

Transcript

Episode Title: How to Move Abroad to Iceland with Jewells Chambers

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Jewells Chambers [00:00:00]

It's very dark here, the shortest day of the year is four hours long, four hours sunlight. Which if you're not used to that, and I don't know, really, people are used to it as much, they just know what's coming, and they try to prepare themselves. But it is a fascinating thing to have to endure. And I had to develop a routine to deal with it. Because if you allow yourself to sit and think about how dark it is, it's such as closing it on you.

Christine Job [00:00:40]

Hey, everyone, welcome back to *Flourish in the Foreign*. The podcast that elevates, affirms the voices and the stories of Black women living in thriving abroad. Why? Because we do this. Yes, Black women, move and live abroad. Thank you so much for tuning into the show this week. I appreciate you if you're new. Hi, welcome. I'm Christine Job, the host of the podcast. And in fact, a Black American woman. Yes, living and thriving abroad in Barcelona to be exact. So welcome to the show. Thank you so much you're in for a treat. *Flourish in the Foreign* is written, hosted and lovingly edited by me, Christine. And this process is a labor of love, but labor nonetheless. And because podcasting is not free. It takes time, money and resources to produce this absolutely wonderful, interesting, informative show for you each week. I'm asking for some support. So please support the show. There are two ways for you to support the show. One is monetary, the other is non monetary, and both are equally appreciated. The monetary way is through the site Patreon, you can become a Patreon member of the podcast by going to the Patreon website, which is [ww patreon.com slash flourish form](https://www.patreon.com/slashed/flourish). This allows you to contribute to the show monthly based on the level of support as a level of content you can receive from the podcast. So that ranges from community access to bonus episodes to access to the live q&a as with the podcast guests, and I decided to add a little bit of an incentive. So when flourish the foreign has 10 Patreon subscribers. I'm going to release a second episode that week. Yes, you will get an episode on Monday, always. But also you will get an additional episode that week. As you know, I have a lot of interviews already recorded and waiting to share with all of you. So if you want to hear these stories a little bit faster, go ahead and become a Patreon subscriber. And if you choose to support the podcast through Patreon, I will of course shout you out on the podcast, which is what I'm about to do. Thank you, Shelly. Thank you, Shelly, for becoming a Patreon subscriber. I really appreciate it. Also, if you're saying, hey, Christine, I want to contribute monetarily. But I don't really want to be in a very committed relationship with you and the podcast just yet. That's okay, flourish and for now has cash app. So you can go ahead and cash out the podcast to show your appreciation and your support. The Flourish in the Foreign

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This week we have Jewells who is from New York and is currently residing in a tiny island nation. She has a fantastic podcast, and a fantastic YouTube channel that talks all about living in this tiny island nation. I am not going to tease it too much longer. I'm going to let Jewells tell you all about it.

Jewells Chambers [00:05:36]

My name is Jewells and I'm 34. And I'm from Brooklyn, New York. I was 30 when I moved to Iceland, and I live in a small town outside of Reykjavik called most fat spied. I've been here for almost four years. My mom is originally from Rochester, New York, and my dad is from New York City. They just always had this worldly mindset. It's not like they're really well traveled. But there was just the idea that the world was open to them. And they really instilled that in me and my sister. So within New York City, because we grew up in the 80s 90s. And of course, 2000s, New York City was very messed up place, especially in the 90s, there's a lot of drugs, there's a lot of violence. And people for the most part felt, especially people of color felt they had their areas of the city. And that was kind of it didn't really feel like Manhattan was necessarily open to them. And it's kind of for wealthier people or whatever, depending on what Parliament hadn't lived in, to be fair, but I'm talking about Park Avenue or different museums and all this jazz. And my mom never felt that way. She was always the one to be like, we're going to the museum, we're going to Central Park, we're going all these different places. And she didn't just take me in my sister, she ended up starting a community center in Bushwick, in which she wrote a bunch of grants and was able to get funding in order to have an after school program. That's how it started. And wish she could feed the kids at the after school program from all the different schools in the area. She wrote more grants, and ended up getting a summer program where she would also feed them all day. But then we would go on trips. And we would on trips every day, except for Fridays, which was the arts and crafts day. And we would go to the Beatles go to Manhattan. And she's taking 30, Black and brown kids on the train to Manhattan, all these different places. And it was just in my mind, it just seemed like a normal thing. It didn't seem strange at all that we would show up somewhere that maybe ordinarily, these kids intellect they had access to. And just having parents like this, who were encouraging us to always kind of explore, do our best when I was in high school, there was a potential trip to Italy. And she was

just like we are doing whatever we can to make sure that we can afford to send you on this trip. Because traveling abroad is such an educational experience. We want to make sure that you get that you can't learn this in a book. I just felt so grateful all the time. And before I even went on that trip, I remember sitting in a classroom, I think it was an economics class at the thought came in my mind is I don't think I'm supposed to be living in the United States because we were talking about the US and some history stuff. And it just didn't resonate with me. And I just like I feel like I don't belong here. I'm not saying I necessarily knew I would ever be in Iceland, or you know, somewhere other than the US but there was just something inside of me that I knew back then I did want to live abroad. I just didn't know how I was going to go about it. And I tucked it away in my brain.

Christine Job [00:08:46]

I asked Jewells about her university experience where she went to school what she studied. And also if she had the opportunity to study abroad.

Jewells Chambers [00:08:58]

I studied at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I have a degree in Biomedical Engineering. My university experience was great at first and then very challenging. At when I was starting out, I was just super social having lots of fun. And it was only until later on maybe my junior year where I realized that I was specifically majoring in materials or in a lab testing a lot of things and I didn't like it. I kept thinking to myself, why am I doing this? And I didn't have the passion for it. That became really challenging for me to want to continue, but I knew that having this degree is a great backup. Honestly, if I have to decide later on that I want to either pursue something else in this. And in general, it's a fascinating thing to study. But it just didn't feel like it was my calling. My university experience would have been really, really fun to be in. Let's just get through this and it'll be over soon. We can just live our lives and pursue things. I did have a chance to study abroad, the opportunity was there. And it was specifically to go to Egypt, I think. And I pulled out, I was really nervous about the whole thing. I never took the opportunity. And I don't know why I don't know something inside of me just like just don't do it. I ended up just kind of letting the opportunity go by me. I wouldn't say I regret it. But I do like to think my life would be very different if I had decided to do that. Because after I graduated, I decided at one to just pursue other things. I just always felt this need to help people. And I thought not being in a nonprofit was the answer. And I started looking around for how could I break into that world, because it is pretty tough, especially in New York, I'm everything is competitive in New York, but the nonprofit space is competitive in a different way. I mean, there's politics around it, sure. But just getting into the community, it just feels really small, because there's people who know each other and whatever else, I found this program called Public Allies. And they basically help you to get placed into a nonprofit. I ended up applying for that and getting it and I got placed in a nonprofit called the White House project, which helps women to run for political office. And now I think it's called vote run lead. It's changed names. And it was really amazing. And I got to work with some powerful, intelligent and challenging women in this space. And I learned a lot about myself.

Christine Job [00:11:36]

As I mentioned before, Jewells has an awesome YouTube channel where she talks about all things, Iceland, how to do it. And she also talks about her journey to Iceland. But what I hadn't realized is that her journey to Iceland effectively took about 13 years.

Jewells Chambers [00:12:00]

When I was in college, my friend, Andre, who is Icelandic told me that he had a group of Icelandic friends coming to visit. And he's like, yeah, you should come, it's gonna be really fun. So I did and you know, we partied one night. And one of the guys, they're good enough. And he's of the of the guys he's the one I'm attracted to. But not in like pursuing anything, just as a good looking guy fun to talk to seems really nice. And we were both really young, I think I was maybe 20 at the time. And I could not see myself even being in a relationship, I was having way too much fun in college in general, and went to school. That was, the ratio was three guys to one girl. I'm definitely not chasing after anybody in Facebook started to become a thing. Not too long after this. We were connected there. And every once in a while, we would chat asking how the other ones doing, at some point, good enough, moved from Iceland, to the United States to pursue his PhD. And he ended up getting married, got divorced. At some point in time, we both were single. And he called me while he was visiting his mentor in Atlanta, and is like, Hey, we haven't seen each other a long time. Would you like to meet up? So seven years ago, when we were both single, we decided to meet up in Chicago because he was going to school in Indiana. And I'd never been to Chicago was easy flight for me from New York City. And the idea was that we're going to have a Friends with Benefits weekend, because we didn't say that. But it was just like, if I was going to be with somebody, I wanted them to be in New York City. I had a list of things that I believed that I wanted in a mate. And one of them was that they lived in the city I was in so they didn't have to do long distance. And he was like, Yeah, and I don't want to be with anybody right now, who basically isn't Icelandic because I don't want someone to ever feel forced that they have to move to Iceland because I'm moving Iceland when I'm finished with school. And he had a girlfriend after he had gotten divorced who was from the United States. And it just felt like there is this expectation or pressure on the relationship to move to Iceland. I was like, Yeah, I can totally understand that. We were just essentially getting to know each other's friends on the phone before we had this big meetup weekend. And we saw each other It was basically we were a couple we weren't trying to be, but it just felt right. And we had a lovely time. And at the end of the weekend. He asked me if I wanted to be in a relationship. And I wasn't prepared for that. Because I thought to myself, we had said we didn't want the same things. I'm just trying to not mentally or emotionally get attached to this individual. And it sent me in a bit of a tailspin. But I was so down for it but afraid that this wouldn't work out because he's living in Indiana. I'm living in New York and he's eventually plan to move to Iceland. We realized Distance Relationship for three years. And I would go traveling to Indiana and he would come to me, we do that every month. And then finally he moved to Iceland, we met around 13 years ago. And so in between us meeting, and then eventually getting together, I have no idea. Of course, it can be turned into my husband,

Christine Job [00:15:20]

Jewells had been a successful nonprofit professional, and also Digital Marketer in New York, moving to Iceland meant getting a new job, I was really interested in her strategy and finding a job in Iceland that was in alignment with her abilities, and something that she would feel fulfilled doing.

Jewells Chambers [00:15:42]

When he got to Iceland, I started looking for jobs there, which took about seven months before I found the right job for me. And one of the things that was super important for me to move to Iceland was to find a job in something that I was already good at. So I was already building a career in digital marketing, I transitioned from you know, that nonprofit world into marketing, was doing quite well there, it didn't feel like the right thing for me to just pick up, go to another country, and feel like I'm starting everything over again, I just wasn't interested in that. And he was very supportive of that. I was living by myself in a studio apartment in New York City. Enjoying that I really did think about myself, every day would be wake up, go to work, come home, talk to good not look for jobs, like this was kind of my you know, cycle six months before moving, of course, I was going to work do my normal thing, trying my best to keep it to myself that I am trying to get out of this job. I was just excited about the opportunity to move to Iceland, and only my close friends knew. And my family, of course knew what I was pursuing. I did not understand the language, I'm still working on it, I found it is pretty difficult. But it is possible to learn. And I needed goodness help all the time. Because most of the advertisements were in Icelandic, I would tell him what I was looking for. And we would go through the paper. And then I started to understand enough words, and read enough words that I could point out like, Oh, this one might make may make sense. And then I sent in my application CV. And a big part to me of job searching, whether it's abroad or in the United States has always been to follow up. And if you want the opportunity to actually pursue it, and don't just wait for them to come to you. I would regularly after getting you know my application in on time, I would follow up the email. Or if I could call them I would I was getting responses. I mean, sometimes we'd be that, oh, we decided to go this other candidate, or we're looking for some whatever else. And it was, that was fine. As long as you're, you know, getting an answer. Of course, it's always hard when you don't know. And finally that we found a job. And when I applied for it, there was this moment of pain. I wonder if this is gonna be it, especially when they replied, and I had my first Skype call with them, which was six o'clock in the morning, New York time. And what was funny is that they wanted to do a video call, but I refused. Because I was exhausted. I was like there's no way. But they were fine with it. It was great. And the next time though, that I ended up having another interview the second round and went to Iceland. And this is one of those cultural things where Icelanders are not known for planning ahead. They kind of just roll with it. And I had no idea that over Easter in Iceland, it's a five day weekend. That's from Thursday, before Easter Sunday until the Monday after Easter Sunday, in which there's a holiday people were just not available to go out of town and I had booked Easter weekend. And I was leaving on Tuesday. And thankfully, the flights back on Tuesday to New York City are an evening because that was the only day they could meet with me, which was Tuesday morning when they would all be back in the office. And it was just an amazing interview. We clicked really well. I was in there for a few hours. And I knew I had the job but I walked out it was just one of those things where if I didn't get the job, it

would be an absolute shame, but I think it would have had to do something really terrible. Because I the energy was just really good. What I could offer was what exactly what they were looking for. And everything revved up for me because I was finishing up a really big digital marketing conference that we were putting together at the job I was working at. And so I was leading this which is supposed to be 1000s of People that you know are coming to this and keynote speakers and blah, blah, my life is really stressful knowing that I had this to do, and I'm moving out of country and I'm turning 30 I'm having a big 30, your birthday party and all this jazz. I'd say the last month and a half before moving was amazing, and exhausting.

Christine Job [00:20:20]

I think most expats remember that moment in which they were really leaving their home country. All of the planning, all of the stress, the strategy, the bureaucracy, is done. It's the day of it's time to get on the flight in leave. And I wanted Jewells to tell me about that day, and how she felt

Jewells Chambers [00:20:48]

I was really ready. To be honest, New York is a fantastic place, but it's too crowded. And I remember being on the train, thinking, I'm not going to miss this, I'm not gonna miss being in this metal box crammed in with a bunch of other people and you can smell I was ready to go to be honest. The only hard part for me was saying, see you later too, my mom, and you both cried at the airport, and not like, Oh, I'm crying because this is gonna be terrible. without you. It was just I knew that my sister had already moved to DC. And my mom was feeling that empty nester thing, but was really hard for her to know that her youngest was leaving. We just embraced a lot. And then off I went, the next day after I landed, I went straight to work. And I purposefully did this because we had been on vacation. Anyway, we went for a month around some parts of the US and then up to Germany to visit some of his friends was it like, I wasn't rested, I was kind of fully ready to just jump right in. And that helps me because I am one of those people that even though I want to feel I belong, I need to have a purpose. When I get someplace, some people they need to relax and absorb the atmosphere. And whatever. No, me I want to feel like there's something I'm literally working on. There's a goal right now. And my goal was to come in and make a difference for this company to get to know them. what their needs are, how I can add value as much as possible. And what's crazy is that in 2016, Iceland had one of the best summers that they they'd had in a long time. But I was too busy working and not realizing that when summer is good in Iceland, you take advantage of it. Or any day actually is good, it's good. If you're having decent weather, you take advantage of it. And the people in the company, I used to think they were really lazy. And I'm coming from New York attitude. So we have to remember this, of like, you just got to get it done. And also summer exist all summer. It's not this week, it's going to be incredibly rainy, windy in the next week, maybe you'll see the sun. It's not like in New York, I mean, it's hot, and it's sticky. And of course it can rain, but it's pretty stable summer weather. Whereas here, it can feel like fall in summer and winter on the same day, in a summer month. If it's feeling summer, you should just go outside. And people were doing that they would come into work, leave at two o'clock in the afternoon or whatever. And I'd be there till six or seven, I wasn't aware and people were trying to tell me that I wasn't listening, because I was hell bent on doing work and providing some type of value that I kind of forgot to be a person a little bit,

Christine Job [00:23:46]

I wanted Jewells to tell me more about the differences between Icelandic or culture, and the work culture she experienced as American, particularly in New York City.

Jewells Chambers [00:23:58]

The most obvious thing is the hierarchy. It's much flatter here, for sure. Not to say that they don't have any hierarchy at all, where I work currently, and even where I worked before. There is a CEO, you know, a CEO, all this jazz, but everyone's idea is something that they want to hear if they're asking for ideas, and not just Oh, tell me what you think. And then when you do, they're like, Oh, no, this is like kind of shutting it down. Whereas in Iceland, they really do open it up. Everyone has the ability to contribute. And they're willing to include people more or give you the ability to take charge of things. The management style is very lacks and because they have this attitude, like it'll all work out and that at best is kind of the national slogan of Iceland, which is it will all basically work out can be very frustrating for a person who feels like they need more More details. And they're not just leaving it up to fate in some ways, I worked at an adventure company, a tourism company. And there were many days where I was just like, okay, I love having this freedom. But I also feel like I'm lost in whether or not we should be going in some other areas. Or if we have the resources for all the things that I want to do, am I just adding on work to myself, because no one really here to give me some more guidance. But then now that I've moved to another place and advertising agency, it's super dynamic. And to the point where the work is endless, you literally could just work yourself to death in a place like this. But again, very flat structure, I can, at any point, go to the CEO and talk about some things that either I feel like would be good for us to do, or that might be bothering me, they're happening in the company. And I've seen plenty of people go to him and ask him, if he has five minutes. And he always finds time to talk with them. There's always this inclusion of great, I want to hear your ideas, I want to feel like we're all in this together, they're really open. So they also have a lot of snacks. I don't remember this, and the other jobs that I had in the US. But there are coffee time, which is essentially people bring in ridiculous amounts of cakes, and different treats. And everyone sits around and chatting. And you're like it's work time in the beginning, when I first moved, it was like, I shouldn't do this enough for 1520 minutes. But this is ridiculous twice a day. And it's actually built into their contracts. To do this, I didn't realize and I had to learn a lot of my rights from the unions. So I'm part of a union. And it's just it makes sense of you're working here to be part of a union. And within that they tell you all the things that you have access to and your employer is not allowed to do or should be doing or whatever else. That was kind of nice to to feel like you had people backing you and that you could go to your union if there was something wrong, and it's very strong union culture.

Christine Job [00:27:05]

Your first year abroad is always full of ups and downs. I want to know how was Jewells first year in Iceland,

Jewells Chambers [00:27:15]

it was great. It went by really fast. I worked too much. So I have to say that I almost burnt out not my first year. But going into my second year for sure. In my first year, I loved the fact that because I was working for an outdoor adventure company, I was exposed to so much Icelandic nature. And it was a part of my job. My company felt like if you don't understand our tours, if you don't understand the experiences that people are having come to Iceland that we cater to, then you do the marketing, it was a part of my job to go on hiking tours to go on glaciers to go kayaking to do all these things that I'd never done before. But I was totally down for and I could take my husband for free. I don't know if I took enough advantage of it to be honest. But I made some really good friends. And I just felt like I'd gotten in touch with a part of myself that I didn't even realize was there. And I was really challenged though, because hiking is hard. I ended up coming up with a plan for this guide things Matteo and he was turning 40. And he wanted to climb 100 ice climbing routes in a year. And I thought this was such a great idea. And of course, because I thought it was a great idea and decided to help them pursue it. My boss was like, Okay, you go out and help them make this happen, right, I'm going out with them not well versed in kind of these natural surroundings, and I have some hiking boots or whatever else. But I had no idea what we were in store for. We went to this ice climbing area, a mountain that was just on the side of the road, had no path. But all these people that I'm with our guides, they're used to hiking up mountains every day. And when I go with them, I'm just in the back trying my best to keep up. I'm exhausted, and the rocks are slippery, and there's moss on them. And we have to get to this location by a certain time and then get back or whatever else and do all the filming. I knew I couldn't give up because obviously I'm helping with production and in the storyline and whatever else. But I never been so physically challenged at one point in my life and the coping mechanisms that came out were fascinating. But also my life changed in that moment when we finally got to the top and did all the filming and we had to get down and again I was the last one getting down slipping down rocks and everything else because it was just incredibly uneven terrain. I felt almost defeated, but proud of myself that I'd gone through this and hiked for whatever many hours and made it through the day. But I realized that I don't want to be this person, I don't want to be the one who hasn't had any experience hiking mountains. And working in a company like this and whatever else, some sometimes I started biking to work, I started, you know, hiking mountains more regularly. I started signing up for hiking tours with the company or hiking groups and things like that my husband and I started making a routine every Saturday, it was kind of our date thing. And it still is for us to go on a hike together. My first year was very transformative, I moved to another country and I started taking classes too. That's another thing in Icelandic, but that's one of the reasons why almost burnt out too. I was going to work from eight 430. And then from class from five to eight in the evening, trying to study in is three to four times a week, for six weeks. And by the end of the six weeks, my brain was melting. It was terrible. There was a lot of me trying to jam pack in everything. But I just have always been one of these people that just full on into it. And then things start to break down, meaning it's not sustainable to continue on this way. And I had to learn that it's okay, if we didn't take my time lane language, it's okay for me to take a break, and not try to be the most athletic person in the company or something even though it's not possible because these people are super humans or something. And yeah, it was just a fantastic year,

Christine Job [00:31:33]

Iceland, a island nation with gorgeous nature. I wanted to know how much did this beautiful landscape actually cost?

Jewells Chambers [00:31:45]

Food For instance, it is very easy to spend 20 to \$30 on a meal here, if it's 20 or \$15, that might be considered affordable. Like why is it so expensive to go out to eat. And it's because they have to pay a livable wage to the people who work there, the prices are much higher. And then of course you're on this island. And a lot of things are imported certain foods are more expensive than others gas is ridiculously expensive. Similarly, with food at times, even food grown in Iceland, because of the cost of it is expensive. Whether getting imported, or you're buying it directly here, it still is a higher price than if you were to buy it in New York. living expenses. Owning a place is the way to go if you can afford it. Unfortunately, rent has been really high here. And that's mainly because of the market has been flooded with Airbnb ease to attract tourists. And for a while that was working. But then it was pushing everybody out of the downtown area and into other places where maybe rent might have been affordable before but now they have so many other people trying to live there. It became much more expensive, you can easily pay around 1500 2004 varies a month, dollars for a small place in downtown. And just like what am i watching to live in? I don't know trendy area in Brooklyn or something. This is ridiculous. This is it's frickin Iceland, there's 360,000 people who live here. Why is the rent so expensive. And depending on what you make, it can be fine. I've been very fortunate because I've made a good salary. My husband also he has some practice. So life is not difficult. But there are plenty of people who if you're working as a server in a restaurant or whatever else, money can be easily quite tight. because things are so expensive. If you eat out often, I don't see how people can sustain that it's just insane. You can easily spend more than \$100 a day on food for when you're eating out. And that doesn't have to be that you were trying to go to the most expensive places.

Christine Job [00:34:01]

A pressing concern for all expats is healthcare. Is it affordable? What are the differences between the Icelandic health care system and the American health care system?

Jewells Chambers [00:34:16]

So health care is heavily subsidized, but it's not completely free. Every township has a health center and when you're in your different area, you're supposed to go to that health center if you have a problem because your doctor is assigned to you there they know because once you give them your social security number which is called the Kenny Kala in Icelandic, then they just put your Canada in, your name pulls up, they know what your addresses that you're at the right Health Center. I think I've paid \$12 or something like that for going to the doctor and it's just really not expensive at all. It's enough where you have to pay just a little bit but it's You'd have to go to a specialist that's working get quite expensive. And people tell me, if you need to see a couple of specialists do it all in the same month, because there's a maximum amount that you have to pay after you hit a cutoff point and maybe a few \$100. Let's just say, then you stop having to pay for these visits, because they don't want to make healthcare too expensive. And

I'm never had a child. But I've heard that it's practically free service for pregnant women, if not completely free.

Christine Job [00:35:32]

When I think of Iceland, or Icelandic people, I definitely think of very blonde, very fair, blue eyed people. So I was very curious as to knowing how was Joel's experience being a Black woman in Iceland?

Jewells Chambers [00:35:53]

Well, it at first was a little overwhelming at times. And I think the only reason why is that Icelandic people have a tendency to stare. And they're not people who normally are smiling, just walking down the street, they're staring and you can't tell if they're staring because they're just curious. Or they have a problem, or they see something that maybe they notice something in your face. I have no idea. And at first, I was like, oh, man, this is so strange. And goodness, like, Oh, we just we just stare and I was okay, fine. But then I was walking down the street, and there's a lady who was driving and she was breaking her neck, staring at me. And I was just like, this is not okay, first of all, you're gonna get into an accident. I was just not okay. But is it really? that weird to see someone of color in your neighborhood? Right? I don't think so. We exist everywhere on television. And in Iceland, there tourists that come here all the time who look like me, it might have been that just in this particular suburb, she wasn't expecting to see someone that looked like me or No. I've never felt though, that I wasn't accepted here. And I've always found it hilarious when little kids see me who aren't used to seeing a brown person. Because they always stare. So sometimes where their mouth is open. Whoa. That's always like, amuse me. I think with adults, it's sometimes a little harder though. Because it's just like, I know, you travel. This is not it's not that odd, right. But again, it's a curiosity thing. And I just eventually realized that I could also stare back. And what's helped though, is that a friend of mine, we did a video together about being Black in Iceland on YouTube. And that got around Iceland, and even gone to the newspaper, because people thought that this would be helpful to share, because nothing that we said in there was negative. It's just basically this is our experience. And if you're coming to Iceland, and you look anything like us, FYI, this might be something that you experience. And overall, though I found it, people have been very accepting. They've been very warm and welcoming once you get to know them. And if I go to the store here in my town, they speak Icelandic to me immediately. They don't assume English. And I love that because I do want, of course, the chance to practice. But I also want to feel like you see me as a human being who has the capability of speaking this language too. And it just kind of makes it feel equal. And I don't feel like jewels, the Black girl in Iceland, I just feel like myself. And that's been very freeing for me. Because when I was in the US, and I worked for UK company, before I came here, but we were a satellite office in your city. And there is this energy that's different. I'd go maybe into a meeting with a bunch of people who are white, and there's just different energy, different tone sometimes. And here. I've gone into so many meetings, it was just okay. What have you got for us financially, we just want the value that you bring, didn't feel like there was a lot of bias or anything against how I physically looked when they first saw me.

Christine Job [00:39:19]

I was curious as to how she navigated the differences between her Black American culture, and her husband's Icelandic culture.

Jewells Chambers [00:39:29]

He lived in the US for many years before we got together. And he interacted with a lot of people of color. He has a PhD in psychology. I should mention that too, because when he was giving therapy services to people, a lot of them were from marginalized communities. And he got a lot of insight and he's also part of a social justice group, which is super in touch with inequality in the US cultural bias. Racism, police brutality, all of this, he just knew a lot about it. I didn't have to educate him on how harsh that is and how terrible of an experience it is granted up, there are always things to explain more than he might understand. But he already came with a ridiculous amount of information and compassion for the culture, that was very helpful for me, it just felt very natural, because he was already understanding. But coming to Iceland, there were times there have been times where he says, Okay, we're not touching my hair, we're not doing that. Or if you're going to, I need you to wash your hand and ask me, right, this is not a free for all. And I'm vegan. So I think that took people for spin here too, because it's just an added layer of being other, if you will, and Black woman living in Iceland, who doesn't eat their traditional foods, which doesn't include a decent amount of meat or fish. Icelandic people have some strange habits, boom, I'm thankful comfortable if we were to have a child to leave my child outside to take a nap, for instance. And this is a very safe place. And my sister in law, she had her twins, she would bundle them up and literally put them outside of her door of her house where it was covered, the door would be mostly closed. And it's just for the kids to get like fresh air and take a nap. And she would be off in the kitchen doing something right. And it's just an animal, she heard them crying, she would go and get them. This is like what you physically cannot see the child. And they're outside taking a nap. This is in a carriage. And it's just odd to me. And I'm not judging it harshly, but I just personally can't see myself doing it. And I said a couple in New York City, they were charged or at least taken in for child endangerment because they left their kids outside in the carriage of a cafe while they went inside to get their coffee or something. And this was just the cultural norm for them. But they didn't understand in the US, you just don't do that. In New York City. You don't do that. So I think in general, things like this can come across as odd. I definitely can see us raising a kid here. And I also see myself living here forever. It isn't that I'm still feeling it out or anything. This is my home. This is my least my second home, I still feel New York is my my first forever. And if we were to have a kid, which is something we've talked about, and I think has more to do with I'm just really ambitious and doing things I'm not sure if I want to spend time having a baby.

It's just it to pure life. And my husband's very supportive of that. But it's so safe here. And the kids have a lot of freedom. When we were younger, in New York, we can go outside and play. But my parents made lease had to be in earshot of the intercom, right? So they could come inside or yell to the intercom to go upstairs or something. And we had to be around kids of a certain age, everyone was kind of looking out for each other here. It can be five years old, going outside with your friends. I mean, bet your parents for the most part, paying attention, but they're just like, okay, go outside, go play. And summer is sweet for our brightness. It's not uncommon

to see some kids out who are decently young until 10 o'clock at night, and they just go home and go to bed. That part is strange to me. But it's nice to know that they can do that. And in Reykjavik, it's changed some there have been problems, people stealing bikes and things. But we used to live next to a school, the first apartment we had, and wide walk from the school to the bus and all the bikes were unlocked. And these were some expensive bikes. These kids really feel safe here like that, no one's going to come and just pick up their bikes. And that's amazing to think that that's not an issue. Education wise, kids do get a great education here. It's free. You don't pay for college, there isn't tuition. It's just a registration fee. There's just the opportunities to not have to go into debt just to get an education I think is amazing. It's becoming more diverse as well. I've seen a lot more children who are mixed or just from other cultures who are growing up in Iceland that makes me feel more comfortable. That having a child who doesn't look like what people assumed to be Icelandic can still grow up here and I think even miss Iceland for 2019 is mixed. And that was pretty fascinating because her story when she was growing up her name is bitta A BP or something and people used to call her bizarre appear, and appear means monkey. So obviously, that's not very nice. And that hurt her lots and her mom is, is white. And I don't know where the father was. But she would have to confide in her mom about this and cry whenever Alice and her mom took action and went to the school and, you know, talk to them and all the teachers and people did something about it. But it's just sad. It's like, where do they get this from? Right? Kids don't? How would they just come up with this on their own? That part was a little bit like, Huh, it's a little odd. But no one really talked about that part of it, about whether or not their parents are planting the seeds in them or whatever else. But on the whole, though, I have gotten to know some people who are mixed here, and they've had great lives. And they're adults now. And they're doing amazing things. One of them is out this Mama, who is an actress, and she's in this show on Netflix called Valhalla murders, which is based in Iceland. And so crime series. And it's really cool, because she's Icelandic the I interviewed her for my podcast about it, because I was curious. And this is kind of one of those things, if I were ever to be a mom of a person like this, I want to kind of know, right, and she was just super open about how great her experience was. And she has these friends when when she was five years old, and she still has them now and they, you know, hang out together and life for her. It's just been really good. I think that it makes sense to do this here meaning to have these experience where we have children because it's affordable. First of all, education wise, and it's a nice hub to go to other places like that or, or Europe or anywhere else in the world to

Christine Job [00:46:40]

learning the language of your new country can be stressful to say the least. And learning a language that is not remotely similar to your mother tongue probably adds another level of anxiety. I asked Jewells to tell me about her experience and learning Icelandic.

Jewells Chambers [00:47:02]

I am a high achiever. And it bothered me a lot that I was not fluent in Iceland after three years. And I chose three years as a date for when I would be fluent, not based off of any research, not based off of any actual action plan, it was just willy nilly pull it up my butt being like three years sounds enough, right? I'll be here, taking classes of time studying on my own doing whatever, I

should have picked up by them. And it isn't a language you just pick up. That's not how it works. Unfortunately, because there are a lot of rules in Iceland, more than 95% of the population speaks English. And quite well, because they watch TV or YouTube or whatever, even young kids my nephew is nine and his English is great. But it's one of those things where you can easily get away with speaking English. And in my job, I've always worked full time since I've been here. And I know people who've gone to the university to study and they've, you know, done the bachelor's program in Icelandic, and they speak Icelandic quite well, which is awesome. But I've never had the time to do this. I've always just for treated us amount. And I've been very hard on myself about this. I've had many moments where I felt like a failure. I've had to, you know, talk it out with my husband or whatever else. And we're gonna have Icelandic days, there's certain days that we only speak Icelandic to each other. And of course, my stomach has improved a lot. I understand a lot. I can speak it decently. They even had a meeting this morning, in which I was speaking in Icelandic, with a potential new collaboration I might do. And as he was speaking to me, it was like, Oh, this is great. And I thought to myself, I'm just going to answer in English because I really would like to get my point across. And this is this block that I'm working through, just speak it, it's okay. And people are supportive of it. But it's almost like I want to be like coming out being like, Ha, I speak Icelandic now. Right, I just want to be prepared. And that's not how it works. That's not how language learning works at all. I've been fighting against my own integrity critic, to not be perfect, speak the language, right? It's I have a tutor. And just allow myself to flow and let it be a part of my journey here. Instead of it being something that weighs me down. And then I eventually just completely give up on because I do know people who've been here for 20 years and cannot have a conversation by Sunday. And when I heard that it shook me to my core. I was like No, I can not be this person. And I think that even put on more pressure. as a as a year went by as two years went by three years went by and I was just like, Oh no, I'm I'm becoming this person. I'm going to be that person in 20 years, who looks blankly at a person speaking Icelandic and being like Just due to soccer I English

Christine Job [00:50:02]

winter, the season that evokes so many different emotions from people all over the world. But we're a place where winter makes you think of endurance and resilience. I had to ask Jewells, how does she manage winter, in Iceland?

Jewells Chambers [00:50:28]

winter, it's very dark here, the shortest day of the year is four hours long, four hours sunlight, which if you're not used to that, and I don't know, really, people are used to it as much, they just know what's coming, and they try to prepare themselves mentally. It is a fascinating thing to have to endure. I used to talk about how many winters I've lived through. It's the first time I've ever thought about that in life was I've made it through winter. Because it is something you endure. And I feel proud to say it before winters, I had to develop an actual program for myself, if you can call it that a routine, I think it's a better word routine to deal with it. Because if you allow yourself to sit and think about how dark it is, it's such as feel like it's just like closing it on you. Whereas exercising, having a project. In fact, that's what my I started, podcasting was in the wintertime, just to give myself something really fun and interesting to do and to think about,

because I wanted to feel had something to look forward to and not just work, whereas we have something exciting to look forward to winter doesn't even become a factor. The darkness doesn't become anything major. It's just there. And then at some point it isn't

Christine Job [00:51:52]

I asked Jewells, what does wellness mean to her? And how has that definition and that practice, been influenced by her living in Iceland,

Jewells Chambers [00:52:05]

wellness, to me accomplices, the different aspects of my life, how I'm balancing them. When I my job is impeding on the other parts of my life, I feel this imbalance. And if it's for too long, I start to question whether or not I am leading a life that is healthy for me. So I ended up getting a job that is an awesome position. But I was almost working myself into the ground. He was just unhealthy. And I was getting hormonal acne and stuff. It was just terrible. It's like, what's avenues in my face? My body's just trying to send me signals. And I wasn't listening. And at one point, I said, I'm going to quit, I just got to that point where it's like I did too much. I'm going to quit. This is it. And when I took the company, that I really just wanted to focus on things I was passionate about, and I was going to leave there. Okay, wait, timeout, because like it's good to them. They felt like it came out of nowhere, though. How about you just work 50%? out? Oh, that's a good idea. Thank you, I'm gonna do that. I think maybe that's other work culture thing, too. I don't know, most companies in the US that I worked for, they wouldn't have been like, let's just figure this out together. Don't leave, right. I feel like they've like, All right, bye, bye, somebody. Rather than feeling like let's just not put you in a position where it has to be this ridiculous. And we can. If you if you still are willing to bring value to the company and help us out, then we're willing to help you out in some ways to that I think was really powerful for me to realize that I have options and had that has helped with my wellness that I have more control over what happens to me than I initially thought. And I should exercise the rights to have those choices. and think outside of the box. Sometimes, in order to live a life that feels healthy to me.

Christine Job [00:54:06]

If you want to keep up with tools. Definitely listen to her podcast, all things Iceland.

Jewells Chambers [00:54:12]

All things Iceland is what I like to think of as the go to place to learn about Icelandic language, culture, nature and history. And when I thought about what kind of podcasts I wanted to create, I realized that it's not just one thing about ice. It's not just travel. It's not just the people. It's all aspects of this country that makes me so fascinated. I want to wrap that all into different episodes, interviews with some pretty fascinating individuals here, whether they're really well known or they're just ordinary individuals sharing their stories. I've started off with the podcast and then realize that YouTube would be a good resource to talk more personally. about things, all the episodes on the podcast, of course range and on YouTube too. But I have a different flavor and a lot of different topics on YouTube that don't talk about on the podcast so people can get a varied experience. And then on Instagram, it's kind of a similar thing. And every Sunday, I have an Icelandic news roundup in which I go through. I send news from the week before, and

give people an idea about what's happening here. And I've been doing a little COVID type series as well. But during the week, I'll talk about I send words and their meanings and how to pronounce them. Icelandic people were kind of fascinating, or even accounts on Instagram that feature specific exotic places or photography about Iceland that might be interesting for people to check out. I'm creating some resources and for people who have never been to Iceland, so we can feel prepared and have some assistance and have access to me to ask questions and kind of learn more. All things. iceland.com is the website. I am all things Iceland on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. You can also find me on Twitter, but I'm not as active there. Just gonna be honest. But on Twitter, I'm Joe's chambers, but it's his best to use all things ISI.

Christine Job [00:56:17]

Thank you so much, Jewells. That was such a wonderful episode. Thank you all so much for listening. I want to direct your attention to be flourished in the foreign website. Yes, the website is WW. Flourish in the Foreign.com. And on the website, you can actually see a really neat interactive map. And on the map, you can actually click on the pins that are pinned on the map. And it will open up and it will show you the podcast is associated with the country or the city. So definitely go check that out. Also, if you have any questions about moving abroad, living abroad, thriving abroad, getting a career abroad starting a business abroad, please send me those questions via Instagram dm flourish forum. And I'm going to select a couple of the questions to do an ID live perhaps weekly. We'll see how that goes. That is all for today. Thank you so much for listening to the podcast and supporting it. I appreciate it. And of course, thank you to Zachary Higgs who produced the music for this podcast. Zach produces music for artists, rappers, content creators, video games, anything, he can do it all. So if you're looking for some original music for your next project, please check him out. I'll put all this information in the show notes. Until next time, be well please take care of yourself and see you next week. On the next episode of Flourish in the Foreign,

Patricia Qhobela-Jenkins [00:58:06]

international media, from fromTV programs and music, you have a very one sided view of what an African American is and what African Americans do, and how Africans Americans speak and how they present themselves. And when you get here, you see that it's this caricature and stereotype that's been created.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>