

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AFRICAN FEMALE TOUR GUIDE IN 2022

Safari guiding is one of the most exciting, diverse, and unique jobs there is especially here in Africa. Guides are remarkable in the unique tourism field. They are expected to be well-rounded conservationists, excellent interpreters of animal behavior, knowledgeable about culture, traditions, and able to keep the clients entertained in between viewings.

Traditionally, guiding has been a male-dominated sector, but slowly many **young women** in Africa are breaking these stereotypes and taking on more of the **guiding opportunities** springing up. Those who have challenged the status quo find themselves in a small minority of **adventure-seeking women**, who are passionate about making their careers in the tourism industry a reality.

While women make up over 60% of the workforce in the tours and travel industry, often women are limited to jobs expected of their gender which are usually lower-paid cleaning and clerical jobs, especially here in Africa. It is not a lack of passion or potential that stops women from taking over more of the **tour guiding jobs**, often it is the lack of opportunities that may be readily available to **men than women**.

Traditionally in Africa, a woman simply cannot lead a multi-day tour. She is expected to look after her husband, her children, the household, and sometimes even the domestic animals. In 2022, most of the younger ladies in middle income families are expected to pursue higher levels of education and are pressured into getting into white-collar jobs, working at a desk from 9:00 am -5:00 pm.

And finally, when some **women guides** do get the opportunity to join the field, they can face a near-impenetrable wall of hardships, like discrimination, lack of mentoring, bullying, and sexual harassment. Women in the field face constant pressure from family and society, and may be judged harshly for going against the norm, simply because they “refuse to settle down”.

Happily, more and more women are breaking these stereotypes, chasing their dreams, and realizing their destiny of working in tourism today. With support from local Non-Governmental

Organisations, both local and international, and like-minded private companies, many guiding opportunities are opening up for women.

In East Africa, with support from these organizations, **women interested in joining the tourism** industry are joining clubs where they are being trained, gaining skills, getting support and mentorship in their careers as **women guides**. The first such initiative was first realized with the **Uganda Women Birders Club**, which started in 2013. With their sole mission of building the capacity of **women in nature guiding**, the club has seen tremendous success and has enrolled tens of **women guides** who are currently active in the tourism industry in Uganda. Many of these ladies are able to earn a much-needed income and are able to support their families.

With the success of the Uganda Women Birders, stakeholders saw the benefits of encouraging more women to get trained and skilled especially in bird watching, one of the highest paying tourist activities in East Africa. Progressively, this led to other **Women Birders Clubs** starting and training young ladies in the neighbouring counties of Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, and now the newest chapter in South Sudan. These are all under one umbrella, the **East African Women Birders Association. (EAWOBA)**

Women experience the world differently from men. Their perspectives bring a great deal of variety to the table. They are able to share their unique view of life, with their own stories, while impacting their knowledge and experience in the communities tourists visit.

Exploring with **local female guides** makes touring the most unique way to explore any destination and are tailor-made for cultural exchange. You get in-depth cultural experiences that offer impactful ways to discover Africa like you may not have experienced before. With a woman's outlook, they lead you to the discovery of a country's culture, history, and community.

Women are earning good incomes from their jobs, they have better access to healthcare, they are improving the well-being of their own families and relatives, and are reducing the scourge of poverty in Africa. With tourism, **gender inequality** is steadily being erased. With more opportunities for **women guides across Africa**, this can be a way towards **economic independence for women**. They are given a chance to rise against the odds.

One hired **female guide** gives back to the community where she stays. Women are given a chance to earn more money, they are able to rise out of poverty, and improve the economy by re-investing into other projects around. Encouraging more female guides into the workforce provides an opportunity for women to be leaders in their communities and inspire other younger girls.

Tourism offers work where the women don't need so many skills and can easily learn on the job. To be an **experienced bird guide** takes years of fieldwork. Some women especially the rural guides don't have the same access to education, opportunities, and freedoms as men in the same setting. But with these trainings, the ladies are equipped with other **nature and cultural guiding skills** which they can still deploy to give very fulfilling visitor experiences.

In fact, **Women-Only packages** are on a rise in 2022, with tour operators seeing a rise in the demand for **female-led tours**. As a result, tour operators are creating more and more products that are **All-Female expeditions**, where travelers can explore a side of countries rarely seen. They are able to experience the culture of other women, **engage in activities and excursions only meant for females**.

Through **female-led tours**, travel provides us with a way to tip the scales in favor of equality and work towards leveling the field. By choosing a **female-led tour** you can further the good fight against gender inequality all year round and wherever you travel. We need more **female tour guides** for this same reason we need **female representation** across the board in the tourism industry.

We encourage all women to continue challenging those **gender stereotypes** and chase their dreams. Realize their destiny. The biggest challenge is conquering your own fears and overcoming the stigmas that might be attached to a **woman forging a career in the tourism industry in Africa**. If you like traveling, meeting, and working with people, there is nothing stopping you! Join a Woman Birders Club near you today!

Written By Carolyne Mutesi

Content and Social Media Marketer, Tour Guide -Agiire Tours and Travels Ltd