

I met **Sonia Cruz Oro** a few months ago through the BoldHeart Programme. I have never met travel coach in my life, love every time we speak, and learning more about her unique work, experience and her journey. Partly, because I am extremely passionate about traveling myself, I always travelled both, for work and private, but also because Sonia has great charisma, experience. When she speaks, you are fascinated and listen – I am.

Sonia, how would you introduce yourself?

I am a certified travel coach, working with women who struggle to find the right travel companion, the time, or the money, and would like to reconnect with their authentic self through meaningful and purposeful travel experiences.



Can you share what “*travel coach*” means and what you actually do?

When I say to people, I am a *Travel Coach*, most think on a *Travel Agent*.

It is understandable, travel coaching is a relative new concept. However, these are two very different careers within the travel industry.

On one hand, you hire a travel agent when you want to delegate all the research/booking for your vacations. You decide on when and where you want to go, and then you rely on the agent expertise to provide you the best option available to them.

On the other hand, you hire a **travel coach** when you want to learn how to use the power of travel for your benefit, for the rest of your life. You are looking for guidance on **HOW** you can create the best trip for you according to your personality type, your values, your needs and wants. A travel coach can also help with the research, but most importantly they will work closely

with you to identify the insights, resources and tools that will allow you to travel with intention from now on, so you can achieve the goals, experiences and transformation you are looking for.

I was fascinated to learn that your career prior to your current was in corporate IT, which may be perceived as totally different segments, or are we mistaken?

That's right. I've been working in corporate IT (more specifically within customer service) for nearly twenty years - fifteen of them in a managerial position. The reason why I remained in that industry so long is not because I love technology (although I do) but because I love people.

In my role as a manager, one of my main responsibilities was to coach a multinational team of professionals to achieve their goals. And this coaching part - helping my team to move from the place they were to the place they wanted to be - is the one I enjoyed the most.

I am always been passionate about people and human behaviour. I believe I have a gift for facilitation, people tend to open up to me - and so I began to find myself being asked for counselling or guidance, even with people I hardly know. Now, I get to utilise this skillset and expertise in my travel coaching work.

What are you the most passionate about?

Mmmm... Travel! 😊 That was an easy one!

But I am equally passionate about personal development. My first degree was in organisational psychology, and then I completed a Master's degree in Leadership & Management, on top of my qualification as a Coach and NLP Master Practitioner. And I completed all of these studies while working full-time.

So, as a travel coach, I feel fortunate to say that my job is the perfect combination of my two passions in life: Travel and Coaching. And from a personal perspective, it was amazing for me to discover how these two areas are so connected.

I was actually a travel coach before I even knew that travel coaching existed as a job, but I knew deep down how travel can be a powerful catalyst for personal growth. Now, that I've learnt about the extensive research on this matter, I get to enjoy the great impact travel has on other people's lives when they travel with purpose.

I love the power of asking questions. What are the questions we are to ask ourselves when planning a trip/travelling?

As a coach, a key part of my role is to help you find the answers that are already within you - another important part of the role is to keep you accountable for taking the action required so that you make your goals a reality and live your fullest life.

Being clear about your intention is the first step to ensure you create a positive outcome, while staying in alignment with your authentic self.

Sometimes we travel because we have vacation time, or we want to visit people. There is nothing wrong with that but we can do more. WHY do you want to travel? You might feel like going on a trip, but what, specifically, are you moving away from and/or moving towards?

Do you want to relax? Do you want to challenge yourself? Do you need time off from stress? Do you want to better figure out your career path? Are you looking for answers about your life purpose? Do you want to spend quality time with your partner, your kids or your friends so you can strengthen your relationship with them?

It's curious to see how most people have never thought about the reason why they want to travel or the value that travel can bring. We just need to dig a little deeper to discover this potential.

What are the trends you see coming in travelling?

If this pandemic has shown us anything, it's the importance of meaningful experiences and human connection in our lives. They say you don't truly know the value of something until it's no longer there, and travel is something that many of us took for granted in the past.

I believe that, as we see things anew - beyond Covid-19 - it's time for a travel reset. What would we do different if we could start from scratch?

Many people will be familiar with the idea of wellness travel. But, in the time ahead, I think we will see a stronger or more holistic focus on wellbeing travel. Within this, we will start to see more demand for mindful travel, activities focused on slowing down the mind, being in the present moment, conscious about self-care and travel as a means of renewal.

Alongside this, I expect we will also see growth across three ideas of 'connected' travel. The first of these is related to remote working and the new possibilities that COVID has shown us in terms of how and where we can work. The second will be that idea of connecting with people, place culture and experiences - we have all been confined to our homes and

locales for so long now, and we are social creatures so we need to get out there in the world and connect with others. The third is connectedness with our planet environment and, within that, the importance of travel that can sustain the environment, cultures and places we visit.

It's a good time to get strategic and become aware of our priorities in life. It's time to reassert the lifestyle we wish to have. That means travel with more meaning and purpose, reuniting with family, embracing nature, learning new skills, achieving life goals, having more opportunities for reflection, immersing with locals and leaving places better than we found them.

Is there any question you want me to ask you?

When traveling, people can more easily find that clarity or new energy they want or need in life. This is because they are out of their comfort zone. When we are in new cultures and environments, we can feel more vulnerable and open, but at the same time we are more present in the moment, more attuned to everything and everyone around us and more aware of our emotions, our fears, our triggers, our strengths and weaknesses. How do we integrate the experience?

The challenges arise when people return to their old routines and all that life throws up. Travel coaches can also help on that with a follow-up session upon return, so that people have the tools and support to make sure they bring all the good stuff home! The idea here is a simple one, based on each client's personal goals - in much the same way that a sports coach would support their clients for sustained performance. If we want lasting changes, we need to integrate the learnings from our travels into our lives.

A good journey starts way before the trip begins and keeps on giving long after we're back home.