

Travelling smart, travelling safe.

In the current global climate, and with increasingly diverse workforces, it's more important than ever that academic organisations meet their legal and moral obligations of duty of care.

We spoke to Carolyn Pearson, pioneering safety advocate and CEO of the female traveller safety experts, Maiden Voyage, to pick her brains on everything from traveller safety to diversity and her top three travel tips.

What was the reason behind starting Maiden Voyage?

I was on a business trip working in Hollywood. As a prolific 'bleisure' traveller, I had taken the weekend prior to my business meetings to rest and get out and see the city, however the reality was very different. I found myself staying in a soulless business hotel in downtown LA, not the kind of place for a woman to venture out alone in the evening. I figured there must be thousands of women in the same position as I who were either holed up in a hotel and bored, nervous about venturing out alone or indeed avoided it because of unwanted attention. There must be a solution I thought, perhaps a site through which I could connect, but there wasn't so I created it.

How did you end up working in travel management and training?

At the time of launching Maiden Voyage, it was really just a 'hobby' to satisfy my own desire to have more connections around the world. I was leading technology at ITV and then went on to work at the BBC and Easyjet. Maiden Voyage continued to grow in the background, evolving rapidly into female friendly hotels, corporate solutions and female traveller safety training. At a certain point the business got so big that I had to make a choice between a secure and well-paid career that I loved and a totally reckless risk to follow my instinct and passion. I took the leap 4 years ago and in 2016 we secured close to £500K in investment which allowed me to build a team around me and develop a series of travel safety eLearning modules.

Because I've been active in the industry from the start, I've built hundreds of fruitful relationships so now it's very easy to collaborate and partner with others in business travel who share our

values. They know and trust us because I've actually been building the Maiden Voyage brand for close to a decade.

At the time, I couldn't have foreseen the explosion in social media or the emphasis on duty of care, and with more women now travelling on business this created a 'perfect storm' that got me to where I am today.

What do you find are the key issues facing women travellers?

It's still the original impetus which is that lots of women don't feel comfortable venturing out in their spare time, so they miss out on the cultural experience and from a wellbeing perspective they don't get a break from work. They are more likely to sit in their hotel rooms and work, unlike their male colleagues who can pop to the bar with less risk of being subject to unwanted attention.

Of course, some of the safety concerns are very real. One in four women have suffered a negative incident when travelling on business and half of those are related to sexual harassment.

What progress have you seen in travel and accommodation suppliers catering to the needs of female travellers and what work is there still to do?

Last year we ran the Women in Business Travel Research and partnered with Virgin Trains, International SOS and a number of other organisations. That was a major milestone in creating a benchmark to really understand where the industry was. Sadly, from this research we learned that 70% of women felt that travel providers should try harder to meet the specific needs of women travellers.

Not surprisingly, safety and security is at the top of the list and the accommodation sector has a great opportunity to make some of the

easiest but most effective changes.

Simple things such as not announcing room numbers out loud at check-in and installing separate locks that cannot be overridden with a master key or lead to embarrassing situations when hotels bedrooms are double-allocated; something that happens far too frequently.

A number of hotels have started to install double-locking doors in order to get the Maiden Voyage certification but there's also got to be a commitment from the hotel leadership, Tony Elvin at Hotel du Vin in Birmingham is a real stand-out pioneer in this area.

It also makes good business sense. 80% of travel decisions are made by women and the Cornell School of Hospitality concluded this in its report 'Creating Value for Female Business Travellers'.

Workforces are increasingly diverse, what do organisations need to do to reflect this change in how they approach travel and traveller safety?

The worst thing an organisation can do is to shy away from gender-specific travel safety conversations. The world isn't equal and if you are sending a women traveller or a member of the LGBTQ community to a country where there are cultural, religious or legal restrictions affecting them, you are failing in your duty of care if you don't arm them with the relevant information.

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Carolyn Pearson, CEO,
Maiden Voyage.

RFP process and at least one major investment bank is asking for Maiden Voyage certification in their hotel procurement process.

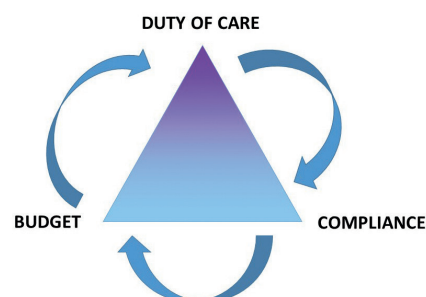
This benefits organisations in other ways too. With the right provisions in place they can actually attract and retain female talent whose roles entail business travel.

What role can travel management companies play in helping organisations meet their duty of care obligations?

I regularly come across organisations and TMCs working together with a focus on cost and compliance, rather than on duty of care. However, if both parties focused on duty of care, they would have a valid reason to push compliance which then gives them the power to drive down costs. Both parties have to be committed to this as an outcome. Here's a real-life example.

A female journalist is covering a political party conference. The hotel rates are understandably high at this time, so to keep within budget the TMC places her out of town. The business traveller has to take a taxi very late at night back to her hotel. The total cost

of the trip is higher than exceeding the capped rate. In this particular example the hotel was located down country lanes and the taxi driver got lost. The female passenger was extremely anxious in this situation. The risk to her and her wellbeing increased as a result. These types of examples are extremely common.



What do you enjoy most about your job?

I'm struggling to pick one thing. I love the variety of clients we have, huge names in premiership sport, silicon valley tech giants, luxury brands to pharmaceutical companies and one of the world's biggest entertainment corporations. I love the genuine gratitude from the women that we are helping and some of them become

our biggest advocates. Then there's the wonderful opportunities (that often come packaged as curve balls) that come our way every week. In short, it's been a huge roller-coaster to grow a business from the ground up but it's also a gift.

Finally, what are your top 3 tips for traveller safety?

1. Research, Research, Research (your destination).
2. Politeness should come secondary to personal safety.
3. Complacency is your biggest enemy.

Carolyn is the CEO and Founder of Maiden Voyage, an organisation that provides intelligence and solutions to support the corporate female traveller. She is a regular speaker on the international speaker circuit on the subject of female business traveller safety. She represents women travellers on the Global Business Travel Alliance (GBTA) Risk Committee, is one of several travel risk professionals on the advisory board for PEAR Insights magazine and was a finalist in the Women in Security Awards.