

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: Hey, ladies. Welcome to the podcast from *On She Goes*, a travel site for all women of color. I'm your host, Aminatou Sow. I travel for business a lot, probably about 170 days a year. There's an art form to business travel, but it doesn't always come naturally. Lucky for you, I know the queens of business travel. Today's episode is all about traveling out of obligation, how to fail at it, and how to do it successfully. And you know who does it really successfully? Roxane Gay. Roxane is a writer and author of the books *Bad Feminist*, *An Untamed State*, and *Difficult Women*. So, let's quit this intro and give her a call.

[PHONE RINGS]

Roxane: Hello?

Aminatou: Hi, Roxane.

Roxane: Hi, Amina.

Aminatou: This is making me very happy because I read both of your books on airplanes.

Roxane: Nice!

Aminatou: And let me tell you, *Untamed State* in a plane, is the most—all you want to do is get off of the plane.

Roxane: [Laughs] Yeah. Right?

Aminatou: I will never forget that flight. I'm like, "It's time for this plane to land because I need somebody to hold me."

Roxane: People watching the movie on the plane is going to be even more depressing.

Aminatou: Oh, yeah. Everybody should watch your movie on a plane. So, it'll be great.
Can't wait to catch it on my next flight.

Roxane: Yeah. [Laughs] Have fun with that flight.

Aminatou: [Laughs] From the snippets that we get from you on Twitter, it seems that you are traveling a lot.

Roxane: Yes, I travel about three or four times a month.

Aminatou: Is that mostly for fun, or for work?

Roxane: It's only for work.

Aminatou: Man! So, you're traveling for business pretty frequently. Do you have an airline that you're loyal to, and you don't have to say which one it is, but like have you figured out the mile situation for you, and how much travel that you're doing?

Roxane: Yeah, I have status on three airlines.

Aminatou: Like, very high status?

Roxane: Mm-hmm. I'm platinum on American and Delta, and I am the entry-level one on United because I don't like United.

Aminatou: Do you take advantage of all the perks, like the lounges?

Roxane: Yeah, I have the credit card.

Aminatou: My experience has been that like there are not a lot of women in those spaces and there are definitely not a lot of women of color.

Roxane: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: And so, I always find it a very—it's like a very weird experience, and I've been traveling my entire life because my parents were diplomats. And I was like, oh, my entire life, like this is not changing, this is very strange.

Roxane: It's really strange. I started noticing it when I started flying exclusively first class and I would stand in line and people would ask me, which still happens, "Are you in the right line?" as if I can't read, and when you're in first class that's when you really begin to notice that white men dominate business travel. And in the lounges you notice that as well and it's always been just fascinating to me.

Aminatou: Yeah, it's very strange and it's such a—I guess like as somebody who works in the business world, I'm like, "Oh, this makes sense." If I'm the only woman in this meeting, I'm probably one of the few women in the lounges because like that's just how that works.

Roxane: Yes.

Aminatou: It's been very shocking to me too that like the airlines just don't—they don't make it easy for you. It's like they have affinity programs for everybody, but somehow it's like you're still an alien if you're like a person of color in a fancy airport lounge.

Roxane: Yeah, they don't know what to do with us. They just are always stymied or shocked or surprised to see us in these spaces, which makes me use them

even more.

Aminatou: I know. I love that, just really doubling down on the place. So, you said that—you're flying exclusively first class right now?

Roxane: I only fly first class, yeah. I used to buy two seats in coach and airlines are not at all equipped to handle that. Like when you do the supposed "right thing" for everyone's comfort, including my own, they're like "Why do you have two tickets?" And they always make a big deal of it, and then when they're doing the headcount before you take off, it becomes this whole thing and I just got humiliated one time too many. So now, I just tell organizers, "If you want me to come to your event, you have to pay for a first-class ticket" and it's nonnegotiable. And I've gotten to the place in my career where that's possible for me, which is great.

Aminatou: That's such an important point too that you're making. I think that it's so ridiculous, that it's this whole idea of having bigger bodies in a plane is—instead of it becoming easier, actually because they're trying to cram more people into the airplane, it has now become a problem. Like, I'm also a fat woman. I've never had experiences where I needed a seat belt extender or getting another seat. But I've really noticed that the humiliation factor for people that do has become just so much more, which is so ridiculous because a lot of times, like, fat customers actually spend more money flying.

Roxane: Correct.

Aminatou: And, uh, you know, there is just like no grace and no—just no dignity in that kind of flying experience, and again like a huge failure of the airline industry.

Roxane: Yeah, it doesn't make any sense that they have not adjusted to the realities of American bodies, and every single thing about the process is embarrassing. And, you know, if you don't get an extra seat there's gonna be an issue. If you do get an extra seat, there's an issue. I don't know. I think that they take pleasure in humiliating people with unruly bodies.

Aminatou: Yeah, it's—you know, I don't know. I feel like we're going to reach a critical mass enough where this is such an issue because I notice it so much now flying, where people just have really terrible experiences. And even just from purely a customer service standpoint, I just want to tear my hair out because I'm, like, people spend a lot of money for a service that is just getting worse and worse and worse. It's like air travel is just—like there's nothing glamorous about it anymore.

Roxane: No, it's just air travel. We've mastered this technology and there's just no reason for the customer service for flying to be this horrible for everybody. It's just—there's no need, and I travel often enough that it's just disgraceful how bad the airlines are.

Aminatou: When you're traveling, is there like something that you can't travel without?

Roxane: I have a blanket that I can't travel without, yes.

Aminatou: What's the significance of the blanket?

Roxane: It's just a comfort tool.

Aminatou: I love it. While we're on this topic, it's like, what else are you doing to really take care of yourself while you're on the road, because all of this flying definitely takes its toll?

Roxane: It does. I'm not doing enough, honestly. So, as my travel schedule is about to start up again, and so, this time around I'm taking my workout clothes on every trip and I'm going to make sure that I work out at least once every other day. And I'm also trying to build in at least two days between trips so that I can just not go crazy.

Aminatou: What's currently on your travel playlist?

Roxane: I listen to a lot of DJ Khaled [chuckles] because I follow him on Snapchat and he's just . . . so bizarre and so confident and so all about talking about himself at all times and I just—I don't know, I admire it in a weird way. But right now on my playlist I have "Closer" by Tegan and Sara, "Off-Set" by TI because it was in *Fast & Furious 7*, then "Turn My Swag On" by Soulja Boy, which is what I listen to when I'm boarding the plane and people are getting on my nerves because they don't know how to board. And "Ultralight Beam," "Jumpman," of course Rihanna, "Player's Anthem." [Chuckles]

Aminatou: Oh my God, “International Player’s Anthem” for the international jet-setter
[chuckles].

Roxane: Yep, what it is.

Aminatou: Thank you so much for making the time, Roxane. It means a lot to me. Can you
tell us where people can find your work if they want to know more about what
you’re up to?

Roxane: You can find my work in my last book, *Bad Feminist*, and my novel, *An Untamed
State*, and there’s a list of everything I’m always working on, on my website,
which is RoxaneGay.com.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: That was Roxane Gay; Roxane with one “n.” Get it together, people. Her
upcoming book, *Hunger*, will be out later this year. Now, let’s bring Ashley and
Rosie back into the studio.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Rosie: Ash really, really, really wanted to go somewhere in mainland Africa, and I’m
gonna be honest with you, um, Seychelles, you know, sign me up. That seemed
like a nice safe bet, but, you know, I was not—you know, I was not gung ho
about just picking a random place in Africa and just, you know, kinda starting
there.

Ashley: Let me just pause right here to mention that she went to Howard. So, like,

anything she said—

Group: [Laughs]

Ashley: Like all of her street cred as far as I'm concerned goes out the window. Like, how are you not comfortable just taking a place in mainland Africa. I just wanted to—

Aminatou: I mean, I don't know. I feel like because I'm from West Africa I can say this; traveling to Africa is like very daunting even with the Internet.

Rosie: Yes!

Aminatou: It's insane!

Rosie: And I had the Internet and I was like, so, "Oh my God. I don't know where to go, what to pick." I was super uncomfortable, but I did do a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of research because I was like, you know, if I'm gonna, you know, rip the Band-Aid off, I am going to do it in a way that I feel the most comfortable. So, we actually tagged up with a tour group when we got to South Africa, which wasn't really the sexiest thing to do on your honeymoon, especially since the majority of the tour group—would you say they were like AARP members?

Ashley: It was definitely like, middle-aged, "my kid is on their way to college," like white folks.

Group: [Laughs]

Ashley: Like that's what that service was.

Rosie: No, there was an Asian family.

Ashley: There was, but I mean, for the most part it was very much like, “I live in suburban America,” and like—

Aminatou: “I’m going on an adventure!” [Laughs]

Ashley: Yeah, exactly. And I mean we’re in a tour bus like across South Africa.

Group: [Laughs]

Ashley: So I’m like—

Aminatou: All of your Howard street cred is going out the window.

Ashley: Like—

Aminatou: It was kind of gone.

Ashley: Like trying real hard to get the right angles on photos.

Rosie: [Laughs]

Ashley: Like little do y’all know, I’m taking this from a bus.

Group: [Laughs]

Ashley: But, it was really nice. I mean I studied history also in college in addition to film at Howard and, you know, so much of the anti-apartheid movement, at least on the US side, happened in DC and it was definitely driven by students at Howard University who were like pressuring the US government to divest from South Africa. And so, I felt like I was connected in some way to South Africa just because I had studied, you know, their anti-apartheid movement there and just

the communication strategies that they, you know, used to kind of like make things happen.

Rosie: But, I'll say this: you know, the race relations that are going on in South Africa are very like—I mean, it's getting better, but it is very in your face. And, you know, we had a great time, but we had this tour guide; he had been in Africa. He's a white guy who had a Dutch background. You know, born and raised in South Africa. So, you know, went through the apartheid movement and, you know, was on the other side of that. And I just found myself kind of when he would say certain things, just kinda looking at him like, "Are you serious?" So much so that like, at the end of it, you know, he's telling us, "Oh, hey, we typically give tips at the end of this." He's doing his little spiel. "So if you like my touring, on average people give this amount." And then the guy who's been driving the bus the entire time is this black guy.

Ashley: Is a black guy.

Rosie: And who was super, super, super sweet and, you know, of course we did the black-person nod with him and had that camaraderie and he was like, "Oh, well, you can give me this amount, but you can give him"—like, oh, I think maybe a fifth of what he was recommending for himself.

Aminatou: Oh!

Rosie: And so, you know, he's sitting there while we're exiting the bus and I literally

took all the money I had in my pocket and it was a lot of rands left.

Ashley: Here we go—

Aminatou: [Laughs]

Rosie: And handed it to the bus driver in front of him. In that moment, I mean, I don't know.

Aminatou: Black lives matter, y'all.

Ashley: She's not going to go to Africa and like not save the Africans, right? Right [chuckles]?

Rosie: Okay, I'm not trying to save the Africans, but I just wanted to do it in front of his face. That's all I have to say.

Ashley: No, I mean I feel that too. It definitely was real and I mean I think that black Americans have these like romantic ideas about going back to Africa. And I don't feel like we went there with that. We were just looking for a really great time in like a new place with people who looked like us.

Rosie: Yeah.

Ashley: And I will say though that it was interesting through some of the checkpoints and when we went through customs. People were definitely like, "Wow, it's great to see y'all." Like I had on my Howard sweatshirt. Like people definitely were like—

Aminatou: "It's great to see y'all?" Like, really?

Ashley: Yeah.

Rosie: No, seriously.

Ashley: People were like, “Tell more people from Howard to come.” I mean, they definitely recognized Howard University—

Rosie: Yeah.

Ashley: And so, I mean that was cool. You know, and it made you feel warm and fuzzy, but I wasn’t expecting people to throw out roses and be like, “Welcome home, sister,” or anything like that.

Aminatou: Ashley and Rosie, y’all are just too much. But if you still want more from Ashley and Rosie, and I know you do, you can check out the photos and commentary from their Africa trip at onshegoes.com. You know what time it is? It’s time for the “three Hs.” Today, Melissa gives us tips on dealing with harassment abroad.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Melissa: Street harassment can be tricky. When something happens, really try to pause and take a second to think about what the appropriate reaction is. Clapping back might not always be in your best interest in a foreign country. It helps to research the destination before you go. The extent of the harassment as well as the recourse may vary from place to place. Find out if there’s community policing or if the country’s law enforcement even handles harassment reports. Just know that verbal assault is something that you might get on a regular basis. It can be a lot, but share how you’re feeling with those around you and try your

best to not let it frustrate you so much that you don't enjoy the other aspects of your journey.

Aminatou: Thanks for the always helpful "three Hs," Melissa. Up next, I sit down with Saada Ahmed.

Saada: My name is Saada, and I am cofounder of Everyday People, among other events as well.

Aminatou: Everyday People is a monthly brunch where people of color come together to eat, dance, network, and celebrate. It started among friends in downtown New York and has quickly grown into a national and even international event. So, here's the thing: I am a notorious brunch hater. First of all, I like to sleep in and, two, there is kind of, you know, a very "white girl" reputation that surrounds brunch and I would rather not be implicated in that. But when I walked into my first Everyday People event, that all changed for me. My brunch views were immediately transformed. It's very clear that Saada and her team are creating an important, intentional space for people of color and I wanted to hear more about it.

Saada: I think for especially people of color there needs to be a safe space where we can have fun and network. And working in that world, like I don't want to say nightlife because it's a day party, but you can see that there's always some pushback with venues or like promoters when it comes to an event that's

typically all black or majority black. I don't know why, but they seem to think that we can get in a fight or there's always drama, but this goes to show that we can all be in a space and enjoy each other and have a good time.

Aminatou: Everyday People is expanding internationally, right?

Saada: Yeah!

Aminatou: And you just had your first party in Barbados?

Saada: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: What was that experience like?

Saada: It was interesting. We were approached by the Tourism Board.

Aminatou: The Barbados Tourism Board?

Saada: Yeah, yeah.

Aminatou: That's rad.

Saada: Yeah, that's pretty—like it came out of nowhere. I was very excited. And their main focus was to bring a younger demographic to the island. It's pretty much an older crowd that goes to Barbados. Like when we went to do a site visit, on the plane, there were like six wheelchairs and I'm pretty sure I was the youngest person on the flight. So aside from the people who are from there, and Crop Over is a big thing, but this was like off-season. So, they wanted to like bring in younger people, but not like on a spring break, like, "Woo! Party! Crazy!" They wanted like young professionals, black folks, you know. We're doing our New

Year's in Zanzibar.

Aminatou: How did you pick the location?

Saada: Moma, my business partner, is also the deejay. He went last year, I believe, and oh my gosh, he fell in love with it and his photos were phenomenal. So, he was like, "This would be perfect for just like a getaway for people." And we have a lot of friends who want to go to the continent. So maybe that could be like a segue.

Aminatou: Mm-hmm.

Saada: You know, feel a little more comfortable going together with people that you know.

Aminatou: Did you find that people were bringing a friend and coming along, or like are there—

Saada: Couples.

Aminatou: Or, mmm, Barbados couples. Because for me, the appeal of like thinking about your Zanzibar trip is I'm like, "I want to meet new kinds of people." It's like what's the profile of the people who are going?

Saada: With any trip we do, we try and incorporate a lot of local vibes. We invite locals to our events; we invite locals to participate so that you can meet new people. Like if you're gonna travel all the way from Brooklyn with your Brooklyn friends, stay in the hotel, hang out with them, what's the point? Like, you need to be forced to hang out with other people in my opinion.

Aminatou: No, I completely agree. What do you pack for a trip like that?

Saada: Bathing suits, shorts, summer dresses, nothing really. [Laughs] Sunscreen, sunscreen.

Aminatou: Yeah, black people never wanna talk about how much sunscreen you have to wear. So I'm really happy—

Saada: Oh yeah, I wear it every day.

Aminatou: Every single day, yo.

Saada: Every day.

Aminatou: SPF-40.

Saada: Yes.

Aminatou: I want to move on a little bit and talk about your background.

Saada: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: You're an Ethiopian-Somali woman.

Saada: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: And you were born in Kenya.

Saada: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: And raised in Georgia.

Saada: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: How did all of these different black experiences really and black culture, like how did that shape your identity and your own idea of blackness?

Saada: Oh man . . . it's complicated. I feel like I come from a first generation. I'm a first-generation woman and I grew up in a predominantly African American community. But also where I grew up in Georgia, there were a lot of refugees. So, I have a mix of my idea of blackness. I see it more as the diaspora in all types of people. I don't have one vision of what blackness means to me, it's just so diverse.

Aminatou: Yeah, I am also a first-generation African person living [chuckles] in America. But, you know, this idea of success always revolves around academics.

Saada: Oh, yes.

Aminatou: And so, I'm wondering how your family has reacted to the success of Everyday People.

Saada: Ummm . . . my mom doesn't get it, and I don't think she needs to [laughs].

Aminatou: [Laughs]

Saada: She's happy for me. I mean, for her, she just wants me to be able to pay off my student loans and own a home and have a savings. And if she does not see that immediately she's just like, "What are you doing with your life? You need to go back to school. You need to leave New York City. New York City is not a place where you can save money." And so now, this year has been like, a turning-point year for me. I spent some time with her in Kenya for two months and I kinda wanted her to understand my struggle. Like, you know, I'm building toward

something. It's not an overnight success. I'm not going to like nursing school and then out the jump getting like, a \$70,000, \$80,000 job. It's something that is mine and, you know, I think she appreciates that. She always told me, "I want you to work for yourself." But I think it's difficult to actually see that. You know what I mean?

Aminatou: Yeah.

Saada: Because it's a lot of sacrifice. It's like paychecks are—it's feast or famine. You know what I mean? Sometimes it's like, "Whoa, shit! I'm rich, bitch!"

Aminatou: [Chuckles]

Saada: And then you're like, "Oh no!" Like, "Do I need to go on food stamps?" Like, it's hit or miss, but I think that recently, you know, we've grown as a business and I've learned a lot and she can see that. And I think she's proud of me. I hope so. Once I buy her a house she gonna be quiet [laughs].

Aminatou: But, that's like the immigrant kid dream, right?

Saada: And get married [laughs].

Aminatou: That's the endgame. You're like, "I'm gonna get married in the backyard of the house that I bought for my parents."

Saada: [Chuckles]

Aminatou: "And then they're gonna stop hounding me."

Saada: Exactly, but then they'll ask you for a baby. It's never ending.

Aminatou: It never ends. It never ends. So, we just all adapt to it.

Saada: Mm-hmm.

Aminatou: The last question, Saada: Where can our listeners find your work?

Saada: You can find us on EverydayPPLNYC.com, or you can follow us on Instagram which is “EverydayPPLNYC.”

Aminatou: Awesome. Thank you so much for joining us.

Saada: Thank you!

Aminatou: What a pleasure.

Saada: Aw, thank you!

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: To see the photos from Everyday People Zanzibar and more info on future Everyday People trips, go to onshegoes.com.

Nneya: And now it's time for “Around the World with Nneya.”

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Nneya: This week I'm talking about Miami, Florida. I know what you might be thinking, business doing what? But the city of Miami is really shedding that *Miami Vice* vibe and in the words of one of Miami's most famous Snapchat-ebrities, Benjamin Kickz, “Business is boomin'!” From the revamping of the arts and entertainment district to the growing fame of artsy neighborhood Wynwood and Art Basel Miami, it's holding down its own as a cultural center at the perfect

nexus between North and South America. Here are three things to check out while you're in this international city . . . Wynwood Walls and the Wynwood neighborhood. Sure, you've seen photos of the Wynwood Walls ad nauseum on Instagram, but this place is definitely worth seeing for yourself. Delve deep into the reformation of the neighborhood and its cultural ramifications. Make it worth your while and book a bike or walking tour with Miami's best graffiti guide. Tell Ryan the Wheelbarrow that I sent you . . . Toro Toro, definitely do lunch at Toro Toro. Located in the InterContinental hotel in downtown Miami, this restaurant is *the* place to be seen power lunching. Miami beachgoers love their cocktails, even over a working lunch, and Toro Toro's delicious cocktail program only rivals their amazing lunchtime buffet. That's right, I said buffet. This isn't your grandmother's buffet though. This is a Latin steak house serving up delicious cuts of steaks, plantains, delicious pork shoulders, ceviche. I could go on; there's so much more. But don't get too filled. There's a certain signature desert, La Bamba, that I know you're gonna wanna save room for . . . The Arsht Center, that's A-R-S-H-T. The arts and design district of downtown Miami is definitely at the helm of this Miami change. So take in a performance at the Arsht Center when you're in town. From a world-class opera house to a black box theater, the Arsht Center spaces seem to have it all, and it's no wonder, considering its diversity of programming from major Broadway shows like *The Phantom of the*

Opera and *The Lion King* to avant-garde productions like *The Donkey Show*, an immersive play experience combining Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* with a fully functioning nightclub.

Aminatou: As always, you can get Nneya's recommendations on our site, onshegoes.com.

[PLANE SOUNDS]

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Aminatou: Okay. That's it for today. Let's get back to biz. Thanks so much for listening to *On She Goes*, the podcast. Don't forget to check out onshegoes.com for more travel stories, tips, and inspiration. It's also where you'll find all of my favorite business travel photos and recommendations. I'm your host, Aminatou Sow. *On She Goes* is produced by me and Bari Finkel for Pineapple Street Media in partnership with Serita Wesley, Lizzy Harris, and Natalie Huizenga for Wieden+Kennedy Publishing. Special thanks to Jenna Weiss-Berman, Max Linsky, Emily Becker, Lindsey Mavis, Sarah Fink, Marmoset, and APM. Bye.

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