

A SWEET SEA CHANGE

If you would like to travel with a light footprint, new, eco-friendly lesbian travel company, Sweet may be the ticket. Co-founder Shannon Wentworth shares her vision.

What was the inspiration behind Sweet?

My co-founder, Jen Rainin, and I knew we could form a company that would show the world that doing good, treating people well and making money go together. We decided to start a company that incorporated principles important to us: being green, volunteering, philanthropy and protecting the environment. We wanted to share our passion about these core values with lesbians in a ridiculously fun way.

During most of our trips, like our November 8-15 2009 Sweet Caribbean Cruise, we'll offer a variety of eco-tourism and voluntourism activities. Some of our guests may choose to hang out and sip margaritas while their friends plant trees or restore wildlife habitats. Sweet brings a balance of fun and giving back to the communities we visit. Basically, we want everything we do to be sweet.

How has Sweet changed your life?

'Enhanced' is probably a better word. It's such an empowering place to work and such an honour to work with such a talented team of bright, motivated and inspiring people. I love travelling all over the world to promote Sweet. I've met so many wonderful, powerful people. Pinch me. I might be dreaming. Now, more than ever, I'm able to put my beliefs into practice on a much larger scale. In 2008, we donated through cash, in-kind contributions and fundraising more than \$95,000 for organisations such as the National Centre for Lesbian Rights, Equality California, Stop AIDS Project, Human Rights Campaign, Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Centre, Aqua Girl



Shannon Wentworth, co-founder of Sweet Foundation, Atlanta Lesbian Health Initiative and more.

2009 is Sweet's maiden year. What has it taken to get to this point?

Jen and I had a strong vision for the company from its inception. The roller coaster economy isn't making us look like masters of timing, but we're building Sweet for the long-term. Our foundation is solid. We've been overwhelmed by our reception in the lesbian community. In general, everything is coming together better than we anticipated.

Are you as eco-friendly as you want to be, or is there further to go?

The green part is easy, especially since we're starting from scratch. Our timing couldn't have been better on this front as so many businesses we rely on are 'getting their green on' too. It's really at the core of our decision-

making. We're always looking for ways to be greener and to solve old problems in new ways. Another Sweet fundamental is to leave the places we visit better than we found them or with a deeper understanding of them. To that end, we're developing fun volunteer activities and eco-tours in the places we visit. For instance, we're doing a wetlands restoration project in New Orleans before we set sail on our first cruise. Our volunteers will plant 10,000 trees to help shore up the wetlands to prevent future flooding in the city.

Do you have a business role model?

Early in my career, I was really inspired by Megan Smith, who is now a director of new business development at Google, but was the CEO at PlanetOut. Her drive, focus, intelligence and playfulness showed me a new way to do business. Before I met her, I felt like business was way too boring for me. I'm also

cruise the river Nile
 cycle through chianti wine country
 be enchanted by india's taj mahal
 be glamorous at vienna's life ball
 explore ethiopia, africa's best kept secret
 sail on a tall ship around the mediterranean
 trek nepal, and get close to the highest mountain in the world...

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a big fan of the Righteous Babe records folks, who are redefining the way business is done in the music world. Independent artists, like Edie Carey, Jen Foster, Suzanne Westenhoefer and Rachael Sage, inspire me with their talent as well as their sheer grit and determination.

“Some of our guests may choose to hang out and sip margaritas while their friends plant trees or restore wildlife habitats.”

What is your favourite Sweet vacation?

Each Sweet vacation is so different. I'm really pumped about our November 8-15 2009 Sweet Caribbean Cruise on board Norwegian Cruise Line's Norwegian Spirit. NCL is a socially and environmentally responsible company. The ship is top-notch. The cabins, restaurants, nightclubs, casino, lounges, pool and spa are sumptuous. We're so excited to leave from New Orleans, a city that still needs a lot of help. We've organised a three-day, pre-departure package that includes an LGBT city tour, a cemetery tour, a cooking and eating demonstration and a fabulous party along with helping replant the wetlands destroyed by Katrina.

Our Sweet Kenya Safari is going to be extraordinary, a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience for our guests. I think my personal favourite vacation is our Sweet Salmon River Rafting trip. It's active and outdoors. It's an opportunity to really disconnect for a week. I relish those opportunities. It's also a Leave No Trace vacation, meaning we leave every camp the way we found it or better. I love that. Honestly, I'm incredibly lucky because I don't have to make a



Above: The Norwegian Cruise Line's facilities are sumptuous. Below: Caribbean dream destinations



choice.

Lesbians know Olivia as the leading travel brand for lesbians. How does Sweet differ?

Sweet brings new and different travel choices for lesbians. We merge the best of lesbian entertainment with social consciousness and environmental awareness. We've been very successful in attracting top-tier entertainers for our Caribbean Cruise in November 2009, such as nationally renowned comedienne Suzanne Westenhoefer and as well as popular singer/songwriters Jen Foster and Edie Carey. Our entertainers promote Sweet when they're

out on the road. They embrace our mission.

It's our goal to make the entire travel experience sweet, inside and out. Extra fees? Hidden charges? Totally not sweet. We offer a totally free monthly payment, no interest, no extra fees. The price you see on the site is the price you pay. Our all-in-one pricing is extra sweet. We roll in all the taxes, gratuities and surcharges. We also offset all the carbon emissions from our vacations as well as offering unique volunteer opportunities for our guests. Our goal is to leave every place we visit better than we found it.

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