About the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance brings together hospitality industry leaders and strategic partners to address critical challenges affecting the planet, its people, local destinations, and communities. They develop practical free resources and programmes to create a prosperous and responsible hospitality sector that gives more back than it takes.

The Alliance currently has over 30 members with a reach of 7 million rooms. It includes world-leading hotel companies, including Choice Hotels, Marriott International, Hilton, IHG, Hyatt and Radisson Hotel Group, regional brands, and other stakeholders in the hospitality value chain.

Their network also includes other parts of the hospitality value chain, including owners, investors and suppliers, to drive further joined-up action on sustainability and accelerate the industry on the path to net positive hospitality. For more information, please visit www.sustainablehospitalityalliance.org.