



# THE WOMEN WHO TRAVEL POWER LIST

*Condé Nast Traveler's* Women Who Travel platform celebrates the ways self-identifying women explore the world. Here we spotlight leaders in food, aviation, landscape design, politics, television, and fashion who are pushing all of us to go further

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOSEFINA SANTOS, CAYCE CLIFFORD, AMANDA HAKAN, CAMILA FALQUEZ, RAMONA ROSALES/AUGUST, NINA WESTERVELT.

For all 15 women featured on this year's list, visit [womenwhotravel.com](https://www.womenwhotravel.com) on March 8



**INTRODUCING THIS LIST** is a full-circle moment for me. In 2011, when I started Nomadness Travel Tribe, a community for travelers of color, the travel space looked and sounded quite different. Instagram wasn't even a year old. There were no travel influencers and only a handful of online travel groups actively bringing communities together. Industry leaders weren't speaking about the priorities of sustainability, intersectionality, or equity the way they are today. And while women in tourism were twice as likely to be in leadership roles as in other sectors, most held unstable, low-skilled jobs, earning 10 to 15 percent less than their male counterparts; more than 80 percent of employees working in hospitality and aviation that year were white.

This lack of diversity and gender equity is why I began Nomadness. I wanted to democratize access and representation across the tourism industry. The travel landscape felt like the Wild West, filled with untapped opportunity—and for women like me, the time had come to forge our own paths. Since then, Nomadness has bloomed into a 31,000-member community—78 percent of which is made up of women. Today we are influencing the travel industry like never before: Marriott International's workforce is now 54 percent women; in 2019, the tour operator Intrepid Travel more than doubled its women leaders, from 154 to 342. We are the activists, designers, politicians, hoteliers, television hosts, and community leaders who are bringing creativity, innovation, and empathy to every corner of travel, from the outdoors to aviation to food.

Take Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna. The first Indigenous Cabinet member, she is tasked with protecting and preserving the nation's spectacular public lands—places like the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. Or Sara Nelson, the president of the Association of Flight Attendants—CWA, who works tirelessly to transform the airline industry into a better place for workers. Then there is television host and culinary evangelist Padma Lakshmi, who uses her platform to educate (and entertain) us about the diversity that truly makes America what it is, insisting that there are always seats at the table for others. Actor Eva Longoria will soon follow in her footsteps, bringing her new show *Eva Longoria: Searching for Mexico* to our screens this spring as one of the only Latina travel hosts out there.

As a 2019 alumna of the last edition of this list, I know the power of being among such groundbreaking women. I also understand that platforms like this one are to be shared—it's an opportunity to pass the mic to the next generation who will shape the way we travel. (I recommend following the work of Ashley Renne Nsonwu, an activist, sustainability educator, and board member of the advocacy group Climate Power.) Emerging leaders can look to the women on these pages for inspiration, knowing that while we have claimed our place in the travel universe, there's still plenty of room—and need—for all of us. EVITA ROBINSON

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EVITA ROBINSON IS THE FOUNDER OF NOMADNESS TRAVEL TRIBE, A COMMUNITY FOR TRAVELERS OF COLOR.

the tastemaker

# Eva Longoria

**WHEN STANLEY TUCCI CALLED** Eva Longoria to suggest she host a travel show in the vein of his popular *Searching for Italy*, the actor didn't realize at first how groundbreaking an idea it was. Few travel hosts are women, and even fewer are Latinas. Last spring, she wrapped production on the six episodes of *Eva Longoria: Searching for Mexico*, which premieres on CNN on March 26. Longoria grew up near the border in South Texas and in 2021 founded the women-run tequila brand Casa del Sol near Guadalajara, but she says that even a lifetime of having "one foot in Mexico" couldn't prepare her for the emotional wallop of this experience. "I don't think there was a day that I didn't cry." For the show, she visited traditional fishermen in Lake Chapala, Mayan cooks in the Yucatán, a female master mezcal maker in Oaxaca, and the gender-fluid *muxes* who live on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, among others. Each location, with its unique culture, topography, and culinary traditions, felt like entering a "whole new Mexico," Longoria says. "As wonderful as tacos and tequila are, I think that's all people think Mexican cuisine is." Food, she adds, is "the heartbeat of Mexico. It really is expressive of everything beautiful. It's a way to honor tradition, family, the land, and ingredients. It's a way to celebrate births, marriages, or deaths. There's something always shared over a meal. I equate it with love." LESLEY TÉLLEZ





the advocate

## Sara Nelson

**WHEN THINGS GO WRONG ON A PLANE**, travelers turn to flight attendants. When things go wrong for flight attendants, they turn to Sara Nelson. A flight attendant for 26 years and the international president of the Association of Flight Attendants—CWA for nearly 9, Nelson came to greater prominence during the pandemic as a fierce defender of flight attendants and other workers across the aviation industry. Representing 50,000 employees at 19 different airlines, she fights forcefully against understaffed planes and mistreatment of staff—and for better working conditions and pay. Her latest undertaking? A drive to unionize Delta’s flight attendants. Nelson, who has testified frequently before Congress, sees the organization she leads as critical in creating equity for women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ workers navigating a turbulent workplace. “There’s no predicting anything; there’s no planning for anything,” she says of air travel today. “It’s just about being as responsive as possible, as quickly as possible, on every level of the aviation industry.” Three years after COVID-19 turned travel upside down, Nelson hopes that the hard-won changes that have occurred during her tenure can provide a positive example for other sectors. “I’m excited about the role that aviation can play in bringing people together—and not just physically,” she says. “We need to continue building solidarity around big policy ideas and starting movements for progress for the next generations, especially as unions continue to hold management accountable.” **TARIRO MZEZEWA**



the ecologist

## Lily Kwong

**AS A CHILD IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**, Lily Kwong felt an unwavering connection to nature. “I grew up 10 minutes from the main entrance of Muir Woods National Monument. The tallest trees in the world were my neighbors.” It’s no wonder, then, that Kwong’s career keeps her rooted in the natural world. The landscape artist has spent the past five years transforming public spaces like Vanderbilt Hall in New York City’s Grand Central Terminal and the busiest night market in Taipei into tranquil pieces of botanical art, using materials like live moss and blood red flowers in full bloom. And while her stunning creations look at home on Instagram feeds, Kwong is set apart by what she calls an “evangelical” devotion to sustainability and conservation. She prioritizes working with endemic plants—most recently in gardens she created for JW Marriott at its properties in Desert Springs, California; Orlando; and New York

City. “We’re told we need a certain type of beauty 365 days a year, but that’s just not natural,” she says. “Nature has rhythms and cycles. We really have to learn how to respect and integrate ourselves into that, instead of forcing ourselves on the landscape as we’ve been doing.” Kwong sees the widespread practice of planting exotic non-native vegetation within a landscape as an act that detrimentally “changes environments and communities” and “decimates ecosystems.” She hopes other brands will follow the example of JW Marriott, for whom she has several global projects planned, including a culinary garden in Singapore. “Ecological consciousness means a concern for the more-than-human world, where plants, animals, insects, and beyond are considered and respected,” she says. “It takes more time and planning, but the rewards are enormous.” LALE ARIKOGLU

the storyteller

## Padma Lakshmi

**PADMA LAKSHMI ISN'T JUST ONE OF** the most enduring voices in food and travel today; she's also one of the most vital. As the host of the Emmy-nominated *Top Chef*, she has consistently prioritized expanding the types of dishes featured on the show—and including more women and minorities. As the executive producer–host of Hulu's *Taste the Nation* (season three is expected this spring), she crosses the country highlighting marginalized communities whose cuisines often get left out of the celebration of American food. Lakshmi doesn't just eat her way through destinations—she dives deep into local cultures, creating room for complex, often painful stories of migration and assimilation. “We all recognize the places in the show, but how many know that there's a vital Thai community in Las Vegas, or about the beautiful Arab cuisine that is in Dearborn, Michigan?” Lakshmi asks. As a host, she draws on her own identity as an Indian American—and an immigrant experience that she recognizes isn't singular to her—as well as those of her mostly women-of-color crew. “I'm not interested in shows with swashbuckling male hosts traveling to gawk at ‘strange funky food,’” she says. In shifting the narrative on food cultures in America, Lakshmi is changing the way we travel. “There tends to be such homogeneity to everyone's experiences. Learn to get lost on your travels. Pick a truck stop, not just the Michelin-starred restaurant. Ask a local where their community eats; it will give you a more authentic experience of what it feels like to walk in their shoes.” ARATI MENON

## WOMEN WHO TRAVEL

the caretaker

# Deb Haaland

**"IF YOU ARE VISITING** another state, another county, another city, research that place. What tribes lived there prior to colonization? What tribes still live there?" says Secretary Deb Haaland, Pueblo of Laguna, who made history when she was sworn in as the United States Secretary of the Interior in 2021. The first Native American Cabinet secretary, she oversees 480 million acres of public land—including the 423 sites overseen by the National Park Service, which drew nearly 300 million visitors in 2021. As an Indigenous woman who grew up helping her grandparents in their cornfield and participating in her Pueblos' cultural ceremonies, Secretary Haaland brings a different perspective to the office than her predecessors, most of whom have been white and male. For travelers, her message is clear: "There are sites that are sacred to Native Americans, to tribal communities," she says. "We are hoping that people visit with respect." Not every American has easy access to nature—something that Secretary Haaland is seeking to change. Last summer the Interior announced an influx of \$192 million to create more parks and outdoor recreational spaces in urban areas across the US. (A wildlife refuge in Detroit is a recent success story.) Secretary Haaland knows firsthand the power of the land's being open to all people. "I was so fortunate to take my mother to the Pecos National Historical Park in New Mexico," she says. "We were able to push her wheelchair through that site because it was accessible. This country belongs to all of us." PAULY DENETCLAW



PHOTOGRAPHS: CAMILA FALQUEZ, JASON HARDWICK



the creator

## Aurora James

**BLACK U.S. TRAVELERS SPENT OVER \$100 BILLION** on travel in 2019. Yet somehow they remain overlooked by the industry. Aurora James, however, will not be ignored. She's the founder of fashion label Brother Vellies, known for its use of traditional African designs, as well as the Fifteen Percent Pledge, which asks retailers to earmark at least 15 percent of shelf space for products from Black-owned businesses. James's efforts are creating and sustaining artisanal jobs in Africa, a place near and dear to her. At the age of 23, she headed to Morocco to backpack the continent and did something most travelers probably wouldn't do—she rented a car from a stranger she met at the airport. She wanted to be open-minded and trusting in her journey, an ethos that animates her work today. "For me, traveling and living and occupying space in places that you weren't born into is about being like water," she says. "You have to let that environment catch you off guard and flow with it instead of force it." This approach allowed James to meet artisans like beadworkers and handloomers from Burkina Faso, who explained that, due in large part to American-donated clothes and the spread of Western fashion trends, their skills were no longer in high demand. When she launched Brother Vellies in 2013, she hired some of those same makers. Rooted in sustainability, craftsmanship, and social impact, the brand has helped redefine luxury. James isn't stopping there—she also hopes to address the lack of curated experiences for Black women travelers. "I would love to do a Brother Vellies hotel one day." NANA AGYEMANG