



## Traveling in Africa

When Africans think of traveling, their goal is often to go to Europe, the US, Dubai, or anywhere other than traveling in Africa itself—except to visit relatives, and usually within the same country. We see other continents as superior, and the moment we can afford the opportunity, we go overseas because there is a belief that the streets are paved with gold. It was not always like this. Africans were once nomadic, and in the great Bantu migration, centuries ago, they moved from east to west, then down towards the south of Africa, entering the lands of the San or Bushmen people who lived there. That is why Bantu languages, like Swahili, are so similar that someone from Uganda can almost understand someone from Zimbabwe when they are speaking different languages. The Bantu people settled down to become farmers and herdsman, then colonization brought borders, which further restricted movement. During apartheid in South Africa and Zimbabwe, Africans could not even visit cities unless they had a "town pass," so families were split up, and many were too poor to afford to travel, even if they were allowed to.

I was born in Mutare, a beautiful small town on the border of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, to a single mother who was 18 years old at the time. I was left with my grandparents while my mother went to work in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. I was sent to boarding school in Harare in junior school, so I would often be put on the slow diesel train in Mutare in the morning to travel with an older cousin on the all-day trip to Harare, where my mum would meet us at the station. I still love the train to this day because I would stare out of the window as we passed small towns and big farms, then watch as people boarded and disembarked at towns like Rusape, Macheke, Headlands, and Marondera. We always carried treats, including Fanta orange drink, Choice Assorted Biscuits (delicious cookies), and money to buy meat pies (flaky pastries filled with beef) or sausage rolls, a British colonial favorite snack. I think my grandparents tried to distract us with treats because we were two small girls traveling on a long journey alone, and thank God people were decent in those days because nobody ever bothered us until we arrived. My mum got married, and eventually, we would drive together as a family for the holidays to visit my grandparents. Mutare is in the Eastern Highlands, a range of beautiful mountains, which was so named because it reminded the British of the Scottish Highlands. We would go to stay in resorts like Troutbeck Inn and Montclair in Nyanga and Leopard Rock in the Vumba, where Queen Elizabeth once stayed.

When I turned 17, I got my driver's license, so I became the family driver for all my cousins during the 3-hour drive to visit the grandparents at Easter, Christmas, and other major holidays. We would stop for meals at Marondera (a third of the way), Halfway House (which was literally halfway), or Rusape (two-thirds of the way). By then, I had little brothers, and our favorite meals were burgers or waffles with milkshakes or floats. The highlight of going to Mutare is driving into the city through Christmas, which is a sight that never gets old. We also took vacations by plane to tourist destinations like Victoria Falls, Kariba Dam, Great Zimbabwe, and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-biggest city, where Matopos Hills are located. We loved going on safari to see wild animals, and my parents enjoyed going to the casinos in Nyanga and Victoria Falls. Zimbabwe is a big golf destination; Harare alone has 14 golf courses, so we all used to play golf.

Each time we got back to school after the holidays, our teachers would ask us what we did for the holidays, and the white kids always went to South Africa with their families, mostly for shopping because South Africa had many goods that were not available in Zimbabwe. Eventually, we took a road trip to South Africa too, through Bulawayo, Botswana, where my mum owned a business and a house, then we visited the gambling mecca of Sun City and eventually ended up in Johannesburg. South Africa seemed like Europe with all the modern developments and amenities. Mauritius is another popular holiday destination for Zimbabwean families, and we went there twice for a beach vacation. As Zimbabweans got more upwardly mobile, they started to take their families on holiday in the region but local and regional airlines including Air Zimbabwe and South African Airlines tend to go out of business and sometimes come back with limited operations. Even if you want to support African airlines, one time I sat on the tarmac in Nairobi for 6 hours waiting to take off for New York because Kenya Airlines was experiencing delays. The only successful airline is Ethiopian Airlines and it is now the biggest carrier in Africa.

We followed the British education system in Zimbabwe, where we took Ordinary Level (O Levels) at the age of 16 and Advanced Levels at 18, in order to get into university. There was a tradition amongst middle-class families that after you finished taking your O Levels, you would go on a student tour of Europe, so my mum booked me on a two-week, 6-country tour of Europe with a group of kids from different schools in Harare. We landed in Athens and embarked on a frantic bus tour through Rome, Innsbruck, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Paris, and London. I remember tasting pizza for the first time in Rome, and it was divine. I was also surprised at how cold it was, but it was December, so it was the first time I had even seen snow. In Africa, I visited former schoolmates in Zambia, but it was rundown, and Western countries seemed more alluring.

I really wanted to go to university in the UK or the US, but my mum insisted that I study in Zimbabwe. I loved London; I had family there, so I would visit London once or twice a year. Then one day I went to visit friends in New York City, and I fell in love with that city. To a college kid, it had so much energy, and we had so much fun shopping and going out. I started to visit the US every year. I graduated with a degree in pharmacy from the University of Zimbabwe

and immediately got into a one-year master's program at the School of Pharmacy at King's College, University of London. That year was magical, and I also got to travel to Sweden, which was kind of slow. After graduating, I went straight back to Zimbabwe and started my own pharmacy chain. It was fun at the beginning when I bought myself a red Mercedes convertible as a young businesswoman around Harare and traveled to Europe, the US, Asia, and Australia, as well as Kenya and Malawi, which were beautiful but not quite the same, to my young mind.

Eventually, Zimbabwe was in the throes of the highest hyperinflation in the world, which surpassed the Weimar Republic's, and businesses were suffering. There was a day when I was sitting at the bank watching the exchange rate to the US dollar go up on the ticker from 1 to 10, reaching 1 to 18 within a matter of minutes. At that point, I decided to sell my business and go back to graduate school and get an MBA. So many people have left Zimbabwe due to economy challenges that families are now scattered all over the world.

I got into the business school at Pepperdine University in Malibu and started life in America. I would visit my friends in New York and London during the holidays and spent the summer in Zimbabwe, but it no longer felt the same because the economy was struggling so much. My international MBA included a semester abroad in France at a business school in Strasbourg. Studying in Europe amongst the Erasmus students who do student exchanges all over Europe and the US gave me a new perspective on life on a world stage. Strasbourg is also the seat of the European Union, so it was very welcoming to foreigners. I made friends with a Chinese girl from Hong Kong, and we used to walk into Germany from Strasbourg to buy chocolate. We took many trips together with adventures in Paris and even took a road trip with a ferry ride to sell her car in London. We are still friends to this day after having married and lived in different places.

After my semester abroad, I got a 6-month internship at Roche, the pharmaceutical company, in St Louis, a small French town next to Basel. That area is where the borders to France, Switzerland, and Germany meet, and Roche had factories in each country, but they were located a short distance from one another. St Louis was so close to Basel that I would take a short bus ride into Switzerland to buy chocolate on Saturdays. I would visit Paris often and had a number of friends. Work was almost completely in French, and I got so attached to my co-workers that one of them even offered to adopt me so I could stay in France. I cried on the flight all the way back from Paris to New York City.

So began the next chapter of my life as a New Yorker, and I ended up working on Wall Street in finance. I was very curious about my new homeland, so I traveled around the US to explore as many cities as I could. I went to Chicago, Philadelphia, Dallas (several times because there is a large Zimbabwean community), Miami, Las Vegas (a favorite), Washington DC, and back to Los Angeles a few times to visit friends. I was very active in the Diaspora African community, and I started getting homesick for Africa, so I started looking for employment opportunities in South Africa. By a fluke, I was volunteering at a friend's Africa recruiting event when the recruiters asked me why I was not applying. I thought they were only looking

for engineers, so the next day I went to interview, and two days later I had an offer to work in the treasury department of Eskom, South Africa's power utility. I had a boyfriend, so I just sat on that offer for at least 2 months, then I made up my mind to take it. In a short space of time, I moved to Johannesburg and began my life back in Africa.

It was a culture shock to leave my life back in New York City and move to South Africa, where I hardly knew anyone. The only bright spot was that Johannesburg was only an hour's flight away from Harare, so my mum and brother could visit often, and I could go home for the holidays. Zimbabwe was in the grip of shortages, so a trip home meant bringing the most basic groceries and necessities. I bought a house in a luxury suburb and became quite a hostess. I also started to travel in South Africa to places like Cape Town and Durban, the main tourist destinations. One of the biggest deterrents to travel within Africa is that Africans need visas to visit other countries within Africa. The first time I wanted to visit Nigeria, the visa was so difficult to apply for that I had given up until I met a Nigerian government official who was visiting South Africa and intervened. I visited Lagos, Nigeria with my colleagues and was so impressed by the generosity of the Nigerian hospitality that I went back several times. I also developed a wanderlust to learn more about my continent, so I visited Ghana, Senegal, Namibia, and Mozambique. Nigeria always stood out, so when I was offered a job as an expatriate fund manager in Lagos, I took it and enjoyed life in Lagos. There was a lot of travel when we went on roadshows, so we went fundraising in Cape Town, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Dubai, Casablanca, London, and Johannesburg. I visited Dubai several times and even considered working there, but it is a bit like Las Vegas—glitzy at first, but it wears thin after a while.

The next phase of my nomadic life was a return to Zimbabwe, which by then had given up using their own currency and were trading using US dollars. Besides inflation, the country had over 90% unemployment, and there was a generation of young people who had never held a job. After unsuccessfully looking for a job, I became an entrepreneur, mostly in real estate, like most of my family, and at one point, I even made furniture upholstered in African print. I kept my house in Johannesburg on AirBnB and stayed there when I was in South Africa. I tried to set up an African fashion business, so I visited several countries looking for somewhere to manufacture the line on a large scale, including Madagascar, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, and Namibia. I gave my friends in New York City samples, and they were getting stopped by women on the street, asking where they had got my clothes from. At one point, I met a Senegalese designer in Los Angeles who promised to manufacture my clothes in the city's garment district, but when I shipped my fabrics to him, he let me down. I also consulted, running events for the World Bank and the UN, so I survived, but it was a challenging time.

I can never regret moving back to Africa because of the experiences, great people, and great food. Food is everything when it comes to travel, and my favorite foodie experiences were in Accra, Lagos, and Maputo. Beware—Nigerian and Ghanaian food is spicy, and the region even has a "jollof war" over who makes the best jollof rice. Ghana is one of my favorite

destinations in Africa, and everyone is finally catching on. Even though you need visas, I used to just land in Accra without a visa and know that I could talk my way into entering the country because the people are so nice. You cannot do that in South Africa. There are some destinations in Africa that I expected to love but did not, including Egypt. I also found Zanzibar too touristy, but I loved the Tanzanian food.

Africa has some of the most exotic destinations. I remember when I was flying on Kenya Airways, my plane stopped at an island with the bluest waters around it to pick up passengers, and when the doors opened, you could actually smell the perfume from the flowers outside. Someone told me we were in the Perfume Islands, and I have since tried to find it on a map, but I could not find it. Africa has 54 countries, and I have barely scratched the surface of seeing them all. The thing about returning to Africa after living abroad for 10 years is that you feel like a foreigner in your own country because your worldview has changed, and you have to start over again building a network. Unfortunately, it was also becoming clear to me that I could no longer afford to live in Zimbabwe without a secure job, so I decided to move back to the US in the spring of 2019. Luckily, it was the year before Covid happened because I do not know how I would have fared there throughout the pandemic. I visited Africa 3 times since that time, including in 2020, 2021, and 2023. I also never stopped traveling during the pandemic because as soon as I got my first shot, I went to the US Virgin Islands, and I visited Hawaii for my birthday in 2021.

I have also moved around a lot since my return. I spent a year in Seattle because my niece was living there, then I spent 3 years in Washington DC, 19 months back in New York City, and now I just moved to Florida, so hopefully, this will be a good fit. I love traveling because I have friends and family all over the world. One time, my niece was rowing for the South African national team at Eton College, so I went to the UK for the weekend to support her. When I was in DC, I was a member of the Rotary Club, so I attended the international conventions in Houston and Melbourne. My twin nieces, who live in Australia, met me in Melbourne with the whole family. I can travel to Africa for a week and deal with the jetlag later. It is worth it just to spend time with people that I love.

During the pandemic, I started a nonprofit that supports children with cancer in Africa, Nyasha Africa. I would love to bring our donors to Africa to experience Victoria Falls, enjoy golf in the Eastern Highlands, go on a safari, and enjoy the food in Cape Town, which has been voted the best foodie destination in the world. Philanthropy should be fun, and more people should experience what Africa has to offer. I fell in love with my continent and even wrote a book about it, \*A Modern Africa Nomad\*. My nomadic roots run deep, and for years, my mother and other people tried to tell me to stop traveling so much, but I have embraced the lifestyle. Florida is my base now, but I am a citizen of the world and a daughter of Africa.

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