

Aminatou: Hi there. Welcome to the podcast from *On She Goes*, a travel site for all women of color. I'm your host, Aminatou Sow. Today we're talking about transitions, whether it's taking a trip between jobs like writer Jia Tolentino or exploring the world for a year like artist Myiesha Gordon. Travel often forces you to confront transition, and that can be scary, it can be uncomfortable, and other times, it's just downright ridiculous! Stephanie Foo of *This American Life* sheds some light on that later.

Aminatou: But to start *On She Goes*, as our first international correspondent, Jia Tolentino heads to Iceland before starting her new job at the *New Yorker*, and I knew she just had to bring a mic with her.

Jia: [screams] This is the craziest thing I've ever seen in my whole life! [chuckles]

Jia: That's me, Jia Tolentino, and my boyfriend, Andrew.

Jia: We just got to the glacier lagoon, and we just turned the corner. And there's all this—

Jia: We're on Iceland on vacation, a trip we booked because Andrew's friend was there on fellowship, and I'll do anything to go anywhere that looks like the moon. Iceland's beautiful in that way—remote, stark, and wonderfully lonely. I was walking around like a pair of eyes attached to a nervous system, and some fairly basic processes started to slip my mind.

Jia: Hey, Andrew, what just happened?

Andrew: We did the pants dance! We got some gas! Woo!

Jia: What almost happened?

Andrew: I actually think we did run out of gas.

Jia: And when did we run out of gas?

Andrew: As we pulled up to the gas tank machine-thing guy.

[door closes]

Andrew: Not to ruin this—you can possibly edit this part out.

Jia: What?

Andrew: But I will say that when this is in economy mode and you're idling for a little bit, it does turn off. Like it—

Jia: Oh, oh!

Andrew: But, but—

Jia: It had just gone to zero?

Andrew: All of these . . . were literally not there.

Jia: Yeah, yeah.

Andrew: So—

Jia: Like, the gas thing had literally dropped to zero. Hoo!

Jia: I should've kept track of every time Andrew tried to "actually" me on this trip. But that's why we're good at traveling together. He's pedantic about details, and I'm more like this.

Jia: [sighs] So right now I'm in the continental rift, so I'm in between North America and Europe. Which I'm assuming means no laws apply and I can probably murder someone in my tour group and there will be no lawful jurisdiction for it.

Jia: It didn't mean that.

Jia: I'm very disappointed because I just found out the obvious fact that the continental rift was about the continental plates [laughs] and not the actual continents.

Jia: Yikes. I've done a lot of solo travel in my life, and I like it. But it's nice to have Andrew around to stop my truly dumb ideas in their tracks.

Jia: I just realized that my obvious crater metaphor is like, you know—oh shit! I almost fell down the crater! [laughs] Maybe we all need to blow off some steam every now and again.

Andrew: I think that's true. That is horrible.

Jia: It's too obvious?

Jia: And for accent practice.

Jia: [Australian accent] I wish I had vaped, because vaping is sexy, am I right?

Andrew: Well, we would've lost hand strength.

Jia: We'd be extremely unsafe.

Andrew: [Australian accent] Extremely unsafe.

Jia: [Australian accent] Extremely unsafe if we vape before we got on our four-

wheelers.

Andrew: [Australian accent] Vaping is sexy, but not in a moment like this.

Jia: That's absolutely true! [laughs]

Jia: And to ruin perfectly good songs.

Jia/Andrew: [sings] Don't go chasing waterfalls!

Andrew: [sings] Just stick to the rivers—

Jia: Because much of central Iceland is uninhabitable, you mostly get around via the ring road, which circles the coast. So we spent a lot of time in the car, and a lot of time listening to Icelandic radio, and here's the thing about Icelandic radio: it rules! My favorite station played mostly pop-rock from the last three decades but would throw in an hour of Motown or '50s country or '90s hip-hop, and then something like this.

[OPERA PLAYS]

Jia: We're in the car [chuckles], and Iceland is playing its own theme song.

[OPERA PLAYS]

Jia: [chuckles]

Jia: The schizophrenia of Icelandic radio was a nice mirror for the weather conditions, which shifted dramatically even though it was summer. Huge storms would open up, temperatures would drop, visibility would shrink to horror-movie conditions, and all of a sudden we'd be driving in a void.

Jia: We are driving through the thick cloud that has been cutting all the mountains in half all day, so we can't see the top of any of the mountains we're around. And how many meters of visibility would you guess that we have?

Andrew: Right now it's a little more, but it just was probably 25 to 50.

Jia: Yeah, which is crazy, so I can see the nearest rows of hills and maybe headlights, if they're close, and then everything is disappearing. What's your take on driving through a cloud?

Andrew: It's scary as fuck. [chuckles]

Jia: Yeah. [chuckles] It's pretty scary.

Jia: But honestly, it's when Iceland was scary that I loved it the most.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: That was the wonderful Jia Tolentino, everyone; she is a writer at the *New Yorker*. Make sure to read everything she writes. Let's hand the mic over to Melissa Valle for the "three Hs."

Melissa: Let's talk health. One thing that's important to women's health, and often overlooked when we prepare to travel, is underwear. I know. It's a taboo subject. We often consider climate when we're packing up our bathing suits and our jackets and things like that, but we often neglect to think about underwear and how they relate to climate. For example, if you're going to a very hot and humid place, you probably don't want to pack those thick, silky lace thongs. You want

to stick with things that are breathable, like cotton or microfiber. Some things that also dry very quickly as well. And this becomes key, because you often don't have access to a washing machine abroad. You always want to be mindful that you might have to hand-wash your unmentionables, or you may have to give them to someone else to wash, which I know for me is always kind of weird. But I've gotten over it, and you will too.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: Melissa Valle, as always helping us all be the best travelers we can be. [plane sound] Chances are that, like me, in the middle of a particularly bad day during that nine-to-five grind, you've probably thrown your hands up and thought, "I should just quit this job and travel the world for a year," and then you get right back to work. Well, you're about to hear from a woman who made that her reality: Myiesha Gordon is a multidisciplinary artist and doctoral student who is traveling the world for a year. I caught up with her while she was staying in a hostel in Bolivia.

Myiesha: My name is Myiesha Gordon, and I am an artist and an educator. A few years ago I planned a trip to Italy, and I remember seeing a lot of senior citizens on that trip and just thinking how amazing it must be to be able to travel now that you've gotten work and probably raising kids out of the way. And the more I started looking into long-term travel, I was like, "I don't wanna wait until I'm

retired, or wait till I get too old and not as healthy to be able to go up stairs and enjoy a long-term trip.” So I started looking into long-term travel and seeing what people were doing, and the more I learned, the more I realized that it was possible. And I just started saving and planning and doing research and just thinking that if there was a way that I could do it, I wanted to do it now.

Aminatou: How are you carving out time to create art? It’s not like you can travel with, like, a big easel [chuckles]. Or you know, that kind of stuff. What does your portable studio look like?

Myiesha: It is so crazy. So I only brought one carry-on luggage and a backpack. But what I did was brought watercolor, graphite pencil, color pencil. Things that could be used on paper and dry quickly. But it’s complicated, because when you’re in places—I don’t know where I’m gonna be three weeks out. Like, right now I know where I am and I know where I’ll be next week. So scheduling time to create is really difficult. The last time I had a long session to create I was at a bus stop waiting for a bus that I thought was supposed to come. I think it was at 6:00 and it came at, like, 8:30 or 9:00, so I just sat and drew.

Aminatou: Are any friends or family coming to meet up with you along the way, on this yearlong journey? Or are you traveling by yourself most of the time?

Myiesha: For me, traveling solo is one of the greatest things in the world. I mean, I love being with my friends and family but—

Aminatou: It's my favorite thing in the world.

Myiesha: Yeah! It's so freeing and, like, you get up, you go do what you wanna do, what you need to do, and there's no compromising. There's a lot of coordinating that is emotionally involved when you're traveling with other people. So while I have talked to some of my friends and family, and we did talk about going places, meeting up in places, I don't know how much of that I'm gonna do.

Aminatou: I love taking trips by myself. And I think that especially . . . I don't know, for me as a woman of color, the sense of adventure that has been possible with solo travel, it's been really eye-opening and really mind-bending in some ways. You know? You get to participate in this cultural thing that all of media tells you is kind of the province of white men. [laughs] You know? And there's not big narratives of black women who travel alone, or that kind of stuff, and I think that there is something so healing for me to be part—you know? —to do that for myself at least once a year.

Myiesha: Yeah, I think it's great, and even the things that you notice when you're alone, I think, is different than when you're in groups of people. Like when I first started out in Brazil—I don't speak Portuguese, and I've been trying to learn both Portuguese and Spanish. And I think when you have to struggle to speak and communicate and navigate a different world, there's a certain challenge about that, that is different from always being with people that speak your language



and think how you do and come from similar backgrounds. I think it creates an environment where you're able to grow a little bit more. So yeah, I think solo travel is something that I hope a lot of people can experience.

Aminatou: How did you go about saving for the trip? Did you have a specific financial goal, or did you start out with your own savings, or was this something that you really just saved for?

Myiesha: I was pulling from everywhere. Once I knew I was going on the trip, I didn't take vacation anymore, because my job, they would pay out the vacation. And I also used the 503b, which is the retirement savings. So I used that.

Aminatou: So you decided to, when you were going to go on this long trip, that you were going to quit your job, and cash out some of your savings, and cash out your vacation?

Myiesha: Exactly. So my vacation payout, income tax refund, and the 503b payout. Those were the three main sources. And I made sure to do it that way because those were places that were already, like, I didn't see that, so it didn't feel like a hardship as much. But I did, once I decided that I was going to travel, you know, I cut back on things that I would normally do, like eating out and small things like that.

Aminatou: In one sentence, can you tell me why you think it's important that other women of color have these kinds of experiences?

Myiesha: I think it's important for anyone to be able to experience how other people live and to be able to be exposed to other cultures. And you see that your world, your way, is not the only way of living, your culture is not the only way to live. I think it's important that people experience other cultures on a deeper level.

Aminatou: Beautiful. Myiesha, where can our listeners find your work?

Myiesha: I started a blog and it's called "MyieshaAtLarge.com." It's M-Y-I-E-S-H-A at large dot com.

Aminatou: Perfect, and I can't wait to follow your blog and see what you're up to next.

Myiesha: Oh, okay, I look forward to it. You take care.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: I think "Where in the World is Myiesha Gordon?" might just be my new favorite game.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Nneya: And now it's time for "Around the World with Nneya." This week I'm talking about Nashville, Tennessee. It might sound cliché, but there really is nothing like Southern hospitality. When I'm feeling particularly nostalgic for that Southern childhood I never had here in Brooklyn, I like to hop down to Nashville. Here are three things that will have you feeling so down-home while in Nashville. Head to Germantown for Monell's. This restaurant is like being in someone's dining room. Really. There's a fixed menu, you're at a communal seating of a dining-

room table, no cell phones, and the only rule is you pass to the left. With course after course of yummy fried chicken, mac 'n' cheese, biscuits, mashed potatoes, so much more coming out of the kitchen like at Grandma's house, the hardest thing to do is remember to pace yourself. Do wander Broadway and downtown Nashville, also known as Honky Tonk Highway, and take in the music. There's live music all day, every day, in this city appropriately called "the music city." You'll be in awe of how much talent there is out there. A visit to these bars is why I started to watch the show *Nashville*. Definitely keep your eyes open for some of your favorite musicians; this town has always been happening on the music scene. But with new restaurants, bars, clothing stores, and galleries, Nashville is making itself a full-fledged cultural hub, with many musicians opting to have homes here. A chance encounter with the photographer for one of my favorite bands in high school led to me hotboxing a hotel room with them later that evening. You just never know!

Aminatou: Okay, Nashville, that was Nneya Richards with a list of must-dos for Nashville, Tennessee. Thanks for all your help, Nneya. [plane sound] This next story comes from *This American Life* producer Stephanie Foo. Stephanie flew from New York to Miami a couple months ago, and because of a mechanical failure she got stuck on the runway for six hours! Two days later she flew back to New York and got stuck in Miami again for another 15 hours! While she waited for her

plane to take off, she started tweeting at her airline, Delta, about her frustration, and her complaints turned into a full-on story in and of themselves. Here she reads her tweets about the story of her epic travel delays.

Stephanie: Hour five and a half on runway at JFK. Am I gonna fall in love here? Give birth here? Die here? [phone sound] Hour six on tarmac and I've already had two daughters . . . one of them has a peanut allergy and the other one is an Othello prodigy. Lillian often asks where she came from. I tell her I birthed her into a lukewarm bath of Sprite. Her first bed, an inflatable life vest.

Stephanie: I wake in Miami.

Speaker: We are safe. All passengers remain seated with their seat belts securely fastened.

Stephanie: Lillian! Bridget! Was it all a dream? I find a single Othello piece in my overhead compartment. I feel a deep ache. After keeping me on the runway six hours two days ago, then canceling my flight tonight? Delta? You're asking for this story about my daughters. After birthing them on the plane, I'm raising them at the gate. It's tough finding nutritional food, but they have a lot of snow globes. [background whistle] Lillian is learning Chinese from the Air China stewardesses. Bridget reads *Condé Nast Traveler* and asks what an ocean feels like. Bridget's becoming a woman. I can't find a copy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, but I buy her Danielle Steele from Hudson News and cross my fingers. Lillian's

fallen in love with the Jamba Juice cashier. He brings her tamales from outside. He doesn't mind she only wears Miami tees. Bridget's been accepted to Vassar; admissions liked her essay. Like a bull at the gate, a Delta childhood. I tell Lillian she needs to leave too, but she's afraid to leave me here alone. Besides, Antonio's been promoted to Jamba manager. I've had many lovers, mostly art dealers who pass often through Miami. But it's hard to hold on to a man when you only sponge-bathe. In the time I've been here I have missed my best friend's wedding and my father's funeral, but I've never missed an *Anderson Cooper 360*. [background noise] Lillian calls me from her new home. Silence had been hard for her at first. Sometimes she admits, "I really miss Delta's acid jazz."

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Stephanie: Now I am old and spend most of my days in the massage chairs. I would've liked to feel grass on my toes one last time. The girls are here holding my hand. I whisper, "Give me liberty or—" "I'm giving you a Starbucks pumpkin bread, Mom," Lillian says.

Speaker: Welcome to Delta flight 59.

Stephanie: The plane is boarding. My friends have gathered to see me off.

Speaker: Thank you for choosing Delta.

Stephanie: The guys from duty-free, security. The girls are sobbing with catharsis. Raul

from baggage claim is playing taps. [trumpet sounds] I didn't know Raul could play the trumpet. Maybe he found it in some unclaimed luggage. The Delta gate attendant smiles at me knowingly and says, "Have a safe flight." The gate cheers, the trumpet soars, and so do I. [trumpet sounds]

Aminatou: When they saw her last tweet, Delta finally tweeted back. "Woo-hoo! Exclamation point. Thanks for flying with us, Stephanie! Exclamation point. Happy face, star, signed AB." Again, that was Stephanie Foo.

[MUSIC PLAYS]

Aminatou: All right. That's our show for today. Thanks so much for listening to *On She Goes*, the podcast. Don't forget to check out [onshegoes.com](http://onshegoes.com) for more travel stories, tips, and inspiration. 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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