

What's it like to run a travel business with your mother

BY JOANNA LAM | MAY 2, 2017

Travel Talk



Team Harris striking a pose against their newly renovated workplace

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Being in the travel business with her own mother, [Charlotte Harris](#) of luxury travel agency [Charlotte Travel](#) proves that a mother-and-daughter team is the way to go. Charlotte tells The Loop HK about what's like to be her mom Jackie Harris's business partner, and the best mother-and-daughter getaway destinations.



Charlotte with Jackie, her mother and business partner

What made you decide to run this travel business as a mother-and-daughter team?

I kick-started my career in risk management, thinking I was going to earn a lot of money and live a successful life. Nevertheless, being brought up with a "love what you do and you will succeed" motto by my parents, I often pondered about the true meaning of success.

Two things I love the most are family and travel, and with my mother being in the travel industry all her working life, it felt perfectly natural to make a career jump into the travel sector. I was very much born into the travel sector — we had hotel inspections during family holidays, analyzing each hotel room we stayed in, reviewing the most exclusive things to do in each destination.

Mom never expected me to take part in the family business, and in order to join them, I was asked to go in for a formal interview along with an updated CV, a cover letter and a three-year business plan. It was hands-down the hardest job interview of my life!

What are the things you love most about being in a family business with your mother? And what are the key challenges?

The key to joining any family business is not to think that you can change things overnight. The business has been under mom's successful management for 14 years, and I came in as a newbie with no operational or management experience. Despite our differences, mom and I work fantastically together — we recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Whilst she is highly experienced and well-known in the travel industry, I joined the business with a fresh mind and a millennial point of view: ways to use technology to enhance sales, marketing and build internal structure. The biggest challenge of being in a family business? Getting mom to switch from being a boss to a parent after work hours. Luckily, I don't live at home, so that definitely helps with drawing a fine line between family and work life apart from those occasional work-related phone calls when I'm out having a drink!



These two are inseparable in and outside of office

Have you learned any surprising facts about your mother since you guys started running the business together?

Mom is a highly devoted hard-worker and she has made a name in the industry by ensuring every client was satisfied and that our staff were happy. We have clients who have been with her for over 30 years, and staff that have been with us since we opened 16 years ago, and I can see how much time mom puts into the company in order to make sure everyone is treated with care and patience.

What's more, she also doesn't have negative thoughts about others and is so thick-skinned she doesn't take things personally. I really respect how she juggled work and family so well, that she could come home for dinner every night despite her hectic schedule at work.



Charlotte on the road

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Can you share some memorable trips that you and your mother took together?

Mom and I have been on over a hundred trips together since I was born. Funnily enough, we haven't traveled together much since I joined the business, as one of us would have to be around in the office.

One of my favorite mother-and-daughter trips was embarking on luxury river cruises and exploring Myanmar together. It was a pleasure seeing mom watching the sunrise in Bagan at ease, and just taking in the atmosphere without having to be on her phone and laptop all the time. We also enjoyed discovering Italy together — be it taking a shopping spree on the high streets of Milan or indulging in the pizza and pasta next to all the couples around us in Venice.

With Mother's Day coming up, can you name a few unique destinations that would make a great mother-and-daughter getaway?

Personal shopping experiences in Italy with free-flow champagne from shop to shop makes for a fantastic mother-daughter getaway. An artsy mother-and-daughter duo can also go for a private viewing of Michelangelo's *David* after hours in Florence. For those who are looking for a tranquil getaway in Asia, Koh Samui makes an excellent digital detox escape. Spend some quality time with mom away from the internet and indulge in a good mix of healthy food, exercise and spas.



The sky's the limit for Charlotte Travel

What sets Charlotte Travel apart from other travel agencies in Hong Kong?

Charlotte Travel is the only Hong Kong homegrown family-owned luxury travel business. Our team is able to cater to all forms of travel, ranging from tailor-made luxury holidays, multi-generational holidays, to corporate travel and everything in between. Aside from curating personalized itineraries for our clients, we also spend time building our network and reputation within the industry, which allows us to negotiate the best amenities, upgrades and VIP statuses for our client base.

Themed traveling is trending these days. Do you have any itineraries that are curated for travelers with different interests?

Specializing in highly tailor-made itineraries, we are known for our quality and exclusive themed travel planning. We've put together treks and cultural immersion itineraries through Nepal and Bhutan, private wine tours through France and South Africa with vineyard owners, and even foodie tours through Japan, with exclusive classes for those who want to try out native Japanese cooking and sushi-making.

What's next for Charlotte Travel?

With our newly refurbished office space, we've grown in both size and business volume. Aside from keeping an eye out for new travel trends and leveraging technologies, maintaining our quality remains our core value.

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