

Transcript

Episode Title: “How to Get Residency in America” with Itiah Thomas

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ITIAH [00:00:00] Oh god that was such a manic last day, silly me, decided to still work that day. And I said, I did pick up my password, oh my god the worst, because it ended up being held up at the Vietnamese Embassy longer than I intended and then went back to work. I was late to my farewell party, said my goodbyes, then decided that I needed to get my hair braided because I was like, “I don't want to manage my hair while I was abroad,” so I made it to the airport. So by the time that I got on that plane, there was nothing but relief, that somehow this had all come together and worked itself out by the grace of God.

CHRISTINE [00:00:45] Hey, everyone. Welcome to *Flourish in the Foreign*, a podcast that affirms and elevates the stories and voices of Black women living and thriving abroad. This podcast centers on living abroad as a pathway to wellness, and wellness in all aspects, professional, financial, spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical. Welcome back to the show. And if you're new, hey, I'm Christine, a Black American expat living in Barcelona, Spain, yes. Trying to thrive because 2020, goodness, I mean, I think everyone has a year that they remember quite profoundly or aspects of the year, and there's definitely, probably decades that we don't really remember in that crystal clear way. But 2020, I remember everything about this year, I think I might remember this year down to the weeks of this year, it has been the same. So for those of you that are new, I'm the host and creator of *Flourish in the Foreign*, and *Flourish in the Foreign* is a labor of love, but labor, nonetheless. It takes time, resources and money to put on this amazing podcast for y'all every single week. So I'm asking y'all to support this podcast. There are several ways for you to support this podcast. So let's go through them. Number one, become a Patreon supporter of this podcast by going to www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. Number two, you can Cash App this podcast, Cash App is kind of like a tip jar. If you think an episode was exceptionally good, or really helpful or just made you say, “Dang, I love this podcast,” go ahead and just send a little something to us via Cash App, you can do that with \$flourishforeign. Number three, you can place an ad or sponsor an entire episode of this podcast here. Yeah, you can. If you have a business or service that's in alignment with this podcast, go ahead to the flourish in the foreign website, www.flourishintheforeign.com/contact, and drop me a line and we can discuss how you can support this podcast. And also get your business and product in front of my amazing audience who has been just so receptive already. I've had several of my guests say that they have been contacted about their professional services just through this podcast. Number four, be sure you have subscribed to this podcast, that you have rated this podcast five stars on Apple podcasts, and that you have left a review. I repeat that again, leave a review. It takes about 30 seconds to say, “This podcast is my favorite podcast, and I love it,” or whatever you want to say. It's so important for you to leave a review of the podcast so that people know that this podcast is great. And what I'm saying in the description and all those kinds of things is legit. People should spend their time to listen to this podcast. So please go ahead. If you have not left a review and you've been listening to this podcast, hey, you know, the deal is you are a veteran. You are seasoned

now. Go ahead and write that review today. Yes, please. Thank you very much. Number five, please be sure to share, share, share this podcast. I mean in times like this in which the world is just interesting. We'll say that's the best word. That's the most diplomatic way the world is interesting. People are feeling antsy and a little bit nervous. This is a podcast that helps the left people know that one, that their wellness is so important, especially as Black women, our wellness is so important, and our wellness can really be just kick started by living abroad. And if you've ever thought about living abroad, this was this podcast as it gives you just amazing anecdotal information about what it's really like living in these places. So share this with a friend or a colleague, or, hey, maybe you have a whole newsletter of your organization once you go ahead and tell them to listen to this, because let me tell you this podcast centers, Black women, that I have had reviews and I have had comments from a lot of people that do not identify as Black women, and they love this podcast. Don't just hoard this podcast, know, share the love. Go ahead and share this podcast with a friend and acquaintance. Maybe I'm sorry, you don't like but just be like, you know what today? I'm gonna do it right? And I'm gonna, I'm gonna send you this podcast. And you know, that's your civic duty for the rest of the week. There you go. You're done. Number six, make sure that you are following the podcast, yes, on Instagram, especially because that is where I drop new information about the podcast. Follow the podcast [@Flourishforeign](#), Twitter, [@Flourishborn](#) Facebook, *Flourish Born* and that's where you can find everything. And as I mentioned a couple weeks ago, I am maybe for new listeners. I'm a business strategist. That is how I stay in Barcelona. I work for myself, I have my own business and a new aspect of my business is really catered towards Black women and women of color, really trying to help these women to leverage their talents and their expertise into viable online businesses so that they can pursue their dreams of going abroad. Now viable online businesses really refer to you freelancing, business or consultancy business, that is my wheelhouse. That's what I help women do. You know, going abroad is fantastic. But like I said, this podcast is about wellness. And you cannot be well, if you are not professionally, well, if you're not financially well. And so my service is really centered around just being professionally fulfilled by doing what you want to do. And being financially abundant. Make the money that you're trying to make while living wherever you want to live. Now, if this is interesting to you, please hit me up. Learn more about my services at www.christinejob.com. So definitely check me out. All right, that wraps up the support portion of this here podcast on to the next story. Today's story is fantastic. Like I always say, I mean, I say this every week, but it's true. I'm sorry, my guests are fantastic. But let me say this week's guest is Itiah, and how she ended up abroad, and why she ended up abroad I think, very fascinating. But I'm going to let her tell you all about it.

ITIAH [00:0 08:22] My name is Itiah Thomas, and I am 35. I'm from Brooklyn, New York, and I currently live in Brisbane, Australia. I left the states when I was 30, and traveled for eight months. By the time I landed here in Australia, it was literally a couple of days before my 31st birthday. My mother was always very encouraging of me following my dreams, and doing things that made me happy. She understood from a very young age that I was quite an independent person, and was thankfully willing to let me go to boarding school when I came home really excited about that opportunity. I went to a boarding school when I was about 13 in Massachusetts. That was really quite formative for me in terms of meeting people from various countries and being exposed to a lot of different sports and opportunities. That's when I started

traveling internationally. And it's kind of been a bug ever since. I've traveled to about 54 countries by now.

CHRISTINE [00:09:32] I asked Itiah to tell me what's it like going to boarding school.

ITIAH [00:09:38] I felt really comfortable being there because I found a family not quite my own family of friends and teachers there as well. I never felt alone while I was there. I think boarding school was one of the best decisions of my life and the trajectory that it sent me down. And I am a major proponent of it. It cultivates that sense of independence, or strengthened that for me, and it was an environment where everyone has such amazing talents. And it was actually really friendly. There weren't many women of color there but there were. And we're still very close friends to this day, as well as many other friends that I've met there, my high school friends that are some of my closest friends, because we were together during those formative years. For me, it wasn't difficult to be there, just about five hours away. But I was really immersed and enjoying my experience there. And I loved it and would do it again, and again, I went to Brown, my degree was in Urban Studies with a focus in the built environment. And I was always very interested in urban landscapes and cities and how people use space and architecture. So that was one of my drivers. I studied Japanese while I was there. that started in high school, continued in college. I did study abroad in Japan for about four months. Some of the things I studied there besides language was Japanese architecture and post World War Two history. I spend a lot of time roaming around in the streets. And it's one of my favorite things to do while I'm traveling in general. I stayed with a host family while I was there, in Japan, which I think was definitely the key difference. We went to places on the weekends, we've had dinner every night together, they were retired, they were able to spend plenty of time with me, which is great going abroad, while in college was was definitely a highlight and was my first time living abroad and definitely opened my eyes to wanting to have that experience again. I'd say the thing that probably delighted me the most about Japanese culture is how cognizant of space they are, in terms of how much space they take up, and that their impact is to someone else. The trains, people were quiet, mindful, and respectful. Even though they're like, really grounded. If there was something that someone dropped, someone else would like run behind him, pick it up and put it in their pocket. People would just really aware of the environment and each other. And there was just a respect that was there that was understood, that I was in awe of and really wish I could have brought back that mannerism to the States. It was really tiring speaking, and actively listening in another language. Because I was with a host family, I couldn't just have class in Japanese and then come home and switch off. It would be rude to have to maintain that while at home. I think it was always interesting and funny to see people's responses when I did understand and could speak Japanese. Though they'll be not amazing and fluent, I knew enough to be able to understand what was going on. I always took people by surprise, which was always funny. It was a great experience. One thing that I didn't expect was to spend as much time in school as we did. I thought it would be a bit more of an immersion experience in that sense, like, but we were constantly in class. They're very strict about, oh, it's studying my friends. I was studying abroad in Spain, when they were constantly on school trips and partying out late late at night, not really attending class. And today we're having a ball, whereas I'm very studious experience. So if there's anything I could have changed about that I would have been

that the school wasn't as stringent as it was, and that I could actually spend more time experiencing Japan.

CHRISTINE [00:13:47] I wanted to know how her career progressed, after university.

ITIAH [00:13:51] After I graduated Brown, I moved down to Northern Virginia to Alexandria. I started out in DC in Commercial Construction Project Management and in that space, I was able to do a variety of projects. I was gaining breath in terms of building a new morgue, an office building, some banks, just data centers, at that point, being quite client side oriented and really getting a chance to work with the architects and help influence the design and see what actually got built that was really cool just kind of moving along the ranks with that. I was able to move to San Francisco with the same company and then being in construction that's allowed me to move abroad to Australia to get a start here. In terms of being a skilled migrant, that was a valuable skill. My career has allowed me to transition to different states and countries. I was really happy with that even though when I came to Australia it wasn't the same company. In terms of how I've evolved as a person or in life. I'd say, as I started to get deeper in my career in commercial construction, it was something that ultimately felt misaligned. I had a personality mismatch with the industry, it was more that I'm sending someone who's really quite efficient, and logical, and there were not a lot of times. It was very political at times and that was just not my vibe. And I didn't always feel like I was healthy in that space, it was working with ours, it was really intense, really quite stressful. You can't really mess up when you're building a hospital. People's lives are at stake and it's a bit of a high stress environment. But I guess in general, I don't think people always spoke to each other really well. For me, I didn't feel I could be my happiest, greatest self in the industry and continue to lead people in that space when I wasn't happy in it. They were ever grateful that I was able to move countries and states, and it was able to build buildings that were impactful for the lives of others but ultimately, it was an industry that I needed to step away from.

CHRISTINE [00:16:10] Now, Itiah's journey to going abroad is really interesting, and so I asked her to describe her journey abroad.

ITIAH [00:16:21] I was traveling in the Mediterranean for 24 days on a cruise, and that was such an amazing experience that by the time I got back to DC, I was like, "I have to figure out how I can do this more often." So then the next year, I decided to travel a bit more, still wasn't fixing that itch for me. I moved to San Francisco and for me, I was trying to figure out if, San Francisco, moving there, would make me want to stay in the country. That was what I was trying to assess when I was there. While I was having a ball, it became pretty clear. I was still feeling quite restless. I was like, "Yep, I enjoy San Francisco but I at least know that I wouldn't stay because of San Francisco." That's when I just started kind of going into research mode and started to figure out, "Okay, what are the conversations I need to have with work, with my landlord to break my lease? What is it that I need to do to start researching and being prepared?" because at that point, I wasn't dead set on moving abroad, per se. I was just like, I want to go on a long term trip. And then as I started researching more and more, I was like, "Yep, no, I actually want to move abroad and set my sights on Australia. I know that I had to go before my 31st birthday. That would be in January 2016. If I work backwards, then I need to

make sure that I am in by December of 2015 in Australia because I want to see the fireworks in Sydney. Okay, Australia as far as I want to be able to do some traveling beforehand. When do I need to leave in 2015 to be able to fill in before I get to Australia because I know that once I get to Australia, I'll have one year of that visa and I wanted to spend that time in Australia. I asked for a sabbatical from work for 10 months and I literally started selling everything that I could and boxing up what I you know, I would want to be sent to me if I definitely landed in Australia and decided I want to stay in Australia.

CHRISTINE [00:18:11] I wanted to know about the last day Itiah was in San Francisco, right before she embarked on this world tour.

ITIAH [00:18:20] By the time I left, oh god that was such a manic last day. Silly me. Decided to still work that day. I went to work in the morning, legit actually worked. And so I did pick up my passport, oh my god the worst because it ended up being held up at the Vietnamese Embassy longer than I intended. I had to go pick up my passport. Mind you, this is the day I'm leaving. I then go back to work. I was late to my farewell party, had my lunch then went back to work, said my goodbyes to everyone then decided I needed to get my hair braided because I was like I don't want to manage my hair while I was abroad. I got my hair braided, that takes, I don't know, what four or five hours, literally had takeout at the end of it. Brandon hugged, my last friend, made it to the airport. Another friend met me there in the airport, we had a send off as well, and literally that was the most manic last day, I will never ever do that again. I don't know what possessed me but by the time that I got on that plane, there was nothing but relief that somehow this had all come together and worked itself out, by the grace of God. The only thing I booked for myself when I left the United States was a one way ticket to Thailand for seven days at a retreat that I was starting off with fasting and meditation and yoga, and that's how it started with my trip. I didn't book anything else besides that. That was intentional because I really wanted to see where life took me. I had an idea of the route kind I went to go in, but didn't book anything. I arrived in Thailand, just completely drained but happy that I was going to be starting kind of with a practice that was going to put me in a space to start my trip. I was chasing summer, and summer and architecture and festivals. That was what was helping me guide my route. I left in April of 2015, it was springtime. I was in Asia for two months, four months in Europe and another two months in Asia as I worked my way down to Australia.

CHRISTINE [00:20:35] I wanted to know how she ended up in Australia, in Sydney.

ITIAH [00:20:39] Sydney was a place I visited in 2013 and I felt an immediate connection to Sydney when I visited then. I remember being on this walk from Bondi to Coogee, these two beaches. and I remember texting with a friend that I think found the place that I want to live. it was just such a deep and immediate connection with it. Between the vibe, didn't feel that different from San Francisco, though it was just geographically really pretty. I could see myself there and I saw neighborhoods that I was interested in living in that was really key for me as well. I picked up my favorite wine bar that I would spend time in so that I could already envision myself there. But when I came back to the States, basically between 2013 and 2015, that was my time where I was back in DC for a bit and in San Francisco, and then traveling. It was just an evaluation of like, was that just me living the high of being on vacation or is that something that I

well and truly am still motivated to do? And for me, the answer was still, yes. I feel like Sydney chose me, almost. The only thing that I had really done to prepare for Australia before actually getting here was getting my visa. I got my visa, a one year working holiday visa and it wasn't until about two weeks before arriving in Australia did I actually start to be like, "Oh, I guess I had to look for some accommodation." And so really, what I started to realize is that Sydney is a major place for people to come from New Years. And at that time, the hospitals have basically two week minimums, almost a one week minimum for to stay and they jack the prices up. Here I am just before arriving in Australia, not actually having a place to stay. To be honest, I wasn't sure if I wasn't wanting to stay in Sydney or Melbourne. I had been in my research like "Ah, maybe I'll give a moment a second look." At first I was thinking, "Okay, I will spend two weeks in Sydney and then I'll spend two weeks in Melbourne, and from there I decide which one I actually want to live in." That was what my thought process was two weeks prior to arriving in Australia. Thankfully, I had a friend who I met super randomly. We happen to sit next to each other on a bus a year prior, and within minutes. We were both saying how interested we were moving to Australia. Anyway, she had moved to Australia before I did and was my kind of connection here. I was like, "Hey, can I stay at your house?" And she's like, "I'm actually not there. I'm back in the States but let me just check in with my flatmate and make sure it'd be okay for you to stay in my room while I'm in the States." And thankfully her flatmate came back and said that was fine. She was like, "You can stay here for one week until I come back." And I was like, "Okay, well, one week is— I can do that." It wasn't till the two days before I got on a plane to arrive, basically on the 27th of December, into Sydney, did I decide that I was like, "You know what, I felt really strongly about moving to Australia because of the experience I had in Sydney, not the experience I had in Melbourne. Let me just full on give it a go and move to Sydney. And if for some reason. I'm not liking it, then I'll explore Melbourne." When I got to Sydney, I just threw myself into looking at websites to try to find someone who was looking for a flatmate, because I had a week at my friend's house. And then literally, she was about to come back and I begged her I was like, Can I just stay on your couch during this next week? Because just before she got back, literally, I found a place but they were like, okay, you can't move until January 10. She allowed me to stay on the couch for another week until the place that I wanted to stay was available. That was my start, and I already knew I wasn't gonna have a job for my first six months or so because I didn't want to work, wanting to get insurance in the lifestyle, and potentially sell my own business. So my first six months were focused on how to do that. I've never done this before. And I've never done it in a foreign country, and I don't know anyone here except for this one friend, who we didn't actually connect with that much once I was here. She was crazy busy and never really had time to really hang out with me. I spent a lot of my time actually going to meetups to get to know people. There were meetups with women and meetups with entrepreneurs. I spend a lot of time going to entrepreneur hubs and listening to talks and meeting other entrepreneurs because in general, love the energy of entrepreneurs and the openness and just how entrepreneurs think. I spend a lot of time in that space. I think in that time period, I just got to know a lot of people who are still very close friends to this day that I made in my first six months. The six month time period was like, "Okay, how I'm going to get this business started, because that was going to be the one of the ways that I thought I could actually be able to stay," and didn't have to go back into construction but lo and behold, that was not going to work out. And because they changed the laws, I couldn't self sponsor through my

own company. I wasn't eligible to kind of come in on my own merits, I was a skilled migrant. And because my undergraduate wasn't in construction management, it was an urban studies, I couldn't come in completely without having to be sponsored by a company. So towards the end of my first six months, it was like, Okay, I need to figure out how to shelve my company that I've started and get a job in construction that I can get sponsored, and start working for a company in the last six months that I don't have to go back to America. I know it sounds. actually, now that I'm recounting the story that I was very haphazard in all that I've done. But I'm actually quite calculated person, the planning that I did was actually pretty unreal in terms of preparing myself to leave. But I was really quite open as to what happened after the fact. And I knew that I had savings, and I was intelligent enough and flexible enough that I would be able to figure it out. And worst case is that I ended up back at a job in San Francisco, which was not meant to be a bad option. But this first six months in the second six months looked very different from each other here in Australia.

CHRISTINE [0026:31] I wanted to know how Itiah went about finding a job in Australia in her industry.

ITIAH [00:26:43] It was primarily between job boards, job boards, and recruiters. Anyone that I could find that knew someone who knew someone, I'm not shy, I'm very willing to put myself out there and saying that this is what I'm looking for. www.seek.com.au is a big job board that's here, indeed, as well. I had some connections in the states with some people like what I'm saying in the south, I was like, "Hey, do you have anyone that I can, that you can put me in touch with. I'm here in Australia, reaching out to existing contacts with that, but how I ended up actually finding my job was through a recruiter. And I was paying attention to the job boards and seeing which recruiters which companies were putting out the kinds of jobs that I was interested in. And then I contact those recruiters directly and say, "Hey, this is what I'm after. The job that I applied for wasn't the one that the recruiter thought that I'd be." He basically was like, "Hey, there's another job that I think you'd be even more suited for," and he put me forward but for that, I will say like I very much had to negotiate the terms, myself or other I felt more comfortable to negotiate, because this is not really a culture where people push for things like me, I don't know if it's my New York waves or whatever. But I'm not someone that takes no, very lightly. So I had to definitely negotiate my salary, and definitely prove that I had the experience because there was a lot of translation though we're all speaking English, there was still translation of titles and experience that I had to do, like, literally at times drawing on a whiteboard for them to understand the experience that I had. And I had to negotiate the terms of me being sponsored by them, as well, because at first they were only going to offer the six month position. I was like, No, I need a full time position, and I need you to sponsor me. Like, those are all things that I had to negotiate myself, the recruiter wasn't willing to put me forward for the amount that I said that I wanted to be put forward to, I was like, please step aside. Thank you for getting me in the door. I will finish this thing. In terms of the construction climate, and work culture here. Actually, I didn't find it to be all that different, which is unfortunate. I was hoping that it would be. I feel like construction is just a different beast in itself, and it doesn't really matter what country you're in, or what side of the coin you're on. It's a tough, it's a rough industry. So I feel like it transcends location. It wasn't completely comparing apples to apples in the sense a sound now I was on the owner's rep side working with a government agency. Before I was on the builder side, working

with public and private entities. I was able to get closer to working not 12-14 hour days, I was able to get closer to working 9-10 hour days, but still was a lot. I'd say there are still things that were misaligned here and things like, "Oh, maybe construction will be different here. Maybe I would like it better being in a different country and on a different side of the coin," but while I loved the companies that I worked for, that's never been the issue. I think it was more of an industry level mismatch.

CHRISTINE [00:29:41] I asked Itiah what point did she feel settled into Australia.

ITIAH [00:29:46] It really wasn't until I got permanent residency, and that was February 2018. two years in. One, my day to day life was fine. I felt that moment, if they came back and said, "No, you didn't get permanent residency," that was my third attempt in terms of not getting permanent residency, but to be able to stay in the country. I tried to self sponsor my own company, and I tried to get in by not having to be sponsored at all. And NASA, this is my third attempt, and if that didn't work, you have 28 days, I think, to leave the country. That was part of the reason why I didn't get my own place and just stay with someone else. Because here you have to buy your own refrigerator and washing machine, and stuff, but you have to furnish a place and I was like, "Oh my god, there's no way that I can sign a lease and furnish the place and definitely decided that I'm going to stay." And it's industry or even think about moving from my job because my sponsorship was tied to me being at this job. The moment I found out, I had to like pull over. Because I was in absolute tears, I just felt there was just such a weight, and a freedom that was lifted because I no longer was tied to this job. I just felt like they couldn't be taken away from me, I could be here but did want to look for a place to stay, I could be sore if I now I was eligible to buy property if I wanted to. It was the first time I actually put something on the wall in my room, because I was like, "Oh, I don't have to move. I don't need to take things off the wall." It was just a hung up thing on the wall that day when I got home because I felt like I could actually stay here, and it wasn't going to be at a moment's notice that that could be taken away.

CHRISTINE [00:31:36] I want to know more about the permanent residency process in Australia, and I asked Itiah describe it, and I asked Itiah to walk me through it.

ITIAH [00:31:45] My process is probably easier than what other people would probably have to go through. And that's because my skill was on their skills shortage list of what they basically deem as not having enough people in Australia to fill that role. And just project management, I firstly want to edit a loan because it just looks pretty straightforward but then I realized that the code that I was initially applying for wasn't going to be something that I was going to be eligible to get permanent residency under because I didn't have an undergraduate degree in construction management, I had a phone call with it and an immigration agent has to understand the code that I can apply under because I did a lot of the paperwork myself. I worked with another agent, she just really had to look it over and make sure that it was conforming, and she worked with my employer to make sure that they had all their ducks in a row as well, to be able to go through the sponsorship process with me. It was about how he had to go through a third party assessment to basically confirm that, yes, you have the skill set that you say you have. It wasn't a test or whatever. But they basically looked through all your

credentials and your degrees in your work history. I was able to actually apply directly for permanent residency, a lot of people who come over from my working holiday visa and a lot of people have to come over to sponsorship, maybe for two years for a company before they are eligible to start applying for permanent residency. But because of the visa class I was under and the fact that I was a skilled migrant. I was able to apply directly for permanent residency that cut out two years process, then it was just a waiting game for them to come back to me on that. And then all of a sudden one day said it was just granted. I was really lucky in that sense, that was really nerve wracking, trying to go online and see if there was any progress. No one's contacting you from the moment that I submitted to get assessed. Assessment took about three months. And then you have to pass assessment before you can actually submit for your permanent residency papers. Then from permanent residency papers to actually hearing back, that was 14 months before I actually got granted. That was the permanent residency process for me. I became eligible to apply for citizenship pretty much by the time I hit my fourth year in Australia, because you have to have permanent residency at least one of those four years, which case I had it for two years, and I had been living in the country for four years and other requirements. You can't have been out of the country for a certain number of days in a certain period of time. The citizenship stuff is pretty easy once I just showed them my eligibility to apply for citizenship that within three months, two, three months of that and then I got a notification for me to be able to sit for my citizenship test and kind of interview that was supposed to be the 22nd of May but because he can't do any of that in person, I am now indefinitely postponed. I'm not sure quite when I'll have the opportunity to sit for the test. interview. But then basically the next step after that is you kind of wait for up to six months before you can get invited to the ceremony, and that's when you actually become a citizen. And then from there, you can apply for a passport.

CHRISTINE [00:35:12] I asked Itiah about her experience being a Black woman traveling abroad.

ITIAH [00:35:18] I probably practice this by saying that being in boarding school, and college and DC, although people consider it a chocolate city, essentially. So like I've already got was really quite used to being in the minority. I didn't feel that was really any different by moving to Australia. I feel my life experiences had prepared me for that. I didn't really find that to be drawing. Traveling has prepared me for that because they're not as many Black women traveling that you see as well. I know that we're for sure we exist, even have a Facebook group that wasn't really a jarring experience. Yes, you'll get looks, and so people do and I don't know whether to attribute that necessarily, to me being Black, me being a woman, they might find something that I'm wearing that day intriguing, something about my yeah, appearance. The fact that I'm my boyfriend is an older white male and we're in an interesting mix of our family dynamic, and with his children as well. I mean, people can be looking at me for any number of those reasons, I have no idea but I guess I didn't feel uncomfortable. Moving here, I think that probably being American, from New York, and I'm in San Francisco, there's a cool factor. And that played to my advantage for the acceptance as a foreigner to the country, and I would say that I had a relatively smooth transition, being a woman of color here.

CHRISTINE [00:36:50] I asked Itiah to describe dating in Australia.

ITIAH [00:36:54] The dating scene in Australia, and like, I'll even say that I can't necessarily blanket statement of Australia, per se, I can only speak about Sydney in particular. And I'd say that I didn't think the dating scene was amazing at all. I think that's one of the downfalls of Australia that I think is really unfortunate, is the dynamic between men and women. I was used to according in the States, I found men to be quite forward when their interest is really into the point that you're just like, I'm not interested, please let me but they weren't shy. Whereas here I thought and we're actively asexual, literally doubting like, "Okay, am I not pretty enough? Am I not interesting enough? What's going on? Are they interested at all? Do I need to be more forward? How do I need to navigate this?" This just feels like a lot of hard work, there wasn't according seen, my take on part of what's happening is that there's a lot of single sex schools. So my impression is that there isn't this healthy relationship that happens between young people at a young age in terms of how to interact with each other. It was very much if you weren't in the same circle, to begin with, whether that be in friend circle or work circle, or had some prior connection, then people were just a little less likely to come out of their shell and start new conversations. And that's whether it's friendship, or romantic. In general, there was a lot more effort that had to be put into being like, "Hey, hey, you over there, Actually, you know, want to talk to you. I'm interested in you." You almost had to put a sign on your forehead. And that was new. I'd been posting on Facebook about how horrible of a time I was having a dating scene. And I would say this is not just Australians, there was dating, foreigners that were living in Australia, but there's something about Sydney that was bringing this out of them. But my boyfriend and I had become Facebook friends through some mutual friends kind of earlier in the year and he had been seeing my trials and tribulations and the dating scene, and occasionally would like something or comment on something but we hadn't actually met in person yet. It was quite like later in the year that we met in person and I just went over and thanked him for something you'd helped me with earlier in the year and said, "Hey, it was nice to meet you in person." And then from there, we started talking some more and and then eventually started dating but it was definitely a hard slog in the beginning and to the point that I was just like, I think I'm just gonna become a lesbian and she's easier. It is the male dating scene. It was just not it was not it at all.

CHRISTINE [00:39:22] Itiah started in Sydney and now lives in Brisbane. I asked her what was the catalyst for the move.

ITIAH [00:39:26] My boyfriend lived a bit North of Brisbane. We were doing long distance for two and a half years. While I was in Sydney, and he was here in Queensland. Every time I came to visit I felt really calm. Sydney was starting to feel like New York for me. It was getting a bit more hectic, I guess then my time here and in Brisbane whenever I came to visit. Of course he'd come down to visit Sydney as well, and he was living up on the coast, which speech, which for most people, that'd be lovely. But for me, I was insanely bored. We basically agreed that if you're willing to move to Brisbane City, then I'm willing to move from Sydney. A part of the reason that I couldn't move any earlier was because I was going to the sponsorship and need it to still stay in Sydney and to be eligible for that. So I transitioned careers while I was in Sydney as well to user experiences, I went to school down there. At that point, when I graduated, I was open to positions both in Sydney and in Brisbane, and seeing which was coming through first, but then it got to a point I was like, I'm just gonna fully commit to Brisbane and look for positions

up there and said, Really, I had nothing tying me to Sydney anymore. I didn't have my I didn't have an apartment. Of course, I had my friends, but I still have my friends. And I was gonna really give it a go without a relationship by being like, let's move in together. Up here in Brisbane, the timing worked out well, in terms of no longer needing to be committed to staying in Sydney. And he was said, willing to move to Brisbane. So yep, it's been— in July we'll make one year.

CHRISTINE [00:41:11] I asked Itiah about being in an intercultural relationship, and how is her experience thus far, and how did she successfully navigate it.

ITIAH [00:41:18] Language is more of a factor than I would have thought. Even though we all speak English, there's different vernacular that's being used. And so when you're in relationship, you have to make sure that you communicate well. But I'm having using the same words, and being able to understand your partner, quite literally what they're saying is part of that. So there definitely are times where I'm just like, I really actually legit do not understand what you just said. Either it was the accent, or it was the word that he used. That is another another dynamic in understanding each other. Thankfully, he's quite worldly person and had traveled quite a bit. We have perspective wise, my outlook on life were quite aligned as individuals. That's broaching culture. This is the first time of me dating someone with children, of which their children are very much young. And in their life, he basically had children 50% of the time when we first met. So I was like, oh, playing stepmom-ish effort for three children. Two younger boys, and a teenage now, woman, she's 18. And so like that, that was new in terms of having instant family. Even though I was in Sydney, for the most part of this, I was trying to get to know them. And well, not living here, trying to make sure that I get to know them across that span of time as well, was just just putting in that effort to make everyone feel comfortable in that space. And getting to know his family as well, and him coming over to meet my family. There's, he's in pretty much every video chat that I have with my mom and he's involved. At some point in it, my family knows him well. He's only been to the states once to hang out with my family, they know who he is, they ask and check in with him. So that's been great to be able to bring him into the fold of friends and family as well. In terms of being intercultural, it's not new for me to date someone that's not of the same race, if that wasn't new to me, or a different nationality. I was doing that when I was living in the States. Those aspects were entirely new here for me in Australia. Now, whether they were new for other people who were observing it different story, maybe it's because we have an age difference, and as well as ethnicity and nationality. So definitely do occasionally get some look as people try to figure out what that dynamic is. His daughter is taller than me and looks more grown than me when she does all her makeup and whatnot. So I could see people kind of wondering like, Oh, "Is he dating the friend, a daughter's friend?" "Who is that?" and you can see it on their faces trying to figure it out in the mall. It's funny. If I took it personally, all the times that people looked and stared at me or wondered or asked me questions and came up to me I'd ball in a corner somewhere.

CHRISTINE [00:44:25] I asked Itiah about the Australian response to COVID-19, and what were your impressions of the response?

ITIAH [00: 44:33] Look, I'd say this is probably one of the best places to be except for maybe New Zealand. I say that because we have had restrictions but probably not as many restrictions as what I've seen on the news in other countries. And I'd say that it's been a mix of one we just have a lot less people in the country and thus they're spread out we have I think was like about 24 million people in the country. That's pretty much the size of the US has, we have bit more space to move around. And in the lifestyle is by much people have really big terraces and backyards and stuff, but you can be inside self isolation, but still not feel you're cooped up in a tiny apartment. So if anything was just like, "Oh, I got to enjoy my backyard a bit more." People weren't really wearing masks in wide scale. Yes, their moments of things being off the shelves but that didn't last for long. It wasn't a supply issue was people were just in panic mode. Initially, I thought, given this quote, unquote, lockdown hasn't really been as severe as it's probably been in other locations, and where the community transition hasn't been as high. And cases in general weren't going to tie. I do think that they did get on top of it play sooner than maybe some other places, even at the height of this lockdown. And we were still able to go out to exercise and to take a walk. It wasn't like, you just had to go to the grocery store and come back home. I felt like, there were sections in place to make sure people were safe space and distance and whatnot. But it wasn't this complete, you need to be in your house at all times. I appreciated that.

CHRISTINE [00: 46:10] Because Itiah is an avid traveler, she started the women of color travel Facebook group. I asked her to describe to me why she created it, and what the community is like.

ITIAHB [00:46:26] I was wanting to create a space where women of color felt like there were other women of color who were doing what they were doing in terms of traveling and to share their stories and their experiences, and encourage and inspire other people to do the same. It's a group of about a little over 700 women, and they said for me, it was very important to not have it just be a group just for Black women. I wanted it to be a group for women of color. I was asked to join my group with another group that was specifically for Black women traveling. And I personally declined and that for me, I don't know, I've never really quite seen myself only in a box. For me, I think it was really important to embrace the experience personally of women of color more holistically. That for me was an important driver.

CHRISTINE [00:47:20] If you haven't figured out thus far, Itiah is incredibly ambitious and she is a serial entrepreneur. She has currently, or at least at the time of recording three ventures and I asked her to break it down for us. What were her businesses and what were their origin stories.

ITIAH [00:47:40] I created Leaping for Change, which is a private Facebook group but eventually, I will be offering paid programming within it. And it's for people who are looking to either move abroad or go on long term travel, to change jobs or change careers, to be supported and prepared to do that process because it can be overwhelming and daunting. That was being approached one on one about my transition into user experience design and my the places that I've lived, and if I could talk people through that, and I found that I was able to serve

people better in a group environment, and have people be able to help each other out through that. I created an e-commerce store, and it provides comfortable and fashionable travel and lifestyle goods. I want people to feel confident and comfortable whether they're on the plane or train or working out and they're in the kind of daily lifestyle and not have to be like kind of no muss, no fuss, clothing, and still look good. Things that didn't need to be ironed, and I only carry on the things that could be lightly packed away and could go with various outfits as well. The logo is a woman who has big bold curly hair, and she has a map of the world on her face. She's definitely ready to go and explore, and on her shoulder is a plain iced tea with my initials and roaming this world. I created that because there were so many things I'm like, "I wish I had this on a shirt." I wish I had a shirt that would say what I'm thinking and feeling while I was on this longtime chip. Some of it was positive, some of it negative and I also love collecting clothing from around the world and I realized there were these pair of leggings that I've seen the world with me. So I wanted to have something that people could have with them that they can also take around the world and that's their travel shirt. So that's the story behind it, and I eventually do want to have not only my branded stuff but a collection of things of my kind of everything's kind of Oprah's favorite things. My favorite things that I've found around the world are bags that I've loved dresses, and be able to make that available to people to purchase as well. So a luxury access club is kind of fun to have new business ventures that I'm working on as well. Basically, what it allows people to do is to be able to enjoy the amenities, and the facilities of a luxury hotel, without having to be an in-house guest, basically being able to have a day pass for up to 24 hours to use these facilities. And it's targeted towards people who are either locals or have a long layover or you work remotely and you want to work from a hotel instead of a co-working space, or if you're already on vacation, and you are staying in another accommodation, but you want to check out another accommodation. So there are all kinds of reasons why people may not need to actually book a room, but still want to patronize a resort or a luxury hotel. Really excited to see where that's going and liking the energy and how well that's being received from people.

CHRISTINE [00:51:05] I asked Itiah to give some advice about starting a business abroad.

ITIAH [00:51:10] Look, I'm really trying to connect with the entrepreneur community, rather. In your country, whether that be through meetups or co-working spaces, but really trying to— or Facebook groups or what have you LinkedIn groups, but really trying to get connected with other entrepreneurs is really huge in that space, because then they can help navigate things for you. Just great people to know, having some finances to help you get through that. So not only personal finances that help you get through your month to month expenses, but have the extra finances that you'll have to be able to fund the business until it's able to get to a point where it can help fund you. And just say the network part of it is really huge because particularly countries where people feel like they don't they want to work with someone who has local experience or someone who understands a local market, the alignment and if you can get aligned with with locals, and whether that be through collaboration, or just people to introduce you to other people. And then that'll help people feel comfortable that you understand the local market. If you are trying to do a location based business. If you're going to do something that is

purely online, and your target audience is not any particular nationality or, and whatnot, then all good, that's great. I would like to try to make you have something that can have some kind of online aspect to that you can be able to scale. You'll have to think about what currency you want to offer, things in time zones are something that you're aware of, and how you're going to navigate time zones and have people be able to see things in their time zone as well. And make them aware of time, your availability and the time zones, the banking as well. You, your funds, not understand what your requirements are to be able to open up whatever you need so that you can receive your money.

CHRISTINE [00:53:13] I wanted to know how Itiah's definition of wellness had been influenced by her travels abroad, and now, her living abroad in Australia.

ITIAH [00:53:24] I think that my definition of wellness has definitely evolved. And I feel like that's probably an evolution, it's come with age, as well as the experience of having traveled and now living abroad. While wealth accumulation is still high on my priority list. That's become coupled with me being happy, as well, not running myself in the ground. Having this time to take those breaks for meditation and stretching during the day, taking walks and walking a lot more, we're getting out in nature a lot more as well as spending more time writing and thinking. My money is not spent on material things. It's very much spent on experiences, I didn't have any possessions for a good portion of about three years or so while I was traveling and then getting settled here in Australia. So I was able to live a more minimalist lifestyle, really interested in having a more balanced aligned lifestyle. And if things are not in alignment with that, then it's not in my circle. And being more vocal about being my whole self. I had three different LinkedIn accounts because I didn't want people who were in the construction world or in my to know my design world and people in the design world to know about my entrepreneurship putting people in this room and he's like, Oh my god, this is hectic. I've combined them all and said hey, look, this is me. This is all of me. And if you don't like it, then you're welcome to no longer follow me and people are actually, yeah, they're loving it. And for those who aren't, I guess they're not following along. I have no idea, but I'm not worried. I think wellness has been more comfortable with self and more explicitly stating who I am to others. They can either be aligned with that or not, and wanting to be more happy in my career, in finding my stride in my career, and making sure that I don't kill myself in the process of doing that.

CHRISTINE [00:55:26] What an awesome story. Thank you so much, Itiah. If you're interested in keeping up with Itiah, you can follow her on her social media.

ITIAH [00:55:36]

Either my LinkedIn, Itiah Thomas. My 'Women of Color who Travel' is a Facebook group, 'Leaping for Change' Facebook group, *luxuryaccess.club* is the website for the landing page right now. On Instagram, those are all kind of the same handles as well. *@Itiahthomas*, same with Twitter. So *www.icetroams.com* for the e-commerce store, pick your poison. It depends on whatever platform but I'm in pretty much on all of them. That's how you can find me.

CHRISTINE [00:56:16] Thank you again, Itiah, and thank you all so much for listening to this episode. I really appreciate it. If you enjoyed the episode, please be sure to support the podcast via Patreon, www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. Also via cash app \$flourishforeign. If you're interested in placing an ad with the podcast, go ahead and check out www.flourishintheforeign/contact and drop me a line. Also, if you identify as a woman of color podcaster aspiring or current, definitely be sure to check out the WOC Podcasters Insiders Membership. It is a fantastic membership. I'm a member of it. It really provides so many great insights for so many different levels of podcaster. If you are a beginner to intermediate advanced, if you're just starting out and trying to figure out the idea and the equipment to try to scale your podcast and increase listenership or even if you're trying to monetize your podcast, this membership is really fantastic and I highly recommend it. If you're interested in joining the membership, be sure to use the *Flourish in the Foreign* affiliate link which is located on the website. You can also access it through the link on the bios of all of our social media. So any of the social media bio links, so please utilize our affiliate link. It's no extra cost to you but helps us support the podcast. And of course, thank you to Zachary Higgs, who produced the music of this podcast. Zachary is an exceptional artist and producer. If you need music for your next project, he is your guy. I'm going to leave all of his information in the show notes. This week, I would love for you to take some intentional action, some intentional wellness action. So maybe after you do your journaling, or your meditation, your prayer work, whatever it is. And you get kind of this urge or a new idea pops into your mind, it might be completely strange, like what—doesn't make any sense. This week, I want you to take intentional, urgent action on that. Whatever insight that comes, whatever kind of divine urge or pull. This week, I want us all to urgently act on that. That's what this week's wellness practice is about being in tune. When the divine universe, whatever you want to call it says, “Hey, why don't you try this once you move here instead of analyzing it to death,” and I'm super guilty of that. Let's just act. Let's take it in just intentionally and urgently act on it. And let's see what happens. All right. Okay, that is it for this week. Take care of yourselves. Please be gentle. See you next week. On the next episode of *Flourish in the Foreign*,

NEXT EPISODE GUEST [00:59:48]

I went to the first class and after the instructor she says to me, “Do you like the class?” and I said, “I had a good time but I really need to know where you get these shoes. They're beautiful. Like these tangled shoes, I've never seen them before.” She says, “Oh, well, they're imported from Argentina and you should probably wait until you're sure about the dance. Before you go invest in expensive shoes.” I was like, “Lady, just tell me where to get the shoes. I don't care if I ever dance again,” but I stuck with the dance and I literally never stopped.

