



Interview Lysanne Currie

My business life **Marisol Mosquera**

The award-winning founder of Aracari Travel turned her back on a lucrative career in finance to go it alone in a new sector. She tells *Director* that the experience has taught her the importance of distribution, digital and doing things more slowly

I was an early starter in business.

As a child I was always looking to make a deal. I learnt a lot from my father, who was a financier. Our dinner-table conversations were about futures, options and so on. At the age of 11, I showed prospective buyers around an apartment he was selling. When they eventually bought it, he paid me a commission.

I didn't have much freedom as a young woman in Lima.

Peruvian society was very patriarchal when I was growing up. I realised that I needed to be financially independent to be happy. My mother wasn't. If my dad wanted to go sailing, we went sailing. If she wanted to do anything, she had to wait for him to propose that. I chose a career that I thought was a clear track to independence: finance.

My aim wasn't to become a millionaire or to own expensive things.

Freedom was my goal. I wanted to move from bank to bank and job to job to experience new aspects of the financial world. I sacrificed huge salaries by doing that. I could have earned far more if I'd stayed with one employer.

The culture back then was one of greed.

I worked on the trading floor in the 1980s, both before and after the Big Bang. I remember one boss telling me that I would be promoted and make so much money. There was no sense of purpose to it all, though. I knew I had to make a change.

CV

1985 Analyst, Chase Manhattan Bank

1986 Euro commercial paper trader, Chase Investment Bank

1987 Assistant director, corporate finance, UBS

1992 Assistant director, equity capital markets, Baring Securities

1993 Latin American equity trader, Baring Securities

1996 Founder and president, Aracari Travel Consulting

2016 In her firm's 20th-anniversary year, *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine names Mosquera as one of its "top travel specialists we trust"

I was confused, so I quit my job to travel the world on my own.

That was when I started to discover my humanistic side. I'd never studied the liberal arts before that. On my travels I discovered philosophy, theology and architecture. This opened my world. I thought: 'I certainly can't be a banker for the rest of my life.'

I did actually return to finance after my sabbatical.

This time it was with Barings in the UK, working on Peruvian equities. In the decades leading up to the early 1990s, the market had been a basket case – dogged by terrorism, corruption and hyperinflation – but it became viable after a change of government.

My idea for a business emerged while I was at Barings.

I started helping friends to plan trips to Peru, but to change from an investment banker in Europe to a travel agent in South America was something else.

'Distribution is everything' is great advice.

My original idea was to build a chain of small lodges, but a hotelier friend told me that this would be a big mistake. The key in every business is to control your distribution, he said, suggesting that I set up a tour company. I could go off and build hotels on mountains once everyone believed in me.

My first year as a tour operator was difficult, lonely and sad.

I never thought of quitting, though.

I stayed focused and did the best I could. That's all you can do in tough times. Initially, everyone closed their doors to me. I made a beautiful brochure and went to see travel companies in UK, France and Spain. But they said that Peru was too far away, the country had a terrorism problem and I hadn't been in business long enough. I didn't have a clue about the supply chain. I knew that I had a product and there were lots of people who loved to travel, so I thought I would sell to them. But it didn't work that way, because tour operators were in the middle.

The digital revolution helped me to break through.

The proudest moment in my career came when the first people bought the first trip from me. I couldn't believe that I'd created something. They purchased online. If there had been no internet, I would never have made it.

Aracari Travel recently celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Sadly, my mum passed away four days afterwards. She'd supported me from the beginning and was always involved. She believed in me and saw that I could do things she hadn't been able to do. Wherever she went, she always took a stack of my business cards with her to give out.

I want to continue being active, but do things more slowly.

If someone has a problem, I want to spend enough time with them to help, for instance. Being active but slowing down a little is a difficult balance to find as a leader, but it's an important one. 🕒

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