

# Eight Skål Women Receive International Awards at the CONNECT Travel Conference



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**Skål International USA →**

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KISSIMMEE, Fla., March 17, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- The recent CONNECT Travel Conference, a gathering of leading tourism companies and travel buyers, the industry gathering was highlighted by extraordinary sessions.

One of those events, a dinner organized by Women in Travel and Tourism International (WITTI), provided recognition to a couple dozen internationally outstanding women leaders in the industry for their achievements.



Skål awardees (l to r): Laura Mandala, Founder, WITTI; Julie Scott, SI Nairobi; Morgan Maravich, SI Washington; Iris Salazar, SI, New York; Holly Powers, SI Boston, Julie Ackerson, SI Long Island; Dawn Drew, SI New York; Kelly Craighead, President, Cruise Line International Association and WITTI Mistress of Ceremonies.

Among these women were eight members of Skål International, six of them representing Skål USA clubs. Skål International is the world's largest organization of top travel industry leaders which has chapters in over eighty countries worldwide with almost 15,000 members representing every facet of the travel and tourism industry.

Laura Mandala, Founder of WITTI, recognized the following Skål women for international awards:

- Jennifer Ackerson, Skål USA Long Island, Tourism Marketing
- Dawn Drew, Skål USA New York, Travel & Tourism Media
- Morgan Maravich, Skål USA Washington, Rising Stars in Travel
- Holly Powers, Skål USA Boston, Lifetime Achievement in Travel
- Iris Salazar, Skål USA New York, Travel and Transportation
- Phyllis Stoller, Skål USA New York, Travel Blogging
- Julie Scott, Skål Nairobi, Travel and Transportation
- Lavonne Wittman, Skål Pretoria, Mentor in Travel

All of the women had a few comments about the award and what it meant for Skål to receive so much international visibility.

Wittmann, the 2019 President of Skål International, said, "It is an absolute honor for me to have received the outstanding mentorship award, especially from a women-based organization specifically in travel and tourism. The award has come at a very opportune time to embrace the rise of the African woman in our industry. As Skål International President 2019 and a proudly South African woman, the award is of huge significance not only to me but to my country as 54% of our population is below the age of 24. This is one of the most important groups that would benefit from this award. It gives me the opportunity and leeway to uplift, enlighten, and motivate our youth and empower them to attain their dreams and expectations."

Stottler, President of the Women's Travel Group, noted, "I won for our blog: <https://www.thewomenstravelgroup.com/blog/> which offers stories, tips, and encouragement to women who love to travel. The blog is unusual for its authenticity and straight uncensored advice. I operate a tour company for smart women travelers; the blog is an extension of our 28 years of our small group tours. The award to me means recognition that women have a travel voice. The voice is different than men's and is often overlooked by the travel industry but not by WITTI. Solo women travelers are the fastest growing demographic. We are so proud to represent them and to be awarded for doing that. Furthermore, to be a woman of the Board of Skål in New York, is an honor that brings weekly benefits to my business."

Scott, who is an inbound tour operator at Bunson Travel in Kenya and Secretary of the Skål International Council, made these comments. "Being recognized by WITTI at the Top Women in Travel as an Outstanding Woman in Travel and Transportation is such a great honor to me. When I was first nominated by a fellow Skålleague, who is a believer in the African travel and tourism industry, I looked at the website and thought wow to be nominated by such a group was already an honor. Women have been the backbone of the travel industry, but there is still disparity when it comes to senior leadership positions. With my award, I aim to reassure women in our industry that they can do it. I worked with my club to bring the Skål Congress to Kenya and helped to restart the Skål Club of Addis Ababa. I am now working to grow Skål clubs in Africa. I am looking to work with Women in Travel and Tourism International (WITTI) to form a mentorship program and assist them when times are hard as we face this new reality we are in now."

Salazar, an officer of Micato Safaris, an exotic tour operator specializing in Africa, and past president of Skål New York, shared her thoughts. "After WITTI recognized me as one of its Outstanding Women in Travel and Transportation, I thought a lot about something WITTI said, that 'women have long been the backbone of the travel and tourism industry.' When I first heard that I thought 'Right on!' because to be the backbone of anything you need to have a substantial backbone yourself and I to consider myself in that company of women who stand up not just for what they believe, but for each other. And that's also why it's so significant to me that eight women from Skål were represented among this year's winners. As immediate past president of Skål International New York, my goal was to further Skål's mission of doing business among friends and sharing each other's successes. I was especially delighted that three of us from the eight Skålleagues recognized are members of Skål New York. So, while I feel honored to receive this award and am personally gratified that through my success I might serve as a role model for young Latin American women, I think it's true--especially in the travel industry--that behind every successful woman is likely another successful woman. I truly believe we want to benefit from each other's successes, to benefit from these strong backbones we have in common."

Powers, president of Powers Travel and Event Management, past president of Skål International USA, and currently the ISC Counselor to Skål USA, was thrilled to receive a lifetime achievement award and observed, "How exciting to see so many talented female Skål International members being singled out and honored for excellence in our industry at this prestigious event. I am truly humbled to be included in this esteemed group."

Maravich, who is a director of the Global Business Travel Association and served as president of Skål Washington, remarked, "Receiving the 'Rising Star' award from WITTI is a great honor. This award particularly recognizes my work, efforts, and additional involvement in the industry as a young professional in travel and tourism. I value this industry and appreciate to have had the opportunities and experiences that I've had within it so far. I have an amazing network of friends and colleagues that I like to call my tourism family, who have helped me to get to this point and shared their knowledge with me along the way. I would not be where I am without my tribe and I love that it keeps growing with more faces. I decided in college to follow my heart to an industry called tourism and this shows that following your passion does work, that doing what I love and working hard...works. This is an award I will always treasure and I am grateful for the selection. It was quite an honor to be recognized with all of the other awardees, especially my fellow Skålleagues. To have so many female Skålleagues recognized

for their work in the travel and tourism industry is a testament to where Skål International is today as an organization. Part of my success in this industry is from the relationships formed with Skål, so I am delighted to have received this award with so many Skålleagues by my side."

Drew, who is the former publisher of National Geographic Traveler and CEO of MOSTE, had some insightful comments. "WITTI has evolved from the casual lunch meetings with just a few of us to become an organization that supports and recognizes the achievements of women on all levels of the industry. I am very proud to have been selected by my peers for this honor. It means so much to have the recognition and the friendship of the many women who have been industry leaders. My company operates worldwide and is based in New York City. We specialize in destination development for travel and tourism, destination marketing, and film production. I am founder and CEO of MOSTE and Dawn Drew Independent Productions. I have known about Skål for many years. But spending the evening with the other WITTI winners who are members of Skål really turned my head. Such wonderful, supportive, fun, powerful women! I look forward to each and every opportunity to be with them and to work with them."

Ackerson, president of ALON Marketing Group, which specializes in tourism marketing and training, offered her observations. "The award has given me the opportunity to appreciate my own contributions to the industry. Besides moving at a steady pace for a very long time, my company has always focused first on our clients and not on myself or our company. It is a great feeling to take a moment to reflect and realize that I have made an impact to win an award of this stature. To win it amongst these other prestigious women is beyond gratifying. My company is a tourism marketing company and has assisted supplier businesses small and large on how to achieve their goals in tourism, specifically on how to work effectively with the tourism travel trade. ALON Marketing Group is based in Farmingdale, Long Island, NY, where I have been a member of Skål in New York and Long Island for many years."

The conference was highlighted with an hour conversation with President Barack Obama, who discussed his life in the White House, its impact on his family, and what it was like to be a former President and most importantly a discussion on tourism promotion. Tourism promotion was one of his key initiatives to rebuild the national economy. His discussion did not include any aspects of American politics in 2020.

Skål International USA is the largest national committee of Skål International with 2,000 members and 45 clubs throughout the United States and its territories. Several new markets, including Houston, Savannah and San Antonio are future sites under consideration for activating new Skål clubs.

**Contact:**

Tom Moulton

[info@skalusa.org](mailto:info@skalusa.org)

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