

A Journey from Walk Leader to HF Holidays Board Director

By [Andrea Illingworth](#) | September 2024

I have always been passionate about walking and the health and social benefits it offers. I learned to walk later than most due to a developmental disorder that affected my movement and coordination. However, once up on my feet, there was no stopping me. I have hiked in many places in the UK and abroad over the years. For me, "hiking and happiness go hand in hand or foot in boot." (Diana Spicer - Hiking for Her).

I joined HF as a volunteer walk leader in 2020 and still commit to undertake at least 6 walk lead appointments each year. I instantly liked the ethos and approach of HF and the unique walking holiday experience it offered. I soon became aware of the challenges for HF and the travel and tourism industry in general in recovering back to pre-pandemic levels.

I wanted to do more to ensure HF continued to grow as a business. I realised I could only do this by channelling my time, expertise and energy at a more strategic level and so stood for the Board in 2023. I was delighted to be elected as a director for a 4 year term.

I am now 18 months into the role and have found it a challenging yet worthwhile experience. I received a very comprehensive induction which really helped and have felt fully supported by a friendly and very effective board of directors and senior management team. They are truly committed to the cooperative model and endeavour to ensure the values and principles underpin all decisions made.

I enjoy exploring new terrain, revelling in nature's colours and breathing in the fresh air. For me it's more about the sensory experience and an appreciation of my surroundings. I feel this has helped shape my approach to my director role. I constructively challenge and scrutinise the performance of many elements of the business, whilst striving to listen actively, making my contributions with empathy and always with a sense of mutual attachment, purpose and development.

Delivering member benefits and understanding the customer journey are also central to the role. As a walk leader I see and hear firsthand what guests want and what enhances their enjoyment and experience. I bring my walk leader experience into relevant

discussions at the board and committees to ensure our guests and members stay at the heart of any strategic developments.

Being a director involves a considerable time commitment to prepare for and attend meetings and workshops. Key dates are provided well in advance, and this has enabled me to plan ahead and fully engage in the role.

The board is keen to encourage members of all ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds to consider standing for election. If you have the relevant skills and experience for the strategic leadership of a complex tour operator / hospitality business and want to see HF thrive for future generations then I would encourage you to stand. It is a serious commitment but a very rewarding and fulfilling role.

Apply to join our Board of Directors

To stand for election to our Board of Directors and make a lasting impact, find out more at www.hfholidays.co.uk/join-our-board and submit your application via email to Society Secretary, Manuela Gordea, manuelagordea@hfholidays.co.uk.