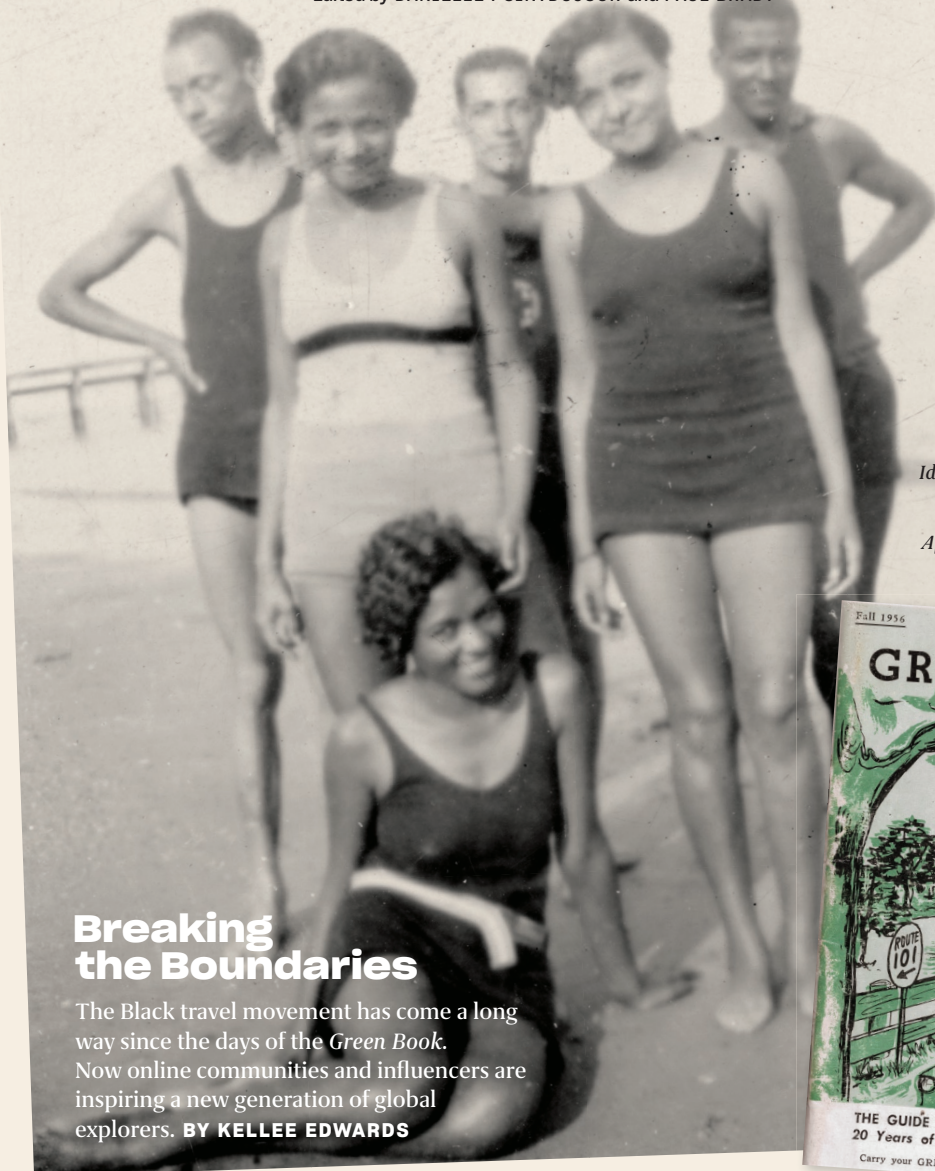


Intelligent Traveler

TIPS AND TRICKS TO HELP YOU TRAVEL SMARTER

Edited by DANIELLE POINTDUJOUR and PAUL BRADY



A snapshot taken in 1938 in Idlewild, Michigan, a resort town that welcomed African Americans.

Breaking the Boundaries

The Black travel movement has come a long way since the days of the *Green Book*. Now online communities and influencers are inspiring a new generation of global explorers. **BY KELLE EDWARDS**





◀ From top: Evita Robinson, seen in Harlem, New York; Mario Rigby in Zanzibar.

on the Travel Channel, *Mysterious Islands*. And last year, I hosted the first 24 episodes of *Let's Go Together*, the *Travel + Leisure* podcast that celebrates diversity and inclusion in travel.

Others are charting new courses—and, in turn, inspiring more Black travelers. Toronto-based eco-explorer Mario Rigby walked from Cape Town to Cairo between 2015 and 2018, sharing his adventures on his blog. “I’ve always found it imperative to see diverse faces in the world of exploration,” Rigby, a *Let's Go Together* guest, tells me.

The momentum continues to grow, and Rigby, Robinson, and I are far from alone. Detroit’s Jessica Nabongo reached her goal of visiting

every country in the world in 2019, making her the first Black woman to document accomplishing that feat, taking nearly 200,000 social media followers along for the ride. Chicago native Nathan Fluellen has been surfing around the world since 2017, giving back to communities he has visited and sharing his discoveries on Instagram. The Bay Area’s Martinique Lewis has written the new *ABC Travel Green Book*, a modern-day version of the original that offers a global guide to Black-owned businesses. And countless other influencers, like fashion-minded Cedric Wood, are motivating Black people to travel, too. It’s proof that, when it comes to where we can go, the answer is pretty much anywhere.



▶ Imani Bashir at Batu Caves, a Hindu pilgrimage site in Malaysia.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MATADOR NETWORK/COURTESY OF EVITA ROBINSON; COURTESY OF IMANI BASHIR; THE ABBOTT SENGSTACKE FAMILY PAPERS/ROBERT ABBOTT SENGSTACKE/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF MARIO RIGBY

▼ Another 1938 photo from *Idlewild*, which became known as the *Black Eden*.



EW PEOPLE would relish being told where they can and can’t go. But that was the reality for African Americans living in the Jim Crow era.

From 1936 to 1966, *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and subsequent titles helped keep Black travelers and their families safe, with warnings about “sundown towns,” where people of color could face intimidation and violence after dark, and recommendations on the hotels, restaurants, and businesses that would welcome them.

Thankfully, the original *Green Book* is no longer a necessity for the African American community. Black travelers have become an economic force, spending \$109 billion on vacations in 2019, according to a recent study by MMGY Global, a marketing agency. Yet we still have concerns. In response, a powerful new Black travel movement has emerged over the past decade—one centered on giving travelers of

color the advice, inspiration, and sense of community we need to explore the world.

One formative moment was the 2011 creation of the Nomadness Travel Tribe, an invitation-only Facebook group, by New Jersey-based Evita Robinson. “The Nomadness brand has always been synonymous with community, risk taking, trailblazing, and trying new things first,” Robinson says of the collective that started with just 100 members and is now more than 25,000 strong. Users swap tips and compile guides to destinations, with notes on accommodations, local experts, safety risks, and Black-owned businesses to support. One woman recently asked for tips on St. Lucia and, in particular, a recommendation for a trustworthy taxi service; another, just back from the island, replied with the phone number of the driver she’d used.

As Nomadness has grown, prominent Black travelers have also begun encouraging others to see the world. My own travel journey started around 11 years ago, when I set out to become a TV host—a realm traditionally dominated by older white men. I knew I’d have to go above and beyond to be considered by any network, so I became a pilot, a scuba diver, and adventurer and picked up more than 100,000 social media followers. In 2016, I became the first Black woman to host a show

A New Way to Navigate the World

One family is using social media to unlock some unexpected destinations. **BY IMANI BASHIR**

For Black travelers, safety and cultural acceptance are often top of the list when choosing a destination. But *Black traveler* doesn’t represent a monolithic group: our individuality impacts the way each of us moves through the world. As a Black Muslim woman, mother, and expat, my needs look very different from those of a Black LGBTQ person on vacation. I often consider whether or not my hijab (headscarf) is lawful in a given destination. Will I be able to find somewhere to pray? How are darker-skinned people treated? What about Muslims?

When my family was planning a move to Asia a few years ago, a Facebook group for Black Americans, Brothas & Sistas of China, proved invaluable in answering these questions, and many more. Most Black American expats in the country opt for cities with bigger international populations, such as Beijing, Shanghai, or Shenzhen. But we were landing in Chongqing—a city my husband and I had never even heard of—thanks to his new job there as a coach for an American-football program.

Facebook users advised me that my son and I might be photographed, and even touched, without our consent. More positively, we were constantly told how family-friendly China was going to be, that it was an extremely safe place where both children and elders are held in high regard. It turned out to be true, as Chinese people—and, in particular, the older generation—doted on our son in Chongqing and in Wuhan, where we later moved.

We left China for a vacation in Malaysia in early 2020 and were unable to return, due to the spread of the coronavirus. We spent months living in hotels and Airbnbs, searching for a place where we could feel safe and comfortable. I once again found a safety net in online expat groups, which turned us on to Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula. We now live in Cancún, which we’ve found to be focused on family and community. It’s a place where we can leave behind some of the anxiety that comes with being Black in America, and where our son can just be a kid, swimming and building sandcastles on the beach.



◀ McLeod Plantation Historic Site, in Charleston, South Carolina.

▲ The mural Rhapsody, in Austin, Texas.

COURTESY OF BLACK AUSTIN TOURS

Black History Tours Are Finding a Broader Audience

After protests calling for racial justice, travelers are seeking out Black-centric storytelling in the places they visit.

BY SARAH ENELOW-SNYDER

TEXAS HAS LONG branded itself as part of the West, playing up cowboys and rodeos and playing down the history of slavery and segregation it shares with other Southern states. Most of the 30 million people who visit Austin in a typical year go for the music, the food, the swimming holes; Black history has so far been less of a draw. But Javier Wallace, who founded **Black Austin Tours** (*blackaustintours.com*) in 2019, aims to tell those lesser-known stories.

Wallace's family roots in the Austin area date back 200 years, and he explores this personal history in his two-hour excursions through the city's East Side. Like many, he's led his trips virtually in recent months. When I joined him over Zoom, he talked about how the Austin City

Council forced Black families into a Negro District in 1928; legal and de facto segregation at the city's renowned parks and pools; and a 19th-century economy powered by plantations—including Ancient Oaks, where Wallace's ancestors were enslaved.

"We walk every day in these historical injustices," he says.

One important landmark on his tour is the Texas state capitol, a Renaissance Revival building in the heart of Austin constructed by Black prisoners in the 1880s. Wallace connects the story of the building's construction to broader topics, including convict labor, mass incarceration, the policing of Black communities, and the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

Nationwide protests against racial injustice in the spring and summer of 2020 have touched many aspects of American life—including the way we travel. Since then, Wallace tells me, he's noticed a major uptick in interest in his tours and, among the white visitors who seek him out, a desire to learn about the Black experience and become better allies.

"Did I start this tour in response to June?" Wallace says. "No, because this has been going on since 1492."

The protests have also prompted another look at the importance of Black representation at historic sites in Virginia—and a push to ensure Black visitors feel safe and welcome. To that end, Richmond—once the capital of the Confederacy—is growing its initiative **BLK RVA** (*visitblkva.com*), which celebrates Black culture and businesses. **Montpelier** (*montpelier.org*), the home of President James Madison, tells the stories of the estate's enslaved people in consultation with their living descendants, and **Ben Lomond Historic Site** (*pwcgov.org*), a plantation house in Manassas, has a new virtual reality tour focusing on the lives of its enslaved people.

"Has something really changed this time?" asks Rita McClenny, president and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation. "Yes, but change is always incremental."

Southeast of Fredericksburg, an ambitious restoration is under way

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF CHARLESTON COUNTY PARKS; COURTESY OF BLACK AUSTIN TOURS

at **Menokin** (*menokin.org*), where the delicate ruins of a 1769 plantation home are being partially encased in glass. Honoring the enslaved is one of the site's objectives, says Pia Spinner, Menokin's education research assistant. The grounds have been open to visitors throughout the restoration work, but last spring and summer, Menokin added deeper discussion of the lives of enslaved people in Virginia to its tours.

At the **McLeod Plantation Historic Site** (*ccprc.com*), in Charleston, South Carolina, the mission has always been to focus on the Black experience, according to Shawn Halifax, its cultural history interpretation coordinator. "The attention paid to Black voices by historic sites and museums has

been a growing movement that really began in the 1970s," he says. The growth of Black Lives Matter since 2013 has accelerated the shift—as well as the fact that Dylann Roof photographed himself on a visit to McLeod before murdering nine people in a Black church in Charleston in 2015.

Back in Austin, Wallace is planning to hire additional guides and develop new tours—including one focused on the downtown area—thanks to increased demand and a coveted Heritage Tourism Grant from the city. He wants to demonstrate that Black influence extends beyond the East Side. "The contributions, experiences, and history of African people in this city," Wallace says, "are in every nook and cranny."

▼ The Texas African American History Memorial, on the grounds of the state capitol.



Why Black Travel Matters

T+L asked six globally minded personalities to share their thoughts on the movement.

AS TOLD TO DANIELLE POINTDUJOUR

"When you're in another land and see someone who looks just like you, there's an understanding that happens, just with eye contact, that our presence in this place is, in itself, progress, and an experience we can pass down to our children."

— **Roy Wood Jr.**, comedian and correspondent for The Daily Show with Trevor Noah

"I've looked for magic in the sunset on Anguilla and in intricate hand-painted sconces in Marrakesh, Morocco. But my favorite moment was dawn on New Year's Day in Accra, Ghana. It felt like the ancestors awoke with the sun to bless me."

— **Bozoma Saint John**, chief marketing officer at Netflix

"While filming my show, I found utopia in countries like Rwanda, South Africa, and Zambia. Everywhere I turned, I was in the majority. I didn't stand out. Experiencing cultures across Africa let me reconnect with my ancestors."

— **Nathan Fluellen**, host of World Wide Nate: African Adventures

"Travel has shown me how to persevere, love myself, and be more confident. Travel taught me how to enjoy the life I have—and to create a movement that helps others who look like me, a fat Black man, live life now."

— **Jeff Jenkins**, CEO of Chubby Diaries, an online community

"To travel the world is a privilege. To have the opportunity to experience my Blackness abroad is an honor."

— **Skylar Kearney**, social media strategist

"Black people, like all people, come in so many different colors and shapes, with different religions and beliefs. And when we travel around the world, we show others those different representations."

— **Jubril Agoro**, founder of Passport Heavy, a social media consultancy



The Travel Advisors Charting a New Course

An emerging field of experts is crafting experiences geared toward Black adventurers.

BY TANYA A. CHRISTIAN

IN 2012, attorney Sheila Ruffin noticed a gap in the travel market. After relocating to St. Thomas, in the U.S. Virgin Islands, to work on maritime and environmental issues, the Howard University School of Law grad realized that the yacht-charter business was geared almost exclusively toward one demographic—white.

“I thought to myself, *Wow, I should change that,*” Ruffin recalls. The Virginia native was already an avid traveler, so she decided to start her own company aimed at



Black adventurers. In 2019, **Soca Caribbean Yacht Charters** (socayachtcharters.com) was born, making Ruffin one of a growing number of Black advisors who curate luxury experiences for a group that has

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From top: A Sisters Traveling Solo trip to Fez, Morocco; morning yoga in Bali, during an OMNoire retreat.



◀ *T+L Travel Advisory Board member Kareem George, visiting Seoul.*

▼ *A tour of Cartagena, Colombia, organized by Sisters Traveling Solo.*

often been overlooked by traditional tourism outfitters.

“Black travelers, as a whole, have very diverse interests, just like everyone else,” notes Kareem George, founder of the Michigan-based agency **Culture Traveler** (culturetraveler.com). A member of T+L’s Travel Advisory Board, George says his clients have all sorts of requests, though destinations like the Caribbean, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, and South America tend to be among the most popular. “That’s because they’re iconic places—but also because of historical connections that clients might feel based on their own ancestry.”

The Caribbean is also key for Carl Napoleon, the founder of **Carnival Jumpers** (carnivaljumpers.com). His Brooklyn, New York, company’s mission is to increase access to the Carnival experience by facilitating trips to these quintessential island celebrations. Carnival Jumpers handles basics like lodging, as well as more complex arrangements such as costume selections and introductions to mas bands or krewes, vastly simplifying the planning process.

Some advisors strive to build community among their guests. Christina Rice, a certified yoga and meditation instructor in Georgia, places wellness at the center of her **OMnoire** (omnoire.com) retreats for women of color. “I always say

that a retreat is an extension of the retreat leader, so it’s important for attendees to truly know that person,” Rice says. Pre-trip video calls are an integral part of her process, familiarizing guests with the workshops, small-group

conversations, guided meditations, and yoga classes that fill her itineraries, like those planned for Ghana and Portugal in 2021.

Cole Banks, Atlanta-based founder of **Sisters Traveling Solo** (sisterstravelingsolo.com), also focuses on creating connections. She’s taken groups of solo women on a hiking expedition in Greece, a museum-centric jaunt through Morocco, and a beach retreat in the Seychelles. And while the destinations are part of the draw, so too are the potential friendships—like the ones forged between a trio of STS travelers who met in China in 2017 and now plan yearly getaways, most recently to Cartagena, Colombia.

“These women go from being strangers to lifelong friends,” Banks says of the people she brings together. “I see it happen on every single trip.”



Going to West Africa? It's a Trip Like No Other

African Americans have lately gravitated toward ancestral homelands like Benin, Ghana, and Togo. Special planning helps these heritage travelers have a positive experience.

BY TRAVIS LEVIUS

WEST AFRICAN must-sees like Ghana's Elmina Castle and Senegal's Maison des Esclaves, relics of the transatlantic slave trade, are some of the most important historical sites on the continent. They have an even deeper meaning for travelers like Rondel Holder. A Black New Yorker with family from Grenada and Jamaica, he's one of a growing number of people of the African diaspora returning to West Africa to explore his roots.

"I still get chills thinking about the dungeons and cellars of Elmina Castle," Holder says, recalling his visit in 2019. "For a lot of Black people, there's a longing to connect and a longing to learn about where we're from."

A number of developments are driving a surge of interest in heritage trips to West Africa. Advancements in DNA testing—led by Africa-focused

companies such as **AfroRoots DNA** (afrorootsdna.com) and **African Ancestry** (africanancestry.com)—are making it easier for Black Americans to research their genetic backgrounds. Airlines, including Delta, have expanded service to West Africa. Tourism campaigns such as Ghana's 2019 Year of Return, timed to coincide with the 400 years since the first enslaved Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, also attracted the diaspora. And a growing number of tour operators are stepping in to handle the logistics of these trips.

"We've never really had the chance to grow from the past," says

Atlanta-based Eric Martin, cofounder of **Black & Abroad** (weareblackandabroad.com), which operates group tours to Ghana and Senegal. "By making a pilgrimage to these West African countries, seeing the sights, hearing the personal accounts of our African ancestors directly from their surviving descendants, we have a cathartic connection."

Black travelers say the experience can be life-changing.

"I feel more in touch with myself and my culture than ever before," says Brian Oliver, a Baltimore-based nonprofit director who visited the five African countries that matched his DNA: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. Nicole Brewer, a teacher and blogger living in Oman whose DNA results showed a link to Ghana, added the country to her short list of places for retirement, after visiting during the Year of Return. Others, like Kristin Tellis Quaye of St. Petersburg, Florida, have turned heritage travel into a new career. A practicing lawyer, she also now runs **Certified Africa** (certifiedafrica.com), a firm that organizes trips to West Africa.

While these soul-stirring journeys are a powerful means for Black

A naming ceremony organized by Black & Abroad in Yamoransa, Ghana, in 2019.



Rondel Holder, right, and the Togolese fashion designer Koko, exploring Lomé, Togo.

Americans to trace their lineage, they also require careful planning.

"The reality is, Africa has its own complexities and perspectives that don't always match the idealized view of the continent those in the diaspora have," says Kwesi Ewoodzie, a Ghanaian-American sociologist and founding director of **Culture Beyond Borders** (cbbexperience.com), an Atlanta tour operator. The right guide can help navigate language barriers

and facilitate meaningful cultural interactions. Facebook groups such as Black Travel Movement and Travel Africa Movement are excellent resources, filled with advice from locals. And media outlets like *Essence* and *Travel Noire* offer sound advice, often with Black Americans specifically in mind.

Another challenge: DNA testing can trace only Black Americans' racial backgrounds and geographic origins,

not the names or lineages of their families. Despite all of this, Holder says, his visit to Ghana was "deeply spiritual."

"You're standing where tens of thousands of Black people were enslaved, learning about everything they went through before they were shoved onto boats to cross the Atlantic," he recalls. "So, to be back in Africa willingly and happily, in the place where all of that happened, it's like my ancestors' wildest dreams."

Can Black Travelers Find Themselves in India, Too?

A photographer discovered, on a trip to Rajasthan, that the answer is a resounding yes.

BY NANCY LOVA

As a Black traveler, I've had my share of difficulties. I've been ignored and belittled by waiters and hotel staff. Locals have grabbed my arms and taken my photo. I've been told I look "too exotic" to be from London, my hometown. Women have touched my hair without my permission. Men have catcalled, shouting the names of celebrities who look nothing like me—except for the fact that they, too, are Black.

These disrespectful gestures are almost enough to discourage me from traveling at all.

So when I set out for India in April 2019, I braced myself for plenty of negative attention and racial comments. Instead, I discovered a place that felt like home and that rekindled my love of exploring the world.

Which isn't to say it was easy. To make the most of my trip, I relied on a few tactics that helped me better navigate the destination. My first step was to book a room at a world-class hotel, the **Leela Palace Udaipur** (theleela.com) on Lake Pichola, which *Travel + Leisure* readers ranked as the best in the world in 2019.

It may seem obvious that a luxury hotel would provide top-notch service, but the benefits of my stay there went beyond the on-property pampering. The Leela's concierges handpicked kind and knowledgeable guides who they knew I would feel safe with. These guides took me to places of worship like Jagdish Temple, where I got a crash course in Hindu beliefs, and markets where I tried *kachori*, a deep-fried chickpea-flour snack, and *jalebi*, a traditional sweet. The photo-taking opportunities were nearly limitless.



Another key was seeking out local women in markets whenever I had a question, whether it was about directions, shops, or where to eat. Despite a language barrier, they often welcomed me through gestures like placing a vermilion bindi on my forehead or setting a garland of marigolds around my neck. In these moments, I felt protected and embraced.

Lastly, I reminded myself to keep an open mind. I brought my preconceptions to India, no doubt, but nobody there seemed surprised to learn I was from London. I'd gone to Rajasthan expecting one thing and left having learned that, while some trips may disappoint us, others can be life-affirming revelations.

The author captured the view of the pool at the Leela Palace Udaipur.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF RONDEL HOLDER; COURTESY OF BLACK & ABROAD

NANCY LOVA