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# Maiden Voyage

## **INDEPENDENT RESEARCH INTO ISSUES IMPACTING THE FEMALE BUSINESS TRAVELLER 2015**

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## WHY THIS RESEARCH?

There has been a direct correlation between the increase in women in senior positions and the increase in female business travellers with statistics showing an almost even split between male and females.

Many women are uncomfortable dining or venturing out in a strange city often finding the experience intimidating. There is potential to miss opportunities for cultural immersion and exploration which could have a negative impact on their overall performance by comparison to a male colleague. Furthermore, women may avoid that 'next career' move if she's uncomfortable with the travel involved and employers may struggle to recruit the best talent if they do not have adequate travel provisions in place.



Women are impacted or inhibited by four further risks:

1. Women are more prone to sexual harassment or attack
2. Gender specific cultural restrictions
3. Gender specific legal implications
4. Handbag theft and bag snatching can leave female travellers without their travel documents, cash and means of communication.

If legal or cultural differences are misunderstood the implications can range from causing deep offence to being sentenced to corporal punishment, or in the most extreme cases, a death sentence.

Examples include:

- It is illegal for a woman to drive in Saudi Arabia
- Travelling with a man who is not her husband can lead to a woman's arrest in some Muslim countries
- Until recently a woman faced the risk of being de-robed for wearing trousers in Malawi
- Initiating a handshake or making eye contact could be seen as flirtatious in the Arabian Gulf
- Reporting a sexual assault in UAE leaves a woman at risk of being charged with having had unlawful sex
- Eating alone in a cafe in Libya is frowned upon and the woman may not be served
- Inadvertently taking a copy of Cosmopolitan Magazine into Iran could land a woman with sentence of lashings
- A gesture of platonic friendship with a member of the opposite sex in Egypt and some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa could be misconstrued as romantic interest
- Modest dress is important in India and the Arabian Gulf, i.e. covered shoulders and knees
- It is not uncommon for men in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and India to only address male colleagues when in a meeting.

Based on previous research conducted by Maiden Voyage, we know that business travel related anxiety exists in the workplace.

The purpose of this research intends to 'shine a light' on the issues faced by female business travellers, their confidence in their employers to provide an appropriate duty of care and where these women feel the most exposed.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was based on both qualitative and quantitative methods, reviewing existing reports, undertaking a global female business traveller survey and through a series of interviews.

Interviewees included:

- Female Business Travellers
- London's Metropolitan Police
- Experts in travel risk management from some of the world's leading providers
- Kidnap and ransom insurers
- British Transport Police
- Hoteliers
- Employment lawyers
- Employers & their corporate risk and security teams
- UKTI
- The British Council
- FCO
- International culture experts
- Female business travel safety experts

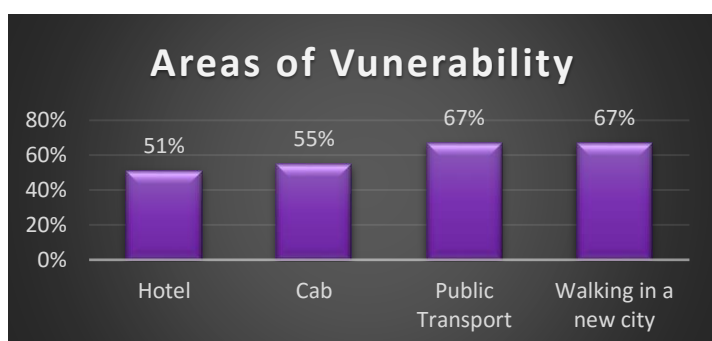
Due to the sensitivity and the nature of this research many of these organisations wished to remain anonymous and likewise the female traveller participants who had suffered a negative experience were assured anonymity.

## FEMALE BUSINESS TRAVELLER SAFETY SURVEY

Maiden-voyage.com surveyed almost 100 female business travellers to understand their travel related safety concerns and experiences.

The findings were as follows:

- 31% felt that their employer did not adequately take care of them whilst on business travel
- 24% has suffered a negative incident ranging from Stalking, hotel room intruders, theft from person, theft in hotel room, sexual harassment, sexual assault, public masturbators, kidnap, attempted kidnap, attempted murder.
- Only 5% had received female specific travel safety training
- Only 1 employer had a specific travel policy relating to women travellers.



When asked where they felt most vulnerable when travelling, the responses were:

An overwhelming number told us that they were uncomfortable dining alone in a restaurant so chose to take room service instead.

The high number of respondents who told us that they had experienced intruders in their hotel bedroom was quite astounding. Hotels frequently, mistakenly allocated two guests to the same room resulting in a range of emotions from embarrassment to distress.

## EXAMPLES OF INCIDENTS SUFFERED

<i>"A stranger was provided with my hotel room number and a programmed card to unlock its door. He attempted to enter the room whilst I was in residence. He was as upset as I was at the mistake that the reception staff (or their systems) had made and retreated rapidly. Nonetheless, I was very shaken by the experience. My access card was rendered ineffective when he had been allocated the room, so I was effectively "locked out" until I went to reception and (complained and) got a freshly programmed access card".</i>	<i>"Several years ago I took a taxi (with a male colleague) and ended up not where we wanted to be and potentially in a vulnerable situation. With hindsight, I don't think any malice was intended, more that the driver didn't know where he was going and we ended up in an underground car park, not the hotel we were hoping for!"</i>
<i>"Had my phone stolen and personal items moved from inside my hotel room while I was out"</i>	<i>"There have been a number of cases of feeling uncomfortable -- people staring, yelling, following me".</i>
<i>"Male followed me into lift &amp; didn't press number. I felt embarrassed to get out, especially as he was black in racist land. I wanted to break stereotype profile. Got out on my floor, he hung back but got out after me, walked down long corridor behind me, very intimidating. I accessed room safely, but noticed my wallet was missing".</i>	<i>"Stayed in a hotel in Leicester. My room was some way along a really long corridor as I approached my room a naked man stood fumbling with his keys. At the time I found it mildly amusing until I went into the room and immediately tried to lock from inside ... No lock !! The chap was obvious testing to see if when closed the door was actually secure.... I didn't get much sleep that night"</i>
<i>"Customs Border Protection placed me in a line to be searched when coming back from a month long trip to Peru. Officers were unprofessional, rude and aggressive and broke several of my possessions".</i>	<i>"In both locations I had necklaces ripped off my neck-In Kenya I was walking on the street, i.e the sidewalk and in Paris I was on the Metro"</i>
<i>"Taxi driver tried to take me to an airport hotel Other taxi drivers getting too personal".</i>	<i>"Attempted kidnap Lahore, intruders in hotel room Karachi"</i>
<i>"Had my credit cards and passport stolen".</i>	<i>"An intruder entered my hotel in the middle of the night".</i>
<i>"Theft of jewelry from hotel room".</i>	<i>"2 men without key card trying to get into lift with me"</i>
<i>"Harassment. I was staying in a hotel that had a group of what looked like builders staying. They harassed me at breakfast. I was alone with them in the dining room and felt very vulnerable".</i>	<i>"was stalked (followed) and verbally harassed by a man after getting off the train at night, whilst travelling on business. He offered to carry my bag and when I declined, became aggressive. To escape, I got on a bus going in completely the wrong direction from where I needed to be.</i>
<i>"Attempted murder in South East Asia"</i>	<i>"Sexually assaulted by a senior colleague"</i>
<i>"Verbally harassed and threatened when travelling on a very early train with hardly any other commuters".</i>	<i>"Sexually assaulted"</i>
<i>"A man posing as a taxi lead me to his vehicle, it was only when I got in and saw no meter that I realised I had better get out - quickly"</i>	<i>"A female colleague and I were held against our will in Africa we were terrified at the thought that we may be sexually assaulted"</i>
<i>"Kidnapped at Johannesburg airport"</i>	<i>"man visibly pleasuring himself in the housekeepers room at a hotel"</i>

The range of emotions disclosed included fear, vulnerability, intimidation, feeling shaken and uncomfortable, nervousness.

Whilst many of the incidents took place in locations such as Egypt, Karachi, Lahore, Nairobi, Beijing, Johannesburg, there were also incidents in cities such as Dublin, Southampton and Zurich. No locations are immune from a potential incident.

## EMPLOYER BEST AND WORST PRACTICE

A number of travellers interviewed told us that they were unaware as to what travel provisions had been put in place to ensure their safety and that their employers did not provide pre-travel briefings. Of those who felt vulnerable in their hotel rooms, there was a feeling that their employer, or travel management company had not taken any steps to ensure that the hotel had adequate safety and security. Furthermore they stated that they would be embarrassed to raise a concern with their employer. Examples were given of being placed in a location within a hotel that made employees feel vulnerable such as in annexes out in separate buildings, at the end of long dark corridors or next to fire exits. For those travelling to more challenging environments or who worked for humanitarian organisations they felt that there was an expectation for them to just "suck it up and get on with the job".

Incidents were raised whereby the Travel Management Company (TMC) had not given adequate consideration to the fact that the traveller was a woman travelling alone. In one instance the employee shared the fact that she had been allocated a hotel in a village far out from the town of Brighton because the central hotels were outside of the corporate budget. Aside from the additional costs of taking a cab, the woman felt vulnerable heading down country lanes with a taxi driver who appeared to be lost.

Another was given a limited budget to spend on hotel accommodation, however, because she didn't feel safe in the hotels that the company budget could afford, she added her own additional funds to upgrade to a better hotel.

There have been multiple examples whereby women have not been adequately briefed before travelling to a destination that has gender specific legal or cultural restrictions. Another cited having arrived in a Muslim country inappropriately dressed due to an expectation that she arrive in corporate (Western) business dress and head directly to the office. This resulted in her being an object of extreme attention and made to feel shame and embarrassment.

Conversely there were some excellent examples of proper duty of care. The British Council for example provides its female travellers with extensive visitor notes, written by locals which advises of gender specific travel considerations, local business etiquette and dress codes.

Other employers did have clauses in their travel supplier Request for Proposals (RFP's), requesting how hoteliers and TMC's aimed to address the needs of women travelling alone.

There did appear to be some confusion amongst travel security managers, particularly the males, as to whether it was even appropriate to segment travellers and provide them with gender specific travel advice. This arose out of a fear of being seen to be sexist or patronising or even a backlash from the travellers themselves who may feel that they should not be treated any differently. This is somewhat reflected in the survey result. However many of those interviewed did disclose that they felt that they were not adequately supporting their female travellers and 'probably should be doing more'.

## PREGNANCY

Business travel during the early stages of pregnancy causes further implications. Whilst the onus is on the employee to declare that she is pregnant some women may not wish to disclose their

pregnancy early on. Even if it is known that a member of staff is pregnant, employers cannot treat every woman the same. Women have different medical backgrounds and for first pregnancies there is no medical history.

Some women some won't want to travel, whilst others won't want pregnancy to be seen as interference to their plans/careers. Many respondents talked about having to travel with extreme morning sickness, sometimes through severe travel disruption or to challenging destination but were still not inclined to disclose an early pregnancy.

Employers and employees need to consider that some travel vaccinations may be off limits during pregnancy and some airlines refuse to accept a pregnant passenger over 27 weeks without a GP's certificate.

Likewise, the travel insurer may also need the assurance of a doctor's certificate that a pregnant woman is safe to travel.

Employers also need to consider if the area the employee is travelling to has adequate medical services.

## UNMANAGED TRAVELLERS

Whilst many of the travellers and organisations we spoke to were from the large corporate travel sector who had excellent back up from travel risk management, TMC and employee tracking services, the unmanaged travellers from the SME sectors were at greater risk. Where budget is a major contributing factor, women may be putting themselves at further risk by opting to stay in less safe hotels, walking as opposed to taking transport or indeed using public transport rather than trusted driver services.

The 'sharing economy' of services such as Uber and Airbnb presents an increased level of risk.

There is untapped potential to pool travel safety and risk management services to this audience.

## CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly there are specific legal and cultural restrictions for women travelling to different countries. Whilst women are not only at a higher risk of sexual harassment or assault, this is also one of their biggest fears and leads to their feelings of vulnerability when travelling, with many citing that they are always on 'high alert' and planning ahead.

### Employer's Duty of Care

Employers have a duty of care and a corporate social responsibility to employees to ensure their safety when travelling on business, and to eradicate travel anxiety. This includes:

- Preparing the employee in advance
- Providing local guidance information
- Ensuring that equal attention is paid to national travel as well as international

Whilst many of the following recommendations are equally pertinent to men, it is recommended that for those engaging female travellers, there should be a review of travel policies to ensure employers are meeting their obligations to their female employees.

These should include:

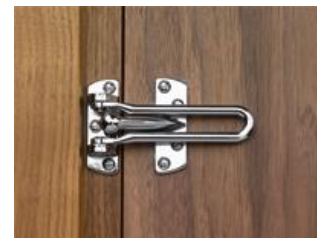
- Pre-planning by researching the region that employees are travelling to,

- Gathering local information in particular to gender specific dress codes, customs and legal restrictions and ensure that the employee is adequately briefed and understands their duty of responsibility to take all reasonable precautions.
- Advising employees of the travel safety services available to them and how to access them.

Where appropriate employers may wish to consider supplying appropriate clothing such as an abaya or a fake wedding ring.

### Hotels

A secure hotel is essential to give employees and employers peace of mind. With the known loop-hole of rooms being allocated to multiple guests there have been a number of sexual attacks committed on guests, sometimes by hotel staff. These incidents have occurred in all standards of hotel, including premium and upper-star properties so a higher budget is not necessarily a failsafe solution. Hotel locks with just one mechanism can be overridden with a master key, therefore hotels with two independent locks, such as chain would at least alert the inhabitant that somebody is attempting to enter a hotel room. Employers could provide travel safety accessories such as doorstops - alarmed or otherwise.



Hotels should be quizzed about their lone female guest policies and feedback should be taken from staff as to the effectiveness of these policies. Where appropriate, employers should take advantage of contracting hotels that have a women's only floor for example in Riyadh, India etc. We would like to see the percentage of women feeling vulnerable in their hotels reduced.

Where TMC's are engaged, again there should be clear agreement on lone female traveller policies whereby common sense takes precedence over budget.

### Local Transport

With 55% of women feeling vulnerable in taxi's, driver services or collection by a colleague should be appropriately provided in high-risk cities and employers should have a stance on what other ground transportation is recommended.

For example, there have been reports of rapes of female passengers in different types of taxi services including Uber. Where staff are being collected by a driver, there should be corresponding paperwork so that driver and passenger can easily identify one another, not just an easily copyable name plate. Good practice is to also call employees or have check-in arrangements to ensure she has reached her destination and returned home safely.

**To summarise**, this report had three main objectives:

1. To give an insight into the common incidents women are currently facing on business travel
2. To identify where they feel most vulnerable
3. To determine what employers can do to ensure safety

Employers need to provide the right policies, training and education to their business travellers. Pregnancy and travel needs to be appropriately managed with alternative reasons given to avoid travel, to protect employee confidentiality.

By providing adequate travel protection organisations will improve their in-roads into attracting women, empowering them to have safe and productive business trips whilst avoiding claims leading to further reputational damage.



## ABOUT MAIDEN VOYAGE

Launched in 2008, Maiden Voyage is the world's only dedicated resource for the female business traveller. With over 7000 members in over 70 countries, the company has been widely covered by the international press, including CNN, Sky TV, BBC WorldService, Caterer Magazine, Economist, the Mintel Report, HR Magazine, The Guardian and Management Today. In 2010. it won the Business Travel Show Innovation Awards across all categories. We are regularly invited to speak at industry events such as The Business Travel Conference, World Travel Market, the Meetings Show and the Office Show on the subject of business travel for women. In 2016 Carolyn Pearson, the founder of Maiden Voyage has been asked to speak at the Global Tourism Forum in Istanbul alongside Kofi Annan.



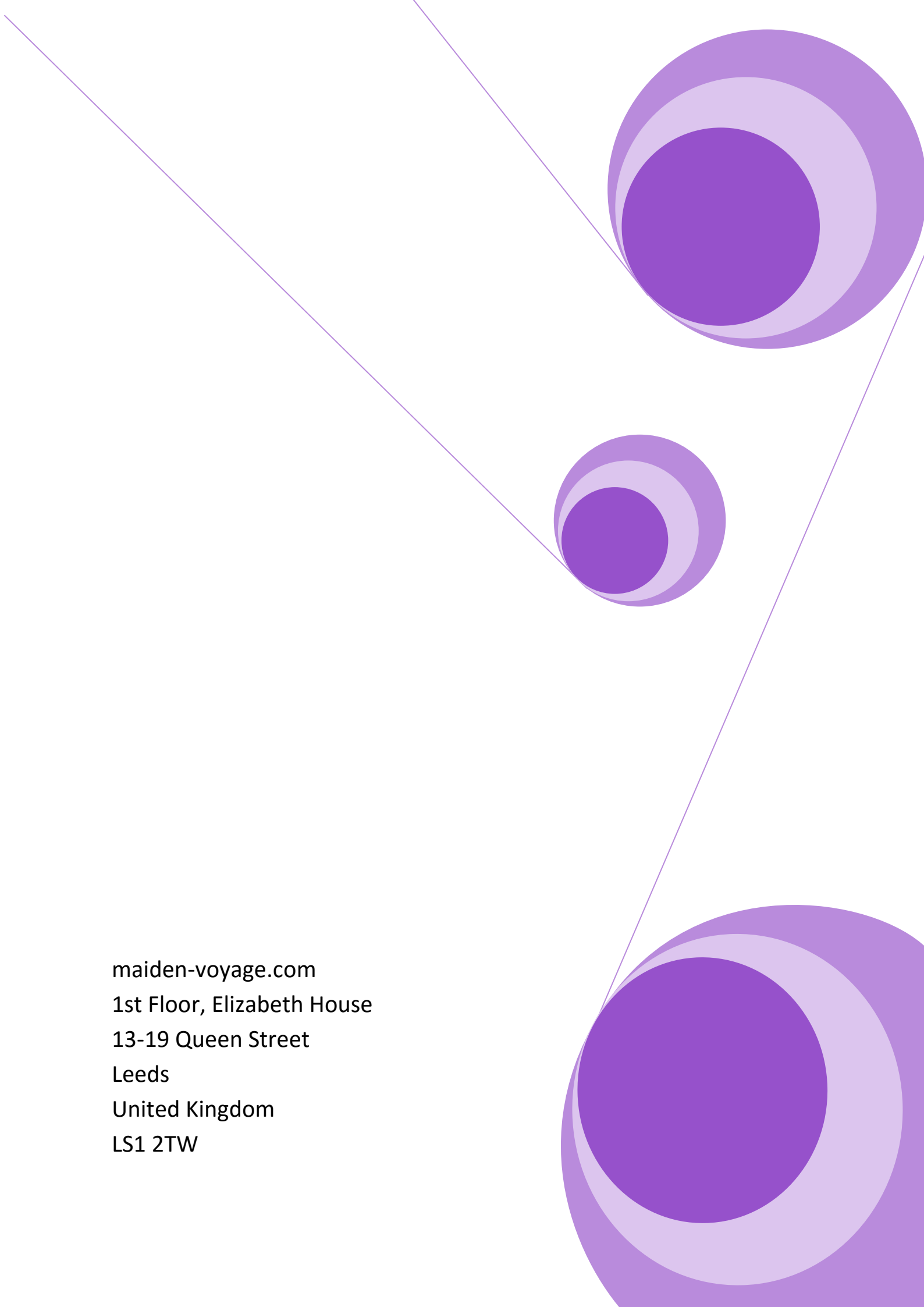
Maiden Voyage members connect through the Maiden Voyage during their free time away, as an alternative to 'dinner for one' or dining in with room service and many look to Maiden Voyage for advice and recommendations of safe, comfortable hotel accommodation.

Maiden Voyage has created the recognised standard for "Female Friendly Hotels" and offers members assurance that recommended hotels meet stringent inspection criteria for both safety and comfort, e.g double-locking doors, discretion on room number announcement, 24x7 manned reception. Through our feedback from members and our continuing industry research, Maiden Voyage gather a considerable amount of intelligence into the preferences of women travellers and how the market is adapting to their needs. It is from this basis upon which we are able to excel in providing training and education services to the hospitality sector.

Many large organisations such as Richemont Group, BP, and Leeds Beckett University use the services of Maiden Voyage as they strive to provide a duty of care to their corporate female travellers. We work with these organisations to help them consider their travel policies with the accountabilities of hotels and TMC's in mind, to provide an adequate level of safety for their staff.

In June 2015 Maiden Voyage launched its Female Business Traveller Safety Training built in consultation with and tested on some of the world's top travel security experts and agencies. Maiden Voyage also provide female traveller safety training on behalf the British Government's UKTI office.

Maiden Voyage is committed to driving up standards and best practice to make business travel safe and productive for women, globally.

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maiden-voyage.com  
1st Floor, Elizabeth House  
13-19 Queen Street  
Leeds  
United Kingdom  
LS1 2TW