

INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Sojourner White. If you have not yet listened to [part one](#), I highly recommend you go back and do that first because it provides some really important context for this episode. If you have already heard [part one](#), then please enjoy the conclusion of my interview with Sojourner White.

Matt Bowles: Well, one of the things that you and I have in common is that we share a deep love and appreciation for train travel. And I want to ask a little bit about how that love and appreciation developed for you. And I thought a good place to start would be with the California Zephyr. Can you share, for people that have never heard of the California Zephyr, they have no idea what it is, can you explain what it is, how you decided to take it and what that experience was like and what it led to?

Sojourner White: So, the California Zephyr happened one night in February 2021 when I was in the pandemic. I need to get it up out the house, but I don't want to go abroad because if I get Covid, I got a quarantine for two weeks. I don't have a hotel for two weeks money. So let me figure out where I could go. So really the California Zephyr was born or me taking the trip was born out of a Google search where I was like, US bucket list.

And I saw this train in the mountains. I'm like, what is [Amtrak](#) doing over here? I didn't know because for me, I went from like Milwaukee to Chicago an hour and a half, or when I was in grad school, Milwaukee to St. Louis. Like, it was actually a mode of transportation, not a tourist thing.

And I saw this train in the mountains. I'm like, what is it doing? Like, what is this? And I just go and I'm seriously, it's kind of like, now I have a glass of wine, it's like getting late. And I'm just typing away, looking at vlogs. I'm like, what is happening? A train in the mountains. Like, how do I get on it?

And I knew that Chicago is an Amtrak hub, so it's really easy for me to get on the trains anyway. So, I'm like, you know what? I'm going to take this train. I haven't been anywhere in a year. And if I'm only going to do this once at the time, that's what I thought. I'm going to go all out. I'm going to get a room. If I get the room, I get the meals. That's easy. And I joke that I'm a traveling homebody because I love to travel, but I also love to be in my room. I love to be at home. I love to be comfortable.

And when I saw the room, I'm like, I can get a room. I have my books and download some movies. I can have everything I want at home. But I'm on a train. I have the mountains next to me. I'm like, this is actually my jam. And so, I booked the train ride. I'm like, okay, bet I'm going in July. And I didn't know then, but that also changed my Sojourneis career because that was the start of the train travel queen.

That really was the start of it because people were like, girl, get back on that train immediately. We want to see you on the train again. And I had no idea that it was going to be something one they wanted to see because I had been creating content by that time from 2017, that was like 2021, so like four years. But like, again, I was in grad school. It wasn't like uh. I wasn't doing it full time or the aspiration to do it full time.

And so, I was like, well, I kind of like the train. So, yeah, I'll take another one and another one. And then next thing I know, I'm taking train trips multiple times a year. And that's how it was born, really. Out of a Google search, with some wine, late at night.

Matt Bowles: That's how a lot of the best things happen. You know, I actually have a remarkably similar experience. So, during the pandemic, prior to the pandemic, I had been probably doing about 85% of my podcast interviews in person because I'm just traveling around the world full time. I'm meeting these amazing digital nomads and travelers, and I'm interviewing them over a bottle of wine in person. Then, of course, the pandemic happened. So, 100% of the interviews are virtual.

So, I interviewed [Nora Dunn](#), shout out to Nora Dunn, the Professional Hobo. She's now been on The Maverick Show twice. And I interviewed her, and she has written a book about train travel, and she has done some of the most epic train journeys in the world. She's gone from Lisbon, Portugal, to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, all by train in like a 30-day period. I mean, just like some of the wildest, epic, over the top train stuff ever.

So, I'm interviewing her about this on the podcast that we're talking about, our shared love for train travel. And for me, almost all of the train travel that I had done was international. I'm taking trains in Europe, I'm taking trains in Japan, you know, this kind of stuff. And the only train travel experience that I had in the US, kind of like you were saying, was the short distance. For me, it was like the east coast routes from like Washington D.C. to Baltimore to Philly to New York.

It was kind of like the Amtrak commuter train there. And until the pandemic, I wasn't even conscious or aware that, oh, they have trains where you have overnight cars, and they serve you French toast and omelets in a dining car in the morning and they do all this stuff in the US. I was like, really? We have that in the US. I didn't even know. And so, there was an Amtrak sale on some of the long-distance routes that I saw. And I was like, oh, that's interesting.

So, I had just interviewed [Nora](#). Mind you, Nora and I had never met in person. We did a virtual interview. Okay. So, I sent her this thing and I'm like, hey, Nora, look at this. There's a sale on these long-distance US Train routes. What do you think? And it's a similar thing. The first kind of trip, post pandemic, doing a domestic train trip instead of an international trip. Literally the same thing you just said. I'm like, check this out. There's a sale on these Amtrak train routes. Want to go on a train ride?

And she replies, and she goes, actually, yeah, which of those routes were you thinking? So, I had sent her, like, the route from Chicago to Seattle, the route from Seattle down to LA, and then the route from LA to New Orleans. And she goes, which of those were you thinking? And I was like, I was kind of thinking about all of them. We just like starting in Chicago, go to Seattle, then to LA, then to New Orleans. We just take a month and circumnavigate the US and she's like, done, let's do it. And I was like, cool.

So literally having never met each other, we're like, yeah, let's commit to doing a one-month train ride together. Sure. We'll meet in Chicago; we'll do this train ride. So, we did it and we circumnavigated the US on this super long-distance train route. And then later we recorded a second podcast episode talking about this experience that we had on this train ride, which was super-duper fun, but that really got me aware of what's actually available inside the United States, that I had only associated with things outside the United States.

But you have also done some train rides outside the United States, including some that I have not done that I have to ask you about. Can you explain to people that have never heard of the Jose Cuervo Express Tequila train in Mexico? What is that and what was your experience like taking it?

Sojourner White: So, I first heard about the Jose Cuervo Express, I think on a TikTok or something. I think once I really got in a train shop, I'm like, well, what are other trains like in this hemisphere? I'm like, where can I go in this hemisphere? And I saw it and initially I'm like, oh, this will be a great like girl's trip.

But being in my late 20s now I'm 30 as of last week, I was like, well, people have stuff going on so I'm going to do it by myself. And earlier this year I just finally I went to go work remote because again, Mexico, Guadalajara, same time zone, not really a big deal. I'm like, okay, let me go take this train ride. And I don't know what I expected. Like I knew what to expect, but I didn't know what to expect.

So have a sunrise and sunset option. All my research said do the sunrise option. Which meant that you'd be knocking back tequila shots at about 9am is essentially. And I'm like, well, there's a good time for everything. So, I was like, okay. So, I booked the train ride and of course I do the most luxurious option. Cuz if I'm going to do this train once in my life, I'm going to do the elite one.

Matt Bowles: For sure.

Sojourner White: Yes. I think at the time this is their newest class of train. I think it was diamond or something beforehand. But the elite car. So, I go in the elite car is gorgeous, the service is great. I check in, they take my bags. I told them I'm staying in Tequila. So, I also stayed in a Tequila Barra hotel afterwards. So, they were like, no worries, we'll hold on to your bag till the very end. I meet my car attendant, and we all sit down.

I'm the only solo traveler. I think, again, it's like a bachelorette couples thing. And here I am in my really cute orange linen set I just got a few days ago. I'm about to enjoy this. With, like, purple hair. About to enjoy this ride by myself. And so, I'm just enjoying it. I'm listening to him. I speak Spanish and I can understand Mexican Spanish pretty well because it's most familiar to me. So, I'm understanding what they're saying.

I'm taking the shots; I'm taking the mixed drinks. And they give you some food. Not as much as you think. So, I would bring some snacks if I were to do it again. But they do give you some plates of food and you just kind of learn about the tequilas. And now is healthy Cuervo, my favorite tequila, no. Did I drink that? Jose Cuervo? Yes, I did. Because I don't know, because I was on the train, it tasted better. I don't know what it was, but it was great.

You like past the agave fields and the train ride is only two hours. So, then it's a whole day of activity. So, they get you drunk essentially in the morning because there's no way that you can counteract that at 9:00am So, I'm like, oh, I'm fine. I think the vlog, you can kind of see my eyes going down as the vlog goes on. But I'm like, oh, my gosh, I'm fine. I stand up, I'm not fine. I need water immediately. So, then we kind of walk over, they give us water.

They gave us like a tour of the facility, Jose Cuervo Express. The facilities, like how they make stuff, all of that. And I sit down and across from me is another woman who me and her start talking again. When you have had tequila at 9am, you're a bit friendlier than maybe you would be on other days.

And so, me and her started talking. And she's also a social worker turned nurse, and she's here with her boyfriend and all their friends. She's like, oh, you're solo? Come hang out with us.

So, for a part of the day, you have a few hours to go explore tequila. They are buying me drinks. Oh, you're solo. We got you. They buy me drinks. I'm essentially part of their friend group now. We kind of go out to one of the cantinas and have some wings. I'm like, I got to get back. Because they weren't going back on the experience. They were going on their own after the train ride. So, I was like, well, I got to get back. I got to catch a taxi back into town. And then I enjoy kind of the rest of the day.

There's like dancing and then you have got to go to the agave fields. They show you how they cut the agave. It's full. And there are some more drinks throughout the day. It's not like you're done. They give like a little water bottle that has like Jose Cuervo on it. And you get churros and some other food. And then she's like, okay, miss, it's time for you to go. And then they arranged my taxi for me to get to the Tequila Barra Hotel.

So, it's nighttime at this point. Everyone else is taking the bus back. Because you take the train to Tequila from Guadalajara and take the bus back to Guadalajara because the sunset people take the train. And I'm like, okay, so here I am in a tequila barrel, very tipsy and just like pass out sleep. I take off my makeup and that's about all I have time for and the energy to do after drinking tequila since 9am. So, it's definitely a fun experience. Is it for the beginner solo traveler? No, I would not say that. Unless you are very comfortable, unless you are super comfortable, go for it.

But I think for me at this point in my solo traveler, trained traveler career, also speaking Spanish was really helpful. Also, that gave me a shot upon arrival. I'm like, listen, I don't know if I have any more shots in me, but I will take it and go to my room. But it was really fun. And the Tequila Barrel Hotel is an amazing thing. If you even have a chance to do it while you're in Tequila. It's just so cool because they're like tequila barrels. Like literally rooms in tequila barrels, fully functioning showers, everything.

Matt Bowles: Well, let's stay on train rides in Spanish speaking countries. I also have to ask you about Peru. Now, I have taken the train in Peru from the Sacred Valley to Aguascalientes in sort of the base of Machu Picchu area. I want to ask you about where you took the train in Peru, what your experience was like, and just explain maybe for people that their only association with train travel is more of like that, you know, standard kind of commuter train.

Explain about the scenic trains and the windows and the roof of the train and the observation cars, like just describe what it's like and then what you saw and experienced in Peru.

Sojourner White: Yes, Peru I think has some of the best trains that I've been on in this hemisphere. But I also took the Vista Dome train. So, I did the one-day Machu Picchu hike. So, I took that same Agua Caliente's train and then I upgraded to the Vista Dome on the Peru rail one on the way back. But their gorgeous windows, they're very clear.

Peru is also interesting because they give you dancing, music and a fashion show on their trains. They have like entertainment on lock. I have never been on a train that has had that much entertainment. So that was kind of the precursor to the one I read. I changed my entire Peru trip to

take the Peru Rail Titicaca train to go from Cusco to Puno, Peru, which Puno is the closest city to Lake Titicaca on the Peruvian side.

So, I got up and it was I think 275 for a 10 hour train. It included three course lunch which was, was incredible. Had a glass of wine. You could buy breakfast on the train because it is a bit early. I was solo again, so, I had my own little table though on Amtrak, you know how you might have to share. It was like just me in the back, my little white tablecloth and everything like that. And then the views were gorgeous. I mean you're like going through like essentially a lot of Peru that you probably wouldn't see if you just stayed in Cusco or Lima.

You're going through a bunch of other areas that was really beautiful to see. They kind of remind me of another train ride I did in Mexico, the El Chepe Express in northern Mexico that is part of Mexico. You don't normally see like big hills, you know, stuff that we don't really think of based on the images that we get in the US about these countries. So, it was really beautiful just to see a bit more of the local life outside of the big places. And then also on the back of the train they have, and the one in Mexico had this too, like a terrace where you actually got some fresh air.

You were on the train, but also you can be back there and just sat back, relax. Obviously, I'm an influencer. I took photos and videos as well when I was back there. Had to get my content. But they also had a pisco sour making class which was or demonstration which is really cool. And again, overachiever. I'm always going to volunteer because I thought you were able to drink the drink. And I was correct.

I volunteered to shake the pisco sour drink and my arm hurt. But it was good, it was worth it because he gave it to me at the end of the demonstration. But there were three dance breaks, there was a fashion show, there was music, it was a fully cultural thing and it was timed out really well. When we weren't eating, we were dancing. Weren't dancing, we were relaxing, and then we had afternoon tea right before you get off, you know, little snacks with tea. It was just so cute. Such a well thought out experience. And for the price, honestly, really, really good.

Matt Bowles: One of the most amazing things about travel is the culinary discoveries that you find when you go to places. I literally didn't know what a pisco sour was before I went to Peru. And now when I'm in Peru, I drink nothing but pisco sours every night, all night. It's lomo saltado, ceviche and pisco sours every night. And it is just unbelievable.

And I feel like you learn about this stuff when you go to these places. I mean, that's, for me, one of the absolute highlights of going to these places. Now, another thing I have to ask you about in Peru is the Rainbow Mountain hike. Now, I have a little bit of a story about this. I should probably preface this, which is why I want to ask you about it. I was in Peru for about a month, and I was literally the organizer of a trip to go to hike the Rainbow Mountain.

Now I had more and more people just kept joining onto this trip. I want to go, I want to go, I want to go. My friend's coming to town. I have got three friends coming and they want to join. We literally got up to 17 people.

Sojourner, I book a trip, I do all the logistics. I'm coordinating with the guide. I'm doing a thing, 17 people to hike the Rainbow Mountain. And then what happens? I have had the most outrageous series of consecutive travel mishaps of my entire travel life.

Sojourner White: Oh, no.

Matt Bowles: And in a three-day period, I am unable to get from Lima to Cusco, which for people that don't know, is literally like a 60-minute direct flight. I'm not able to get there in three days. And so, the other 16 people ended up hiking Rainbow Mountain without me because I didn't make it there until the evening when they got back from the Rainbow Mountain hike. So, I have organized a Rainbow Mountain hike. I just haven't actually done the Rainbow Mountain hike.

So, for people, though, that have never heard of the Rainbow Mountain, because again, this was something that I discovered when I went to Peru, and I wasn't really aware of before that. Can you describe what it is and then what was your experience like?

Sojourner White: Okay, listen, I did Rainbow Mountain, okay? And I'm going to press what I'm saying. It is a beautiful experience. You could not pay me to ever hike Rainbow Mountain again.

Matt Bowles: I heard it was hard.

Sojourner White: It whooped my ass. I have never been beaten by a hill like, or a mountain like Rainbow Mountain. So, for context, it was my last hike. Hike. So, I had hiked Machu Picchu. I did like the one-day hike. It was like eight hours, whatever. I had been in Peru for over a week at that point. Everyone is like, oh, if you're there for a week, you're fine with the altitude. Whatever. I had no sickness before this. I was drinking cocoa leaf tea. I was doing all the things that the mountain did not care.

It was cool, though, because I found on Airbnb experiences an ATV ride. So instead of taking a van, I drove ATV with a bunch of other people who I didn't know, but we're all on the same tour, so that was pretty cool. And they were saying, oh, it's cold. I'm like, I'm from Wisconsin to find cold. It's not going to be that cold for me. And it really wasn't. But man, they had the option to take the motorcycle up. And I'm like, no, I came all this way. My self-righteousness. I'm like, I'm a hike it. Listen, I could have tumbled down, and I would have been happy and be like, okay, that's it. That's all I'm seeing.

That altitude on Rainbow Mountain was something serious and I was not prepared. For some reason, I hadn't packed a whole lot of snacks and water, which I don't know why I didn't, but I had a little bit of things. A handful of us hiked it. It took me forever. That man, there's a. I think that's one of, that's a video that actually popped off on Instagram and stuff because I had a video of the man holding my arm, taking me up because I was ready to tumble right back down. And no shame. I would have been just fine. Listen, I did what I could.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And folks can do Google image searches online just to see what this looks like and see some pictures of what we're talking about if they've never seen it.

Well, Sojourner, I also want to ask you about some places that you have been that I have not yet been to that are super high on my list. One of them is Guatemala. I want to ask about your experience in Guatemala overall, but I especially want to ask about something that I learned about from you and from going through your content, which was that you hiked a volcano and then there was a pizza experience. Can you explain this, please, for folks?

Sojourner White: Again, shout out to TikTok, because this is also where I found this. But, yeah, so I went to Guatemala again. It actually, as someone who studied Spanish, I actually didn't know a lot of Guatemalan history. I learned a lot about Peru and Colombia and Mexico, but Guatemala wasn't a place that I knew a whole lot about. I had seen Machu Picchu, like, I had dreamed of going to those places. I'm like, huh? Guatemala had come up on my [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#) feed quite a bit.

So, I did some research, and that was actually my first big hiking trip. I did Volcano Acatenango first, and I was the last person to get up there because that was my first time ever hiking altitude. But it was the most gorgeous clouds I've ever seen, the most gorgeous view. That was like six hours up.

But the pizza one, I went like two days later. So, I'm still, like, healing from this other hike, but I was like, I have to do all of them while I'm here. So, I did this one, and it was just me on this hike. So, it ended up being a personal hike, but me and the guide. And again, it was only like an hour and a half. It wasn't too bad. It was very tame. It was not the one like in Peru. It was very tame. The altitude was not nearly as bad because it was not super high.

Essentially, you hike Volcano Pacaya, but you don't go all the way up. You kind of go across it almost. And then there's a bunch of volcano dogs, what they call them, like, a bunch of stray dogs. I got, like, hot chocolate on the way up, you know, that good Guatemalan chocolate. And you get there, and it's a chef and all his employees, and they make you a pizza, literally on the volcano.

This man made me a pizza. It's Pizza Pacaya de David, I believe on Instagram, it's still his name, but it's called Pizza Pacaya. And he made it, and it was the wildest thing because they just had all the toppings there. They're like, do you want. You want meat? Do you want veggies? I'm like, I feel like I got to try all of it because when else am I going to eat volcano pizza? And I sit there and I'm like, can I take a photo in front of pizza? I need proof. Like, this is not something people are going to believe that I did. I need proof that I did this thing.

And I took a little photo shoot while the pizza's cooking. And that pizza was so good. They give you a little beer to go with it. He likes sits you down on some rocks. They kind of have like a little table of rocks set out for you. And he served you the pizza. But it was amazing. It was just like, when else am I going to have a chance to do this? To this day, I'm so glad I did that because I'm going to tell my nieces and nephews was outside. Okay. It was great.

I highly recommend visiting Guatemala. I think as someone who has learned a lot about a lot of Spanish speaking countries, it was probably the most interesting to me because I didn't know a lot about it, and I learned a lot about especially like someone who I didn't grow up outdoorsy. I know it sounds like I did. I did not. I was not an outdoorsy girl. This was a travel thing. How travel gets you out of your comfort zone. So, I think Guatemala shaped how I wanted to hike in Peru and all these other places later.

Matt Bowles: Well, another Spanish speaking country that I have not yet been to, super high on my list that I want to ask you about is Panama. Can you share a little bit about your experience there and what some of your highlights were from Panama?

Sojourner White: Panama was a flight deal city. I got a flight deal email out of Milwaukee. I'm like, hmm, \$300 round trip. That sounds nice. So, I went for Labor Day a few years ago. So it wasn't like a really long trip, but it was really cool because Panama is a place where I hear a lot of like Americans

really like, because Panama and Colombia, they have a higher population of black folks or like Afro Panamanians or Afro Colombians, just like kind in general.

And so, I was really interested to see what Panama City was like. It was like a city. It was a regular, regular city. I did a food tour while I was there. I didn't go to any of the beaches, so I would go back to Panama. I think they also have like a volcano hike there too that I wasn't able to do. But I was primarily in the city. I just hung out the city, hung out the markets. I did learn just how much they are getting gentrified. I feel like that was one thing that was kind of consistent amongst, amongst a lot of these places was how they're changing. So, I learned a lot about that while I was there, but really it was about eating the food. I think Selena had like a salsa class on the rooftop. So, I did one of those because why not?

So, it was a very chilly trip, but like a very nice trip to have. And I also did Monkey Island. You kind of go and you kind of spot the monkeys and like we fed the monkeys. And I did a tour of the indigenous village that was there too and learned about had some of the best fish of my life. I don't know what she put on it. I don't think she put anything on it for real. I think it was just how the fish tastes. And she put a little some pineapple on it and it was delicious. Definitely a fun place.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask about some of your travels to the continent. You talked about your Morocco experience. I now want to ask you about your Kenyan experience. Nairobi is one of my all-time favorite cities. I have been a couple times. I spent multiple months there. Absolutely love it. But can you share the context in which you went to Kenya and then what your experience was like?

Sojourner White: I'm going to say this out loud and I still don't believe it to be true even though I've gone on the trip already. But I won a trip to Kenya essentially this time last year actually I submitted an application for the BIPOC Mentorship trip for Travel Digital Storytellers through Intrepid Travel and Nomadness Travel Tribe, two really big names in the travel industry.

And I submitted a video that was what does it mean to be a conscious traveler? You can watch it on [YouTube](#). I made it public. At the time I was like, I don't want my head to know I'm scared. But now obviously I am leaning into that. But I won a spot on the trip and at the time I had no idea where we were going. I just know I won. I will be recognized at Nomadness Fest last year, which was really cool. And I won \$5,000 for my business as [Soujournies](#), which was obviously an amazing thing to be a small business as someone who was balancing a 9 to 5 to have that kind of investment.

And I did had no idea where we were going. I know I'm going on this trip sometime in the spring. Had no idea when I get an email in March saying, hey y'all, we're going to Kenya in April. And my jaw dropped. I'm like, they are playing with me. There is no way you're paying for me to go to Kenya. That's not a cheap trip. I was in shock. I wasn't shocked till I got there. I don't think I was in shock until I left, like, then, okay, yeah, that was real that, honestly, because those kinds of things just don't happen, like, often.

So, it was amazing to be around a bunch of black and brown storytellers. I was a mentee. They're really great mentors on the trail. I think Gabby's been on your podcast before. Gabby was one of the mentors. Anella, who's Feed the Malik, is also an incredible video creator and black travel food criteria creator. And then Glenn, who does a lot of work, like black girls, texting and craft and

release. Really a great storyteller. So, it was just an honor to be around them as mentors, but then also be with a bunch of the mentees.

And we were from all across the world, honestly. And some of us were specialized in, like, video transitions or someone specialized in adventure, outdoorsy things. So, we were all had different areas, and we were coming together to learn for a week to be on safari on some of the most incredible safari experiences I can only dream of. Yeah, it still doesn't feel like it happened this year, but it happened in April.

And just going on safari in Kenya, just not something that most folks do. And then, as our tour guides told us, we were the first group of primarily black and brown people they've ever had, and they have been tour guides for years. So also seeing us, they were just like, it's different having y'all. And I asked them, and that was the focus of a video that I made of, like, what does it mean to have black Americans come back to the continent? Granted, a lot of us, us, our history isn't necessarily Kenyan history, just given how the Middle Passage was. It's more like West Africa.

But I think just being on the continent and seeing other folks and learning from other folks, learning from women who are pillars in their communities, doing a lot of work there, and then also just learning from the tour guides. They are so knowledgeable about all the wildlife. Maasai Mara, incredible. Unreal. I vlogged the whole trip, and there was also a point where it was, like, a lot of flooding. And so, we didn't know if we would get out of Maasai Mara either. So, like, it had all the good elements of a trip.

A little excitement, a little, you know, danger, but, you know, a lot of fun, a lot of laughs, a lot of really great food. And, yeah, it still feels unreal. I'm not going to lie. Like, it still feels like that wasn't a thing that happened, but it absolutely happened.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. Shout out to [Gabby Beckford](#). She has been on the podcast. We'll link that one up in [the show notes](#), if anybody hasn't listened to that episode. Also, huge shout out to Nomadness Travel Tribe. [Evita Robinson](#), of course, has been on the podcast, and a bunch of other Nomadness Travel Tribe folks have, of course, been on the podcast. So that's amazing.

I also want to ask you about your experience in South Africa. We started off talking about the wine experience, but I want to ask about the broader experience. Cape Town and Johannesburg, was your take on South Africa? How was that experience for you?

Sojourner White: It was interesting because a lot of people asked me, like, well, why are you going to Johannesburg? Just go hang out in Cape Town. But I'm like, well, no, because I feel like I got to see both on my first trip. I got to experience both. And I'm so glad I did because it provided a lot of contexts.

Matt Bowles: Yes.

Sojourner White: For what? For, like, South Africa. My sister and I went with one of our friends. Johannesburg won, and it was one of the first places I've been to where I didn't see hardly any white people, which was a rare thing to see. I was like, oh, it really is all black folks here. So that was one of the things me and her were like, oh, it's just us. That's wild to actually see Camino coming from the, obviously seeing in my neighborhood, but not the entire city itself.

So, seeing that was really dope. But then also learned a lot about the history we went to. So, we went to Apartheid Museum, and then we went to, like, Mandela's house, and we also went to the Hector Museum, which was a story I had no idea was a thing that talked about the uprisings in that area. And it just felt so familiar. But in a sad way, too, seeing their history and how it really reminded me of the stories that my grandparents told about Jim Crow and, like, civil rights. And there were so many parallels, too.

And then going to Cape Town, oh, this is a tour touristy city. It was night and day compared to Johannesburg. I think where we're staying, our tour guys are like, you're kind of in an aggressive area. Like, are y'all safe over there? And people were telling us not to walk around at night, all this kind of stuff. And again, we are from, like, Milwaukee, my other friends from New York. So, we're just. How dangerous is it? It's kind of like relative, right?

But I think it was still cool because we got to learn so much about the place. And also from our Uber drivers, too. They were all super interested. And us being black Americans and visiting and all of that kind of dynamic too, because our histories are just very similar. And so just hearing them was also. It's a unique story for each of us in our own way, but still almost a connected story in how our histories are.

And then going to Cape Town felt a lot more touristy, but also put into context. Having the Johannesburg context made Cape Town make more sense of this is why Cape Town is like this. The history of Nelson Mandela. We went to Robben Island and everything. And so that was a huge thing for us was getting the cultural historical part from Johannesburg and seeing that dynamic play out and how the history we heard about and how that shaped what we saw in Cape Town because there weren't a lot of black folks who were tourists when we got there. It was like night and day.

We were staying in Camps Bay, which is the more expensive part. We had more space and everything. We went to Table Mountain. So, we did all the touristy things. But I think they balance each other out because I felt like we got more of a historical, cultural context in Johannesburg. And I would love to go back to Cape Town to kind of do something similar.

Matt Bowles: Did you get to go to any of the townships in Cape Town? Like, did you go to Khayelitsha Township? Did you go to Rand's party? Did you do any of that kind of stuff?

Sojourner White: No, we didn't go to any of the townships. But I knew of the Khayelitsha one because my internship in Germany, she also had had a program in that township. So, I heard about it, but we did not go.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, totally important experience and a very different vibe from what you're describing. But I think it's a really important distinction that you're making in terms of Cape Town meaning, particularly the part out by the waterfront and that whole kind of tourist realm and how confronting the legacy of apartheid is and European colonialism is and stuff. And that kind of meshes with the tourism dynamic, but also just kind of the legacy of colonialism and stuff that's very apparent there in terms of apartheid, in terms of the racial dynamics and stuff like that.

And then you go to Joburg and it's like a whole different type of vibe. Like, really fundamentally different type of vibe.

Sojourner White: Yeah, interesting too, because as we were coming in, because obviously, I've seen Black Panther. I could also see the inspiration for some things I've seen in media that have taken real places and kind of made them into forms of media too, which is also interesting to see in real life. And I think to your point about the colonialism, I think one thing we noticed too, was that most of the black people we saw or that we were around in Cape Town because obviously we went to the touristy spots because we're tourists.

But a lot of folks we saw were also, like, serving us, which I felt like, also kind of made us feel like, okay, this is a bit different from Johannesburg. So, yeah, it was an interesting dynamic. And then what I did love, though, was seeing the street style, because African street style, no matter where you are on the continent, is its own lane of amazing. And I saw that, and I'm like, oh, this is creativity, you know?

And I think that was the part of Joburg I also love, was seeing the creativity of the young folks who were there. We went to. I think it's called the Playhouse. And so, we had drinks there. We saw the music, the young vibe. Yeah, there was so much going on between both cities. And it's like, I definitely want to go back to both of them. I feel like I miss stuff Even still, because 10 days, just not enough to really get the vibe for our place.

Matt Bowles: What was your experience or sort of personal reflection? And it sounds like you went there with some friends and stuff. As someone from the African diaspora going to the continent, what was that particular dynamic like connecting with the continent in a place like South Africa or a place like Kenya as someone from the diaspora?

Sojourner White: Earlier point about examining my privileges and whatnot, I have so many questions for other folks about how, you know, black Americans are perceived. Just because I think, obviously, again, having the privilege of the US dollar is a thing so, like, financially, we can do things that other folk, in country can't. Which I think is something I'm always thinking about being a tourist and how the experiences I have aren't the experiences that people in the country are able to have, which can also be said for the US. But I feel it more when I'm abroad.

But I personally am always interested in the diaspora. I think I'm always interested in asking questions. Okay. I'm a learner at heart. I'm a curious person at heart. And so, if I had the opportunity to talk to people, I will. I feel like I talked to a few more people in Kenya. Like, some people, obviously our guys ask them, you know, what it meant for them to see black folks even traveling to the continent, because, again, any part of Africa is not cheap to get to. It was expensive. And I feel like people assume, oh, like you're America, you have money. Well, not that much. That flight alone is a lot to save up for.

And so, I think for me, I would love to travel the continent more. That's a dream of mine, is to spend some more time. So, I feel like each place is different. Like South Africa and Kenya are two very different countries. So, I think you learn more about their differences when you're there. And I was able. Able to talk to one of the women we met in Kenya. Like she said, well, you know, not everyone knows that there are even black folks in the US they don't understand how migration has worked, how we got over there to begin with.

And so, she said, it's good too, for other folks to see it, because people only see what they see on social media, you know, and so that's not always the best depiction. And I think I've also run into that. Not necessarily on the continent but understanding what you see on social media is not all black Americans, like, it's not all. Just like what we see of you all on our televisions is not the same either. And so being able to have those conversations, I think on the continent is really beautiful because that's what Pan Africanism is all about.

And that's also what a lot of our ancestors fought for in the US, it wasn't us for just to be isolated in getting our rights and our freedoms. It was also about other folks being able to get it too. And just talking to folks in their countries and hearing their stories and their experiences, I think is always a good perspective to have, just because it's not a narrative I can get as easily over here, even though TikTok has really helped with that. But, you know, it's always nice to have somebody in person to talk to.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to ask you at this point in your travel journey, as well as your academic studies and your professional career and everything else. I want to ask you about your travel lens and why it is so important to you to pay attention to the social and economic and political environments and the places where you travel and maybe any tips you have for how we can all better reflect and understand our positionality and our social location vis a vis the world as we move through it and why that is important.

Sojourner White: I think it's important because nothing happens in a vacuum. Even as you spoke about earlier, like my name, right. My name has a historical context to it. There's something to be said about it. I think slightly because of that and because of how like my parents talked about history and like knowing your history and the people who came before you. I also take that into travel, and I think it's important because places have like people in them.

They're not just vacation spots. Like there are people who live there. There are people who are there like all year round. This is their home, that's their grocery store, that's where they work. And so, I think for me it's always to be conscious of. It's not really our playground. I think I hear that a lot in the travel space of like the world's your playground. Is it a playground? I don't know if that's the right terminology for it. Because there are people who are existing every single day, even when you live in that place. Because travel can be really great.

But also, travel is selfish in a lot of ways. And I think people really get caught up in that of I want a vacation, you know, main character syndrome, all these things that kind of pop up in the lexicon and whatnot. And it's really important to know the history of places we're going to. And it's hard to be a perfect traveler. I don't think that's a thing. And I'm not saying that people need to be a perfect traveler all the time because tourism is an imperfect system. I think there's a lot that needs to be done in the tourism industry to have more equity in how locals are being treated and where the money's actually going to.

So, if you like to care about that and you're interested in that, I would say as much as possible, try to support local businesses. I whilst even is a bit hard even as someone who travels a lot. Cause some places you like choose out of convenience because you know what to expect or sometimes you choose things because of, oh well, it makes sense to be over here than over there. But I think

supporting locals as much as possible. I think it's unrealistic to think that tourists will learn a language before they visit a place personally.

But I do think learning some phrases like please and thank you and you're welcome, you know, like the basic ones is really important. If not download, okay, it's 2024. We have apps. Google Translate has come a long way since I used it in 2015. You can translate whole restaurant menus nowadays.

So, I think also using our resources that are available to us to not demand that folks speak English. I think that's a pet peeve of mine. I've heard it a few times when I'm traveling, not thinking folks should automatically speak to us in English, trying to see how we can better communicate. I think people also underestimate body language. I've used body language to communicate more times than I could count.

So I think being a bit creative in how we think about travel in the sense of not necessarily it's about us experiencing things all the time, but it is kind of an imbalance, but also thinking about, okay, what can I offer or what can I also do to kind of support and have more nuance in the experience that I'm having?

So, I think it's easy to say, well, everyone can travel. Quit your job. Travel the world. That's not true for most people. That's just not a thing. And so just being conscious of the way we talk about travel, I think it's really easy, even if you're not traveling, to get caught up in some of the elitist mentality and, like, the elitist language. I'm talking to anybody who, like, doesn't have a passport. Well, that's not fair.

So, I think there are some things in the travel language and the way we talk about places. Try not to use the word destination, but it's really hard, like, to figuring out how to talk about places. So, they're a bit more humanized and not more for just leisure thinking about who's there, what's their history. I believe you can have some fun and learn some history on the same trip. I don't think they have to be separate from each other. Maybe during the day, you go on some tours, and then that night you go out and see the nightlife. I think that's fine. But finding balance in that, too, is also really important. Just because we want to have, like, a holistic perspective of places, not just saying, I go there to party. So, I think there is some balance to be found.

Matt Bowles: Sojourner, when you think back over the past decade about all of these travel experiences that you've had, how do you think all of this travel has impacted you as a person?

Sojourner White: Ooh, I think, one, I've come out of my shell a lot being a solo traveler. I think I built a lot of confidence because there's something about navigating a place where you do not speak the language that makes you feel like you can do anything. I feel like it's changed me a lot in that regard of being more open and just being more social, too.

Again, I was a bit shy, and you had to pull stuff out of me if you were a stranger. And now I'm just like, hey, I'm a Sojourner. Like, now it's a bit more forthcoming. So, I would definitely say confidence and, like, outgoingness. I was very much an introvert when I was a kid. Now I'm definitely more of an extrovert in general. I think also, too, just being a black woman to be more conscious of all being specific, I'm a black woman.

But also, if someone asked me, I'm a black US American woman, I think all those things are also important in naming that because, again, that shows my social location that makes a difference. Because even if I'm a black woman from the US, a black woman from a country in the global south will have a completely different experience than me. You know, it's definitely possible.

And so just understanding the variety and the depth and breadth of blackness and what that actually means is also a very big learning experience. But it's very beautiful to kind of have that understanding. And then I think a third thing that, like, as far as travel changing me, it really has widened my perspective. I joked that I was a black girl overachiever because I thought, to be successful, you go get a PhD, you go stay in school. I come from a family of educators, you know, and so it was like, that's kind of what I thought success looked like or freedom looked like. And I felt like now I kind of have created my own version of that.

And so that's been really wonderful to kind of create my own lane. A remote social worker. Never thought that was going to be a thing. Didn't know that was a thing. Fulbright really overestimated my ability. I was like, I don't know. But it turned out right. So, I think it just made me a more curious person. I feel like people talk about, like, being delusional, but I think the prerequisite is being curious. Being curious enough to be delusional to apply for a very prestigious program that you had no idea, had a very slow, slim chance of winning, but doing it anyway, you know?

And so, it's really just following that curiosity and, like, understanding that it may not make sense on paper. You may see my resume, be like, girl, how did you get from there to here to do that? To be talking about this and riding trains like this don't make any sense. But I think travel has shown me most things actually don't make sense. And this doesn't matter what you do. Just go Live your life and try to figure it out is the way you go. So yeah, also, a subplot is that my geospatial awareness has also been increased by a lot due to travel. And I can navigate places a lot easier than I think I used to.

Matt Bowles: Well, you have been traveling the world now for a decade. Why are you so passionate about continuing to travel? What does travel mean to you today?

Sojourner White: I think I'm passionate because I've seen that it can change you for the better. I think there are obviously lots of ways to get perspective and change. You don't necessarily have to leave your home to do it, but there's just something about traveling wish it was more accessible. I'm passionate about finding ways to make it more accessible. I think one of my dreams is to send folks on train trips because even though I love them, they are not the cheapest experiences to have, you know, and so figuring out ways to make travel accessible or even one day I hope to apply my social work research skills in the travel space to talk about like social impact and sustainability. I think that would be a cool way to apply skills that I have and whatnot.

So, I think it's still, I guess, a very social worky way of looking through travel, but I think that's really what keeps me going. I want my niece to be able to have travel experiences that maybe aren't necessarily as bound by having \$4,000 for a two-week trip if she decides to go to college. So, I think the accessibility part and figuring out how to make this more accessible so other folks can experience the joy that I have, they may not like it, but they can try it to know that they don't like it.

I think we underestimate trying things just because we're curious and just because we can, because that's actually a privilege that a lot of people don't have. And so, what are the ways to make this more accessible to other folks and how do we do that? Obviously by sharing tips and helping them plan. But what are other more deeper ways I think is a question I always have of figuring out how I can use what I've learned and what I know and the connections I have and the platform that I've grown to kind of help other people experience these things too. So that's kind of, that's where I would like to be headed in the future for sure.

Matt Bowles: Well, I think that is an amazing place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Sojourner, are you ready to move in to the lightning round.

Sojourner White: I love a good lightning round. I have some wine left, so yes!

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right. What is one book that you would recommend that people should read?

Sojourner White: I have two. One is like a fun book. It's called Love Radio. I love young black YA books. They're so cute. Like it's a cute little read. So, Love Radio. I'm almost done with it. It's super cute, easy to read, and a nice escape. If you don't want to travel, just pick up a book. But also, Beyond the Shores, A History of African Americans Abroad by Tamara J. Walker. I started reading this to learn about black Americans living abroad and the history of that and it's been really interesting. So, if you're interested in black travel plus history, I recommend this one.

Matt Bowles: All right, who is one person currently alive today that you've never met that you'd most love to have dinner with? Just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation?

Sojourner White: Because she's the black travel OG, Oneika the Traveller. I have not met her yet and I would love to have dinner with her because like she's pretty much the first black woman I saw traveling on the Internet and I was like, what is she doing? And you know, she was a teacher before she became a travel journalist, on camera, Emmy winning everything. So, I would love to have a one on one with her.

Matt Bowles: All right, Sojourner, knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Sojourner?

Sojourner White: Do not take out them to loans. Do not do that. Apply to more scholarships, there's more free money out here because them going to come back to bite you in the ass later.

Matt Bowles: All right, Sojourner, of all of the places that you have now traveled, what are three of your favorite destinations you would most recommend that other people should definitely check out?

Sojourner White: I love Cartagena, Colombia. I really love Cartagena and Palenque, which is the first free black town in America. So definitely Cartagena. A safari in Kenya. I feel like Maasai Mara, if you're going to go on safari, that's the one you should go on a third place. I mean, mean, I have to throw in the tequila train because it's just one of those things. It's unique, it's not something that you may be inclined to do, but I guess that's technically two places. Guadalajara to Tequila. But yeah, I take the Jose Cuervo express train.

Matt Bowles: All right, Sojourner, last question. What are three of your bucket list destinations or experiences that you have not yet done, highest on your list you'd most love to see?

Sojourner White: I really want to go to Thailand and Vietnam, and I mean, there's tons of trains. But as far as the countries, I would say also Senegal. I really want to go to Dakar to visit Senegal. So, I'll go to three countries.

Matt Bowles: I love those picks. Those are actually three of my favorite countries. I've been to Dakar three times, have spent three months there. It is a spectacular, magical city. Those are amazing picks. So hit me up when you are ready to plan those trips, and I got tips for you.

All right, Sojourner, at this point, I want you to let folks know how they can find you, how they can follow you, how they can check out your amazing content. How do you want people to come into your world?

Sojourner White: Well, I joke that I have an irresponsible digital footprint, so you can find me anywhere here on social media. So, on [Instagram](#), @thesojournies. But on everything else, I'm pretty sure it's just *sojournies*. But if you put in *sojournies* or *Sojourner White*, I promise you I'm the only person that will pop up across all platforms. But [YouTube](#), [TikTok](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), if you really want to connect with me that way too, I know that's becoming a bigger platform. I'm kind of everywhere. And if you want one-on-one help, you can email me, and we can chit chat.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to link all of that up in [the show notes](#). So, you can just go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](#) go to the show notes for this episode. There you're going to find direct links to all of the things that we have discussed in this episode, including all of the ways to find, follow and connect with Sojourner. This was such a wonderful conversation, such a special evening and wine night.

Sojourner, thank you so much for being on the show.

Sojourner White: Thank you for, for having me.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.