

# Spotlight on women in the parks industry

**Three female members share their views on working in the parks industry and discuss what can be done to encourage more women into senior roles**



**According to UK Hospitality, there are 3.5 million people working in the sector, making it the third largest employer in the UK. Research by the UK Caravan and Camping Alliance, of which BH&HPA is a member, found that British holiday parks provide FTE jobs for nearly 230,000 people.**

As with many sectors in the hospitality and tourism industry, women make up a large proportion of that workforce and can often be the 'unsung heroes' in the industry due to a lack of representation at more senior levels.

Claire Flower, Director of Beverley Holidays and BH&HPA Vice-Chair, recognises that despite recent positive trends women are still under-represented at senior levels, and is committed to support efforts to change this. *'I'm eager to see even more women, as well as the younger generation, actively participate in the BH&HPA national committees and at branch level,'* Claire said.

Three female members shared their stories about how their careers developed, whether they have encountered any particular challenges along the way, and what advice they would give to encourage other women to step up to more senior roles. ➤

## Claire Flower Beverley Holidays

**Claire is Director of Beverley Holidays in Devon and Director of the Devon South Branch. She is the current National Vice-Chair of the BH&HPA and will be National Chair as of 2026. Additionally, she has signed up to be a mentor on the NGN's mentoring scheme.**

*'As with most family businesses, I was involved in my family's holiday park from a very early age, learning the ropes in various areas and departments. I loved it, it's what we lived and breathed as a family.*

*'After school, I went to university and then worked as a teacher in the UK and Australia. I rejoined the family business in 2001. My grandad started the business in the late 1950s, with his three sons. I'm third generation, and one of my sister's sons has just started full time, so we're now in the fourth generation and celebrating over 66 years in business.*

*'It's a great industry to work in. Who doesn't like a holiday? As with all businesses there are challenges, but it's so rewarding to see our customers return year after year with happy smiles. It's a friendly industry too. The sense of community and camaraderie within the industry is unique.*

*'It's also a fantastic industry for young people looking to build a career. I've been fortunate to be a part of young school leavers' careers, helping them flourish into management and senior leadership positions across the business. The focus on nurturing young talent and guiding them towards successful careers in the hospitality industry is second to none.*

*'The biggest challenge is that the role can be so varied, covering all the holiday park areas. It's non-stop all the time and balancing operational demands with strategic planning requires a versatile skill set and constant adaptability. But that's also what makes it fun and creates an exciting challenge.*



*'I have always been actively involved with tourism and leisure industry groups and believe that collaboration and working together is what makes people and businesses successful. Throughout, I have come across many people I look up to as role models and have been given some helpful and valuable advice over the years.*

*'I believe mentors can provide immense value to people at all stages of their careers. Having a go-to person who has navigated many of the challenges of running a business and having them be able to offer practical advice and industry*

*insights can help you avoid common pitfalls. Mentorship also fosters a culture of continuous learning and professional development, which is crucial for long-term success in any industry.*

*'While the holiday park industry has many outstanding individuals of both genders, it's been encouraging to see an increasing number of women stepping into leadership roles. The industry is great for networking and I encourage everyone to take advantage of that. It really is valuable.*

*'By sharing experiences, knowledge, and guidance, we can help each other navigate professional*

*and personal challenges. Do go along to your local branch, so you can meet more people, swap emails etc. For the younger ones, sign up to join the BH&HPA NGN as this is a great starting place to get to know like-minded people with similar issues. And I really encourage joining the mentor programme, whether as a mentor or mentee. Yes, it takes time, but it's worth it.*

*'My advice for those of any gender is to go for it! Seek out mentors and role models, continuously expand your skills, be proactive, believe in yourself, and don't be afraid to look for opportunities and make bold decisions.'*





## Elspeth Sutton ES Leisure Consultancy

**Elspeth is Managing Director of ES Leisure Consultancy, providing practical advice to the holiday caravan industry, as well as General Manager at Sandgreen Caravan Park on the Solway coast in Scotland and was chair of BH&HPA Scotland for five years. She is also a mentor on the Next Generation Network (NGN)'s mentoring scheme.**

*'I love the fact that no two days are ever the same and you don't know what is going to come through the door - from the good, to the bad, to the very ugly. The other week there were cattle from the neighbouring farm running around through the park, so you never know what you're going to have to deal with, from the sublime to the ridiculous.'*

*'Women are more than qualified to run these businesses because we're multitaskers. It's what we do from the moment we get up in the morning. We multitask and we can handle confrontation.'*

*'A lot of women running parks might be doing it for the family, so they'll stick with the family business and that's maybe one of the reasons why there aren't more women higher up the ladder and in some of the top jobs.'*

*'I had my family late and it was tough, but I have an amazing husband, who covered for me when I was working seven days a week. I can see that if you don't have that, it would be really difficult, but it doesn't stop you being able to do the job. You don't need to do 90-hour weeks anymore if you've got the right team behind you.'*

*'I'm only on the park a couple of days a week and I've got other clients, but my team are superstars. It took about six years to get a good, solid team but I trust them 100%. If business is slow, or I can feel unrest in the team, I love being able to sit down in the boardroom and thrash it out. How are we going to change this? Looking at the trends coming up,*

*which are fads and which are worth investing in? You can change your business model in a month and I don't know many other businesses like that.'*

*'We had a couple of empty pitches, so we put on a hire fleet. It took a month to get it set up and get that going and that's now quite a profitable part of the business. If you've got a little bit of extra space put in some glamping pods - there's just so many ways that you can play with this industry and things that you can do to innovate.'*



*'There are tough days; I think that's why I want to mentor. I had some amazing mentors, Michael Paul being one, and Ros Pritchard, former Director General of the BH&HPA. This is actually a very supportive industry. If you have an issue, you can contact another park operator and they will help you.'*

*'I think things have improved dramatically and there are some amazing women that work in this industry. The BH&HPA has a female Director General and CEO, but when you look at the top jobs in this industry, the CEOs of all the big groups are male, and that's sad. And I honestly don't know the reason for that. I was offered some really excellent jobs at some of the*

*groups over the years, but it was always at park manager level, there was never really anything above that.'*

*'Maybe we need to change our appearance to the outside world and make ourselves more inviting to the top talent? I think we need to look at recruiting people from outside the industry, and we need to do more recruitment at college and university level.'*

*'I'm really passionate about that because I think we need new and fresh ideas, and different ways of looking at things. Women are very good listeners, but perhaps we need to take our place at the table and shout out more.' ➤*



## Emily Cook Willow Pastures Country Park

Emily has owned Willow Pastures Country Park in Skirlaugh, Yorkshire, for seven years. She has been secretary of the Yorkshire Coast Branch since March 2024.

*'Our introduction to the industry was quite unconventional. We have a number of other family businesses, and we're near the East Coast, so we had a bit of land and decided to open a holiday park.*

*'I did administration in the construction industry and worked in pastoral care, so it's very different to anything I've done before. It's been a steep learning curve, but we've come into it with a fresh pair of eyes and there are elements of the construction industry that we've been able to bring across.*

*'Everybody's usually really happy, which makes it a nice industry to work in. People want to come on holiday, they are treating themselves to a luxury item that they've probably saved up for and they're coming to the holiday park to make memories with their families. The feedback you get is so heartwarming and people are so appreciative that you've made their holidays special.*

*'The hardest challenges are those outside of our control - the weather, politics, and the cost of living. Those are things you can't predict, so it's about adapting to keep the business going, but it's great to see the innovations that other parks and suppliers come up with, such as shared ownership schemes or making parks more dog-friendly. The industry is very supportive. If we have a problem, we can ring the park down the road to ask if they're having the same issues.*

*'This is quite an old-fashioned industry in some ways. There's an attitude of "this is how we've always done it, so this is how we should do it". I do think there's a desire to change that, though. A lot of people in the industry want to address that.*

*Unfortunately, the unsociable hours don't really lend themselves to attracting more women. I'm on call 24/7,*

*weekends and evenings. Christmas, New Year and school holidays are your peak seasons, so that is definitely a barrier. Embracing technology can play a part, though. You don't have to travel the length of the country anymore - you're able to speak to customers and suppliers while working from home.*

*'Some new brands coming through have great ideas and that can facilitate women - and men - being able to balance their family and work lives better. Whether that's technology that enables us to keep in touch with people that are on the ground out of hours, or being able to have virtual meetings.*

*'Women need to speak out and support each other and we need to trust our instincts. A lot of men and women in the industry do recognise that women bring something different to the table. We have different experiences and skill sets. So it's about speaking out about what you can contribute, lifting up the other women around you and saying, 'look I'm seeing this, how do you feel?'*

*When you're in a room with other women and you're sharing stories from when you've been faced with old-fashioned sexism - which a lot of us do have unfortunately - if you approach it with a sense of humour, and hear other women saying, "Yeah, this happened to me" - being aware that it isn't just you definitely*

*helps us move in the right direction. It's about bringing it to the forefront of people's minds and saying, "Hang on, something does need to change".*

*It's a diverse industry so it's about having different networking events that work for different people. Some women don't want to or can't give up their weekends or evenings to come to social events, so whether it's something that we do remotely or a WhatsApp group - there's lots of things we can be putting in place to help people connect. It's about sharing best practice, sharing ideas, sharing what's happening out there and getting people together to support each other.' ■*



### Further information

Members who are interested in the mentoring scheme, or who may work with someone who would be keen to be a BH&HPA mentor, can find a list of mentors and forms to sign up at [www.bhhpa.org.uk/mentoring-scheme](http://www.bhhpa.org.uk/mentoring-scheme).

NGN Network: [www.bhhpa.org.uk/next-generation-network](http://www.bhhpa.org.uk/next-generation-network).