

Oral History of a Tourism Microentrepreneur with Maureen Johnson

By Chea Johnson

Maureen Johnson is originally from Hempstead, New York. As a young girl Maureen's Father worked for Grumman, an airplane manufacturing company. This provided her the opportunity to grow up around the airplane industry. When she was about 4 or 5 years old her father took her on an airplane ride in a friends small Cessna plane. This experience allowed Maureen to realize that the world was such a big place.

Intrigued with the opportunity to remain around air planes and travel, Maureen joined the Air National Guard. Maureen would eventually relocate to Charlotte, North Carolina in 1993 and retired from the Air National Guard after 21 years. Her life experience growing up in New York around many cultures, traditions, and individuals from varying nationalities, to her early experiences with airplanes, and traveling while in the military, fueled her love and passion for travel. Maureen's interest in travel eventually developed to where she desired to assist others in experiencing travel as well. Hence, in November of 2014 Legacy Travel and Tours LLC was formed.



Maureen:

Ever since I was a child, I had a passion for travel. Before I got into the industry, I enrolled in a travel agent school here in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I got certified. From there I started working part-time with an agency that specialized in travel, mostly in Africa, India, and the Middle East. This allowed me to gain a lot of knowledge and experience about traveling to the other parts of the world. After gaining this knowledge and experience I ventured into establishing my own travel agency.

Legacy Travel and Tours is an independent travel and tour destination agency that aids with qualifying clients. Many people want to travel but they do not know where to go, so qualifying clients needs to

take place to fit the client with the right travel package. This is so they can get the most out of what they are looking for. We also, assist clients with preparation, especially when traveling internationally. You just can't hop on a plane, you may have to have certain vaccinations, you may have to have visas, you have to make sure your passport still has enough time on it to travel internationally, preparing clients with different time zones, the climate, what's the political climate going on over there, or what are some cultural traditions you might need to be aware of.

I specialize, because it is my passion, in African travel. I am a certified destination specialist with South Africa, I've been there several times. I am also a specialist with Kenya, I recently traveled to Kenya this past November. I am also a destination specialist for Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and European River Cruising. I am also a certified Travel Agent with the Travel institute, which is a very reputable training association for Travel agents.

The travel and tourism industry is a large percentage of overall GDP for many countries. You have millions of people that work in restaurants, hotels, laundry services, tour companies, drivers, and it goes across the gamut. So, the travel and tourism industry provides a lot of jobs.



The biggest challenge for me as a microentrepreneur, is lack of capital. More capital would assist with marketing, as the goal is to expand the company, so I can hire employees. My long-term goal is to grow the business, bring young people into the Travel and Tourism industry and a succession plan where I can pass it on to someone else to continue the business.

I think the biggest strength of being an independent agent is the personal, one on one assistance with clients, which they seem to appreciate. I do a lot of my contacting and phone calls at night, because a lot of them work during the day, so they're not available during 9-5. I can be on the phone up to 10pm, I do however cut it off by 10pm. I stay in contact with clients and build personal relationships with them. Sending information, shooting a text to say hi, how are you doing , is there anything I can answer or give you in preparation for your trip that's coming up, is a strength of the company.

Is there any interesting work you have done or are doing with Legacy Travel and Tours?

Maureen:

I am proud to say I was part of a small business delegation that traveled to Kenya. The idea for this trip came from Mecklenburg County Commissioner Vilma Leak, where she has the Small Business

Consortium. This organization helps small businesses to be on par to bid for contracts in Charlotte and throughout North Carolina. Commissioner Leak decided to expose small businesses globally to partner up and do business internationally.

I was referred and selected to participate due to my experience with travel in Africa. During the trip we met with heads of the business communities and government officials. While meeting with these officials, discussions centered around developing relationships where small businesses can engage in trade and commerce amongst each other.

The follow up plan from this trip is to develop MOU's, memorandums of understanding. With me working close with the Ministry of Tourism, I was able to meet with the CEO and her staff to let them know we wanted to partner directly with them. The Ministry of Tourism in Kenya have never been to the southeastern part of the US, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia region. So, they are planning to visit Charlotte, and we are going to have them meet with some of the top business people and other travel agencies here in Charlotte.

In addition to meeting with the business community in Kenya, our delegation visited Kibera, the largest slum in Nairobi, and the largest urban slum in Africa. There is a lot of needs and challenges there, too much for us to handle on our own. However, we met with a small organization that helps middle and high school girls manufacture their own sanitary napkins.

There is a problem where many of the young girls miss 5-7 days of school every month due to menstruation. We asked what we could do immediately to assist with this issue. The young ladies requested clean panties, they did not ask for money or handouts. They are a hard working and proud people, and if we could help with panties they would be appreciative. We were able to send a few dozen over to Kibera last month, in March.



Along with Legacy Travel and Tours, I started Our Global Village Incorporated, which is a 501-C3. The motivation behind creating this organization came out of noticing that members in the African American community were not participating in experiencing the world. I think all of us have the right to travel. The purpose is to teach people that they are apart of a global family, and one of the best ways to experience that is to actually be able to go.

Unfortunately, many people don't believe that travel is for everyone. Some have a preconceived idea that travel is only for those who have money. We provide education and events that help to encourage individuals to travel, even if it is not in your plan now, to be a part of your plan in the future.

Exposure is very important, you may not be aware of something until you go and experience it. For example, we took a group of people to Charleston, South Carolina, which I consider local. Charleston has a unique culture and history and experiencing something different for yourself expands someone's knowledge. Once someone travels outside of their immediate environment your perspective on life will expand.

We visit schools and community recreation centers to offer cultural experiences. For instance, conducting African drumming and dancing programs, beading or showing them the different items from the different countries. We also bring in maps to show the children where these countries are, what languages they speak, items these countries produce and export. We do this work to plant a seed, in hopes that when they get older they will venture out and experience it for themselves, through travel.



Website Links

<http://legacytravelntoursnc.agentarc.net/>

<https://www.ourglobalvillageinc.org/>

Audio Links

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2?ui=2&ik=aa12e7d97e&attid=0.3&permmsgid=msg-a:r-2300430318745508645&th=1714bde83497081f&view=att&disp=safe&realattid=1714bde26f135fb5293>

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