

Carla da Silva is back in the cockpit at BARSA



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Carla da Silva, Air Mauritius Regional Manager: Africa and Latin America, has been re-elected as chairman of BARSA (Board of Airline Representatives of South Africa).

BARSA is the voice of the industry, and works very closely with government stakeholders and the aviation value chain, to ensure that the cost of doing business for the African and International airlines is sustainable.

Da Silva says it is an honour and she is humbled by her re-election as chairman. She was re-elected with an overwhelming vote from African and International airlines present at the recent annual AGM. Da Silva is positive that with vice-chair, Michi Messner of Qantas, and the new and existing members of the board, together they will work closely and ultimately add value to BARSA's profile, in all that they do during the course of the year.



Carla da Silva

We chat to da Silva to find out how she got into the aviation industry, her biggest motivation, the challenges and opportunities in the industry as well as what we can see from Air Mauritius in the next year or so...

▣ ***Could you describe a typical day in your job?***

Every day is a different day. Every day has new opportunities and challenges that have to be embraced and addressed.

Aviation is a complex business due to the fact that many factors outside your control can transpire. For example, you're expecting your aircraft to arrive as per its schedule on a respective day and it goes technical or weather issues arise and there are delays and cancellations.

Whilst managing these dynamics, you need to bear in mind, your team, the customers, achieving sales targets, ensuring repeat business and keeping your tour operators, travel agents or channel booked for the traveler content.

There are many balls one needs to juggle and each one is as important as the next. So passion, energy, focus and a coached team that understands accountability and the importance of their daily tasks is critical.

My role comprises of leadership responsibilities, both strategic and operational expertise but also leading with both the mind and the heart because aviation is a people business.

▣ ***What's the least and most exciting aspect of your workday?***

Least is always the administrative duties, signing off all payments, authorisations, documentation which is important and very relevant to ensure cost and revenue management but can be tedious.

Most exciting is that every day is a different day and I get to communicate, interact and engage people, communities and different businesses.

▣ ***What did you want to be when you grew up?***

I wanted to be an aviator and I wanted to achieve and conquer my dreams. Flying, travelling, leading people, having a family and friends and being the best I can be because this was all installed in me by the wonderful foundation my parents afforded me.

▣ ***How did you get into the aviation space?***

I got into aviation as a flight attendant, which was my first entry into the aviation world - the world of learning, travelling and new opportunities and dreams.

▣ ***What was the best advice anyone ever gave you?***

Humility, integrity and passion can never be compromised.

▣ ***What advice do you have for the future generation of women wanting to get into the aviation space?***

I would like to quote a world icon, "A winner is a dreamer who never gives up" by Nelson Mandela.

Having a dream wall with a focused action plan on how to get there is the best way to get into any space... Aviation is all about fulfilling dreams, whether it is a business person pursuing his or her aspirations, a family going on holiday to spend time together and travel to new places, a family who is immigrating in search of a better life and even children who travel from city to city to visit divorced parents. It is all about dreams.



Carla da Silva

“ Surround yourself with cheerleaders, mentors and coaches and ensure you have all the armour on to embrace the opportunity when it arrives. ”

■ **Who or what is your biggest motivation?**
My biggest motivation is my faith in God, as all things are possible with Him; my father who is a leader in business; and my biggest cheerleader, my family who support me endlessly; my friends, coaches and mentors who are like-minded; and then my inner passion and motivation to succeed and achieve.

■ **Are South African women getting enough of a chance to spread their wings in the aviation industry?**

There has been some developments and achievements in this arena, however, it is still very much a male-dominated industry. It needs an objective whereby women and men understand and embrace the fact that diversity and working together results in better outcomes and achievements.

■ **How do you feel about your recent re-election as chairman of BARSA?**

I am very humbled and honoured to be voted once again in a consecutive manner as the chairman of the Board of Airline Representatives in the country, by my peers and stakeholders in the aviation arena.

I take this role very seriously as BARSA is the voice of the industry and therefore representing all airlines in the region. It does give me a sense of recognition and reward knowing that ultimately I have added value to the industry in this region and made a positive impact.

■ **Following your re-election as chairman, will you have the same strategy, or will you be changing anything?**

The BARSA strategy was devised as a five-year plan but every year reviewed with the BARSA CEO, June Crawford and the executive team to realign priorities and objectives as the industry is ever-changing and very dynamic.

■ **What challenges and opportunities do you see in the airline industry?**

The airline industry in Africa has the ability to grow and build a sustainable aviation value chain that will encourage GDP growth, tourism opportunities, job creation, free movement in terms of air access and trade along with economic development ensuring a safe airline industry in Africa.

The current challenges are safety, security, job creation, infrastructure and skills.

■ ***What is your advice for overcoming these challenges?***

Ongoing conversations. A simple and aligned agenda for all relevant stakeholders from airlines, to industry players to government. Most importantly ongoing monitoring and execution of such priorities to ensure we celebrate milestones and continuously focus on ensuring that all the challenges are constantly reviewed to ultimately achieve the desired outcome.

■ ***What has the last year been like at Air Mauritius? What has been the biggest highlight?***

The last year has been challenging as the aviation industry globally is extremely competitive, managing the cost structures from fuel to operational costs along with revenue generation where the profit margins are extremely tight or small.

In our environment, remaining competitive and top of mind for the consumer where there are so many different choices available is really all about innovation, service excellence and being able to manage and adapt to constant change.

■ ***What can we see from Air Mauritius in the next year?***

South Africa will continue to grow as a strategic region as we are looking at increasing the Johannesburg daily schedule as well as those of Cape Town and Durban.

We have recently introduced the new generation aircraft, Airbus A350-900 and will shortly be flying the new Airbus A330-900neo to South Africa. This new generation product enhances the customer onboard experience, offers a differentiated value proposition and delivers on better cost and environmental efficiencies for Air Mauritius.

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