

**AIR
MILES
WITH**

Zahirah Marty

Award-winning travel show host and managing director of The Destination Institute

INTERVIEW YI-HWA HANNA

You've appeared on numerous TV shows in South Africa and beyond. How does being a TV personality or local celebrity affect your everyday life?

I can't say I've ever seen myself as a personality or celebrity, and I've never made any life choices on this basis. I love when people recognise me from a show or social media and come say hello, but more importantly, my work allows me to connect with so many people through doing what I love, and this I am very grateful for.

What are the most difficult challenges of your job? My life feels like an odd juxtaposition at times. I absolutely love what I do, but I am the mum of a seven-year-old boy, and a big part of what I do takes me away from home very often. This is by far the greatest challenge for me, but I am very blessed that he is so independent and cheers Mama on all the way. That, and he gets to experience some pretty incredible things too!

And the best? The people I meet. My career has evolved from simple having a passion for travel, to being in a position where I can travel, present stories, and train people on destinations and how best to market them. I am a nomad at my core, and being able to constantly be in motion, gliding through the world seeing, smelling and experiencing different countries and cultures is a blessing and gift I never take for granted. I also have an insanely talented and wonderful team, which makes my job so much easier.

Why did you pursue this career path? I fell out of love with traditional PR. My job now brings together the fundamentals of my

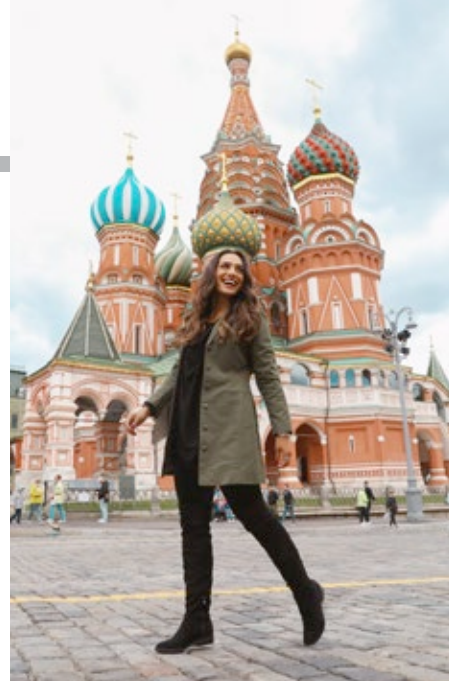


training and background of PR and brand, and combines it with an ever-changing tapestry of cultures, landscapes, and human connections. This career was an intentional construction of my passions built into a job.

What are your top packing tips? Maximise space and minimise wrinkles by rolling your clothes instead of folding them. Ensure you have important items like medications, toiletries, a change of clothes, and travel documents in your carry-on bag. Pack clothing items that can be mixed and matched, reducing the number of items you need to bring.

What is your earliest memory of a holiday as a child? Being packed into the car and driving across South Africa; whether down the Garden Route over December, or into (what was then) the Eastern Transvaal. My parents worked really hard and made sure school holidays were spent seeing our beautiful country. We covered the length and breadth of South Africa and those memories are what make me love my home country so much.

What are your suitcase must-haves? The suitcase varies based on destination, but my hand luggage has staples: headphones, a good book, and snacks, always!



What is your go-to in-flight entertainment?

I fly a fair bit, and usually on the same airline, so I tend to work my way through in-flight selections quite quickly. My go-to is downloading a full season or two of a crime series, or movies that are new to streaming platforms; it's usually the only time I get to sit down and watch anything these days.

How do you spend your air miles? Oh, that's an easy one – upgrades!

What countries will you be travelling to next?

The travel show I host, called *Zahirah's Bucket List Adventures*, takes me to some pretty exciting destinations. Coming up, I have Kenya, Desaru Coast, Bali, South Africa, and possibly France and the USA.

What's one travel memory you'd rather forget?

Oh my goodness, the answer is so easy and so embarrassing! Whilst traveling around Guangzhou in China with my dad, I had an urgent need to use the loo. At the time, it hadn't even crossed my mind that the toilets would be Eastern (squat) style, or that these cities weren't geared for tourists. There was no toilet paper, and everyone else knew to bring their own. It wasn't pretty, or pleasant; I left with one sock less than I went in with! I now know I have a very sensitive tummy.

What's your ultimate bucket list destination and why?

This is like asking parents to choose a favourite child! If squeezed to choose one, I'd have to say Antarctica. Its pristine beauty, untouched landscapes, and unique wildlife make it a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Exploring this remote continent offers a profound connection with nature and a sense of awe-inspiring adventure that is unrivaled anywhere else on Earth. **BT**