



# SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

**S**outh African Airways (SAA) is proud of its status as the country's only long-haul, intercontinental carrier with a wide-body fleet capability.

SAA has been self-supporting since it came out of business rescue in mid-2021. The business has been restructured and conservative, but solid growth plans are in place and are being met. These plans include the introduction of direct flights into Perth (which commenced in April 2024) and direct flights into São Paulo (launched in October 2023). The fleet is growing and SAA took delivery of one of three Airbus A320neo aircraft, in addition to the six already in place, from the China Aircraft Leasing Group Holdings Limited (CALC) in May this year. The A320 fleet will grow from 9 to 14 by the end of the financial year. The business is debt-free, has a strong balance sheet and a R5.5-billion property portfolio (among other assets) that may be used as collateral for future funding. In early June SAA announced that it had entered partnership with the SA Football Association to be the official carrier of South Africa's national football teams. Banyana Banyana and Bafana Bafana are national assets, and the pride of our country. SAA is proud to carry the players, coaches, officials, and managers.

SAA does not measure success only by bottom line. The airline counts transformation and development accomplishments as tangible successes, too, which

build its status as an asset that the nation may be proud of. Among these transformational and development accomplishments is the empowerment of women. SAA is proud of its status as an employer that empowers and enables women to build careers in aviation and related fields. South African Airways has taken significant strides in acknowledging the role of diversity in the flight deck.

Historically the flight deck was occupied by a largely male workforce, traditionally due to the fact that prior to the mid-1990s, the flight deck supply chain was the Air Force, itself a largely male-orientated sphere and career option for pilots. The South African Air Force itself only accepted female candidate pilots from 1996.

In 1996 SAA initiated its own industry supply chain through the South African Airways Cadet Pilot Scheme, ensuring a continuous and sponsored route, other than the Air Force, for all demographics and including a greater intake of female pilots. This was mainly successful and provided a pipeline of female pilots.

The IATA 25% by 2025 vision, which SAA has wholly embraced and incorporated in its plans, and translated to 25% of flight-deck crew members to be females by 2025. This is a stretch target, but one that SAA has fully embraced through its current recruitment process, and the current figure is sitting at 22%, in stark contrast to the 4% industry average and

approximately 10% at SAA in 2020. As important, is the additional value brought by the promotion of subject matter experts who themselves are pilots, into management positions, which further encourages and leads candidate females into aviation. SAA has on-boarded specialist managers in the Human Factors and Safety Sciences, Safety, Fatigue Risk Management, Pilot Recruitment and selection panels; prospective simulator instructors who will become the training leadership of the future. Aside from the management role and leadership, the pilot instructors become coaches and mentors growing and mentoring the new generation of female leaders and pilots. SAA's female pilots are leading captains of change in the aviation sphere both known and recognised domestically and internationally. As SAA expands, these leaders mentor the new generation of female pilots in South Africa.

SAA has a female pilot programme, the objective of which is to "implement mechanisms and programmes that will allow for work life balance, flexibility and other accommodations" that is looking at ways in which they can be better catered for to encourage more of them to join the airline and be at home at the airline. This is looking into permanent part-time work, sabbaticals and reinstating child care accommodation, amongst others. Just watch this space!



## THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR CAPTAIN ANNABEL VUNDLA

*'Ignore people who say there are things girls can't do - like fly an airplane'*

Captain Annabel Vundla, the first African female pilot to be appointed as a captain at SAA, fell in love with aircraft when she was a little girl and first saw a Boeing 747 stationary on an airport runway. The seven-year-old was awestruck by the size and inherent power of the machine, its elegance and beauty. She resolved there and then to make planes and flying part of her future. Captain Vundla commanded the first all African female flight in southern Africa, if not all of Africa, in October 2022.

SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS **ADVERTORIAL**

**CAPTAIN IGNETTE MOOLMAN: ALWAYS PROUD TO STEP ONTO THE FLIGHTDECK OF AN AIRCRAFT THAT CARRIES THE NATIONAL FLAG**

*"Success takes time, dedication and hard work. There are no shortcuts."*

Captain Ignette Moolman has a number of firsts under her professional belt. She was the first female pilot to chair the pilot's union, SAAPA, and the first woman in the South African Air Force to qualify as a multi-fleet instructor. She was also the first woman pilot to command an operational squadron; and was the first woman to qualify as a C130 pilot. Her advice to young women thinking of embarking on a career in aviation is to understand and accept that to grow in aviation (in any career, for that matter) takes time, dedication and hard work. "It takes 10 000 hours to get 10 000 hours experience. There are no shortcuts. Patience is essential. Just keep at it, do the very best job that you can do and your opportunity will come. Count on it.



**CAPTAIN ASNATH MAHAPA: DEDICATED ENABLER OF YOUNG WOMEN EVERYWHERE**

*"Learn to listen to and respect yourself. Be your own beacon."*

Asnath made history as the first African woman to become a commercial pilot in South Africa. That was back in 1999. Shortly afterward she became the first African woman to acquire her airline transport pilots licence. She has been recognised as one of the 100 Greatest Women in Aviation (by the Black Management Forum) and was nominated (in 2003) for the Woman of the Year Award in the Science and Technology category. In 2017 Asnath received a Legacy Award from the South African Women's Alliance in the USA and this year flew the inaugural flight to Perth in April.

**CAPTAIN ZEENAT SAFI: PASSIONATE ABOUT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN AVIATION**

*"Young people are an endless source of inspiration. It's my honour to work with them and to inspire the next generation of aviators."*

Zeenat Safi, the only female management pilot at SAA, has more than 20 years experience in aviation and flew South Africa's first all African female flight in 2022. Although she was trained abroad, she has built her career here at home, in South Africa. Her first flying assignment was flying cargo for a charter airline. Today, Captain Safi pilots the Airbus A320 fleet at SAA. Advocating for diversity and inclusion in the aviation industry is another of her passions. "I am readily available to mentor aspiring pilots, providing guidance and support. I sometimes speak at schools. Young people are an endless source of inspiration. It's my honour to work with them and to inspire the next generation of aviators."



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