

LEADING
WOMEN IN
BUSINESS
—
ARKANSAS

From Layaway to Getaway

Ileaa Swift's inclusive mindset brings world travel down to earth for thousands of clients.

In the beginning, Ileaa Swift had her doubts. Could she really build a successful travel agency that would change people's lives and bring good into the world?

She was young—in her 20s—with no experience in the industry. Hardly anyone she knew used travel agents. But a conversation with a representative of a high-level travel company lit a fire in her. “Payment plans for travel?” they scoffed, in response to her ideas. “That’ll never fly! Besides, those aren’t the kind of clients you want.”

Those were exactly the clients Swift wanted.

The birth of Swift Travel Deals is a uniquely American story in which a dream, fanned by faith and hard work, yields enormous success. Today, the company has helped more than 200,000 clients travel the world, employs a small staff of employees across the nation—most of whom have been with her since the beginning—and earns seven figures annually. And Swift? She retired from her own company. At 30.

Natural Talent Meets Passion

From childhood, the Arkansas native has had a strong entrepreneurial spirit. “I didn’t just want a job; I wanted a calling—a

profession that I loved and that could make a difference in people’s lives,” Swift recalls. While working at a Little Rock college, she was often asked to arrange travel plans and found she had a knack for it. Soon, she was helping friends and family book trips. Her husband, Terrence, suggested she think about doing it professionally. She wasn’t sure.

But one day, Swift found herself on the phone with an international airline ticket agent who told her the same thing. This time, she listened; Swift Travel Deals was born.

“If I was going to sell the world, I had to know what I was selling,” says Swift. “My husband and I spent a year traveling. Everywhere we went, I talked to locals and learned everything there was to know about each town, city, and country: where to stay, where to eat, what to do. We had a ball.”

In 2012, they returned to an America in recession, one in which struggling people weren’t thinking about travel. Swift got creative.

“I had an idea. Why not offer payment plans for travel? We do that for mortgages and cars,” says Swift, who soon made financing available. Word got out that you could book a trip to Paris, a Caribbean cruise, or



a Disneyland family vacation a full year in advance and pay for it over time—and the company took off. In just a few years, Swift built dynamic relationships with airlines, hotels, and vendors all over the world—and a massive, devoted client base.

“It’s incredibly rewarding knowing that my company has made world travel available to people who thought that door was closed to them,” Swift says.

New Heights, Bigger Dreams

Now that she has handed over the reins to her support staff, Swift has time to focus on the “making a difference in the world” part of her life plan. Her Travel with a Purpose program facilitates travel for people with special needs and who suffer from terminal illnesses and chronic diseases such as kidney failure

and endometriosis. Swift herself was diagnosed with endometriosis during her first year in business, and her diagnosis is what originally led her to pursue full-time entrepreneurship. She has also created a program through which she teaches others to start their own travel businesses; mentoring has become a new passion. Swift has already helped more than 2,000 people worldwide become travel agents, and she regularly coaches women entrepreneurs with big dreams of their own.



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