

Part 1: How I Got Here

I was introduced to Black Girl Travel from a friend I met this year in a yoga teacher training at my studio. We had barely known each other for a few weeks when I had gotten into a discussion with her about traveling. I had been to several countries before, including Spain, France, Ireland and Brazil, but was looking for a different destination this year. That's when my friend directed me to Black Girl Travel, particularly, the tours to Italy. She told me about the wonderful experiences she had, including some life changing experiences, and that I should look into going on a trip. I heard a lot about Fleace, founder of Black Girl Travel, her busy, adventurous life style, and how Black Girl Travel was her life's purpose to expose African American women to the world and for the world. I had never been on a trip that focused on black women traveling, so I figured that in of itself would be a new experience worth going. There were several trips being offered, but I wanted to go on the Roman Holiday tour because of the small group size and cultural immersion in the country. The trip included two days in Barcelona, and 11 days in Rome. My friend was going on the Roman Holiday tour for the second time.



When I sent an email to Fleace about the trip I was under the impression the tour spots were already taken up given it was March, and the tour began in July. But when I got the call from Fleace, she spoke to me as if I was already going on the tour. Days later I was signed up for the trip and sent my deposit. In the meantime, I was going through a number of changes in my life. I started teaching yoga part time, and I had a full time job as a contractor. I was incredibly busy from teaching four to five days a week in the early mornings, nights, and weekends to the point that I never really had a day off, considering I still had a "9-5" career as well. My work life was also very shaky given my company had a hard time finding work for me, and I was already looking for a career change. I had been job searching, networking, seeking counseling, and doing anything else to find a career that was what I loved, but also provided the finances I needed to live. Then, money was starting to become a focus for me because I was making large payments to my yoga teacher training, and I knew I also had to pay for the Roman Holiday. I stayed busy teaching so many classes so I could earn enough money to balance my expenses. Being dissatisfied in a career that was unstable and not providing me fulfillment didn't help either. I truly believe that when we're unhappy in our career, it can bleed into other aspects of our lives. When we're chasing money, we wear ourselves out trying to hustle and not go broke, even at the expense of our physical and mental health.

My finances hit a near rock bottom when I was furloughed for a month in June. Fortunately, I could get some income from yoga, even though it didn't make up the paycheck from my regular job. I almost wasn't able to make it to the Roman Holiday tour. Yet even as I knew I was going, I was also going to have tighter finances than I had imagined. One thing I learned is that money isn't everything, but it can be a lot of things in some situations. I was seeking a lot of spiritual guidance in hopes that my finances would improve, and that it wouldn't prevent me from enjoying my trip. My friend, also going on the tour, was doing her best to encourage me and tell me this would be an important trip for my life. I really

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wanted to believe that, given I was going through change. I would think at times that surely going on a trip that I really couldn't afford would make a difference in my life. However, a part of me didn't believe a trip like this would make that much of an impact on my life, and maybe I just wanted a simple vacation where I could rest and relax instead. I had this complex a good part of the trip: should I look at Roman Holiday as just another travel experience or a life experience? The trip I would have was based on the choice I made, and had I chosen a traveling experience, I wouldn't be sharing what happened as I am now.