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Article 1

Saudi Arabia has opened the door to tourism. Whether tourists should go remains up for debate

When Kyle Hyndman went to North Korea in 2007, he saw it as a chance to see what life was like for citizens there. He got it.

“Because we treated our guide pretty well, she actually gave us quite a long leash,” the Vancouver lawyer recalls of the government-mandated local handler who heavily controlled where the small tour group out of Beijing could go.

And while Hyndman says the tour provided some insight into the lives of the country’s residents, it required him to reconcile his desire to connect with the locals with the fact that any misstep could have negative ramifications for people long after he’d left.

“You are giving foreign money to a government that’s probably going to use it for nefarious purposes, but you are also exposing local people to the rest of the world, in a way that they just couldn’t get any other way,” he says. “It was actually really eye opening for me and hopefully for them, too.”

It’s the kind of balancing act people may have to perform if they accept a new tourism invitation from Saudi Arabia.
The Kingdom, which is widely viewed as one of the most conservative countries in the world and has historically only been accessible for business and religious travellers, recently announced that it will now offer visas to tourists. In late September, a tourism campaign launched on social media touting the country’s cultural and historical sites.

The country has come under intense international scrutiny in recent years. The death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, as well as the country’s severe restrictions on women’s

rights has raised questions about the safety of tourists who accept the offer. There is also a question of what, if any, responsibilities they have when they do go.

In recent years, travellers have found themselves with similar decisions to make about Zimbabwe, China, the United States and others.

"Saudi Arabia's up to some pretty terrible things to their own people and their neighbouring countries and that all would weigh on me for sure," Hyndman says when asked if he'd visit. "You have to just balance that with the positive impacts [of a visit] and hope that that interchange will actually lead to more change."

Dr. Laurel Besco, an associate professor in geography at the University of Toronto, agrees. Conscious decision-making is critical, she says, adding that tourists always have an obligation to do their research before travelling. That research should include an understanding of what is deemed respectful to the culture being visited in terms of behaviour and dress, and carrying themselves accordingly, she says.

Finding ways to directly help local businesses, charities, NGOs in the countries you're visiting could also allow travellers to make a difference. There may be opportunities to help on the ground, but often it may mean learning what you can while there and making your efforts to help once you're home. "If you choose to go to these places, look for areas to visit and to spend your money that are actually supporting the local populations," she says.

Hyndman also suggests supporting small businesses instead of government enterprises whenever possible. "If there are opportunities to interact with individuals rather than government officials, do that," he adds. "It's not just about whether you go, it's also about how you go."

Twenty years ago, Karen Green's travels took her to places that made her parents worry, including a stay in Israel while rockets were whizzing overhead. Today, the Chatham, Ont., writer and mother of two says she'd think twice about a trip to a spot such as Saudi Arabia, but wouldn't rule it out.

"I would never excuse atrocities or anything like that, but I also think that pulling back the curtain as much as possible is always a good thing and I think that these countries can exist the way that they do because they exist in a vacuum," she says.

For those looking to take advantage of Saudi Arabia's offer, Samuel Spencer, a travel adviser at Virtuoso Agency Ocean & River Cruises in Alberta, reminds travellers that Canadian travel advisories should be taken into account. A travel agent who specializes in the region you're visiting will ensure that they are top of mind, along with the political climate of countries that may be less than hospitable to some travellers.

"LGBTQ+ clients, for example, should be aware that several countries still regard homosexuality as illegal, and may refuse entry to same-sex couples or may impose restrictions on tourists, such as a requirement to have two beds in hotel accommodations, etc," he says,

Better to know what you'll be facing long before you get there.

All of it has to be taken seriously, but also with a dose of reality, Green says, pointing out that you don't have to go all the way to Saudi Arabia to find governments doing terrible things.
"We have our own unique shame here as well," she points out. When she shared Canada's history with missing and murdered Indigenous women with an international friend, it was a reminder that Canada has work to do, too.

"As much as it hurts to admit it, it's so good for other people to remind us that that happens here because it helps us fix it as thoroughly and quickly as we can."

Besco agrees, adding that we shouldn't simply leave Canada and pick up a responsibility to push back against oppression abroad.

"Finding those places where you can make a positive contribution starts at home."

Article 2

Nunavut in Canada's Far North Should Be on Your Bucket List

Spectacular adventures and indigenous cultures are waiting for those who venture to arctic Nunavut

"Are you ready?"

This was the question I heard most on my five-day trip to Nunavut, Canada. In this case, it came from Louis-Philip Pothier, one of the co-owners of Inukpak Outfitting.

He was sitting in the driver's seat of a snowmobile that was pointed toward the blinding white snow and ice of the Canadian Arctic. He looked relaxed and excited, like he had done this a million times — which, in fact, he has.

But this was my first time. I was sitting in the driver's seat of the snowmobile beside him, the size of the machine and the responsibility for driving it already weighing heavily on my mind. I had some comfort in the fact that my only job was to follow his lead.

"Ready!" I called back to him; the scarf wrapped around my mouth muffled the sound of my voice.

I raised two double-mittened thumbs as a backup.

Catching a glimpse of myself in the reflection of his mirrored ski goggles, I was pleased to see that there would be no way he could tell that I was lying. I wasn't ready. Who could be?

That morning, we were in Iqaluit, the capital city of Nunavut, Canada's northernmost territory. This is the Canada that travelers think of when they refer to the country as the "Great White North." In the few days I was there, I saw my first igloos; lusted over the giant fur-lined hoods and beautifully embroidered parkas of the indigenous Inuit; and marveled at kids who seemed oblivious to the biting winds.

Despite all its snowy whiteness, Iqaluit is a colorful place, with modern homes painted in bright, bold hues that pop against the natural landscape. The territory felt fresh and new, and that's because it is: Nunavut is Canada's baby.

Once upon a time, there were only two Canadian Territories — the Yukon and the Northwest Territory. But in April 1999, the Inuit were given control of the land that had really always been theirs, and Nunavut — the Inuktitut word for "our land" — was born. The change meant redrawing the Canadian map to give more than 800,000 square miles of mainly Arctic land back to the people. Twenty years later, the largest, newest and most northern part of the country remains a mystery to many.

Arctic Adventures

Truly exploring the territory requires time and money, but Iqaluit is an easy place to start. Local outfitters, such as Inukpak, are hoping to lure travelers north with a range of activities that cover everything from soft adventure to full-on professional expeditions.

My visit was definitely on the entry-level end of the scale. Our group rode snowmobiles for a few hours over the ice, eventually stopping at a semi-sheltered clearing where Pothier and his wife and business partner, Martine Dupont, put out snacks for our group to enjoy while we took in the view. Nearby, a small hole in the ice was proof that, while the temperatures suggested otherwise, it was spring here, and within a few weeks, the very spot where we were standing would be fast-flowing water. We were snowmobiling across the ocean — travel in Nunavut is filled with these kinds of surreal revelations.

Later, on a dogsledding adventure with North Winds Expeditions, I climbed into an oversize sled not too dissimilar from one that kids might test out on a small hill. But this time, it was tied to a half-dozen powerful Canadian Inuit dogs who were so excited to see us approaching that they were already jumping in the air.

Sarah McNair-Landry, our host, cautioned us to get on the sled before the animals were hooked up: The dogs instinctively know it's time to go the moment they are attached.

Before we knew it, we were off.

This terrain was no skating rink made smooth by a Zamboni — I felt every ridge and ripple on the ice as we bumped across the frozen tundra. The dogs' powerful legs pulled us forward through the crisp air.

McNair-Landry grew up here. Her parents initially ran the company and now, in their spare time, she and partner Erik Boomer take on expeditions worldwide that make my morning with them seem like a walk in the dog park.

McNair-Landry was the first woman to be recognized by the International Polar Guides Association as a Master Polar Guide, and she's the youngest person to travel to both the North and South poles. She has traversed the Greenland Ice Cap five times and spent 120 days circumnavigating Baffin Island by dog team.

So, I felt like I was in very good hands — even during the exhilarating moments when I could hardly catch my breath.

Local Traditions

Mind you, not every adventure in Nunavut requires breakneck speed. One morning, our group headed out to explore beyond the city limits. We boarded a single engine, turbo-prop plane for the flight over to Pangnirtung — an Inuit hamlet about an hour from Iqaluit. It was a sunny day, and the views from the air of the ice floe edge were absolutely stunning.

The descent was even better. Our wings were so close to the fjords as we landed that it felt as if the space was carved out specifically for them. The tiny airport is only a few minutes' walk from the heart of town and Angmarlik Centre. This visitor center tells the story of the territory's history, and information about the local communities is laid out with artifacts and easy-to-understand panels. Travelers can't help but appreciate the ingenuity of the people in this region: Survival here is never an accident.

This was a lesson we learned again with the day's final activity: ice fishing. Fishing for turbot, a type of flatfish, is one way that locals have lived off the land for generations. Commercial fishing remains a mainstay, and it takes skill, patience and fortitude to be successful.

Peter Kilabuk of Peter's Expediting & Outfitting Services took us to his family's fishing hole. To get there, we had to pair up and climb into qamutiiks — deep, wooden, lidless boxes that look like giant baby bassinets on traditional Inuit sleds. Each one is attached to the back of a snowmobile and towed across the ice. Two adults fit snugly in each, and at first glance, it looked like it was going to plenty comfortable.

It was not.

When the snowmobiles hit about 30 mph on the snow-covered ice, it felt like the equivalent of riding in a convertible during a snowstorm. I sometimes had the sensation that I was flying, and the thick caribou skin beneath me did little to soften the bumps. It was an experience so unique that, even as it was happening, I found it hard to believe. Still, I was grinning when we arrived at our destination.

The only shelter at the unmarked fishing hole was a small, shed-like cabin. Inside, a Coleman stove warmed the air and allowed for hot meals and coffee. Snack-lined shelves and bedding made it clear that if the weather changed, an overnight stay was a possibility.

Some of the local men cut a hole in the ice and lowered 200 feet of line into the water, and then we waited. Between the cozy shed, the friendly company and the beautiful landscape, the time went quickly. An hour later, we pulled 47 large fish out of the hole and put them in a heap on the ice. It was mesmerizing to watch.

The men gutted the haul on-site. They split the catch between fish that would be sold commercially and food for their families. When they were done, it was time to start the journey back.

Leaving felt a bit surreal. The ice walls in the distance seemed closer than they actually were, and the endless white made it hard to know which direction we came from or where we were heading.

We counted on our new friends to see the things we couldn’t — the way the snow peaks formed told them which way the wind was blowing, and which cracks in the ice were safe to cross and which weren’t. We relied on the people who live here now, but also on the ancestors who traversed the lands long before them and passed on their wisdom.

As I carefully maneuvered my body — mummified in layers of warm clothing — back into the qamutiik, I heard a familiar call.

“Are you ready?” the snowmobile driver asked.

I snuggled down into my coat, pulled the hood as far over my face as I could and called back, “Ready!”

It was only when I said it out loud, that I realized this time — despite the blowing winds and the snow already starting to crust on the fur of my hood — I meant it.

Article 3

What I’ve learned as a black traveler

Here’s why diverse perspectives make for better stories.

This year hundreds of African Americans will board flights to Ghana. For many it will be their first trip to the African continent. They’ll be answering a call issued by the West African country to come home. The ship believed to have carried the first enslaved Africans to what would become the United States of America set sail from Ghana. Four hundred years later, African Americans are yearning to understand better what and who was left behind. Ghana has declared 2019 as “The Year of Return.”

I’m not an African American, but as a black woman living in North America, I understand the attraction of the invitation. It’s no small thing to find a place in the world that wants to tell your story.

My history has always been impacted by race and travel. My parents emigrated from Jamaica to Canada in the ’70s. My childhood included annual trips to spots across Canada, the U.S., and the Caribbean. Each time we ventured beyond our neighborhood, my parents—intentionally or not—drove home the idea that the world was mine to explore. My memories of travel focused on what I was seeing, not on how I was being seen. Warm welcomes were a luxury I took for granted.

As I got older I realized that for many before me—including my parents—that had not been the case. As children, they hadn’t had the opportunities to travel that I was being afforded. And when as adults they did venture out, their kids in tow and far from their black-majority homeland, they were often met with prejudices I was too young to recognize.

Years later, my own travels around the world as a journalist helped me understand that the color of my skin is an integral part of my experience. The stories I write don’t have to be overtly centered on race to share my perspectives as a racialized person.

Being a black traveler means that during a reporting stint in Ghana in my 20s a local leader could single me out to share how much I look like a member of a nearby tribe. It means that in Ethiopia, Rwanda, England, and Northern Canada I am called “sister” (and treated as such) by people who can find a connection in my skin color.

It can also lead to experiences that are jarring and to opportunities that provoke conversation. In China and India, my hair and skin have stopped curious crowds.

Showcasing our similarities allows for the possibility of challenging stereotypes that go beyond travel (we swim, we ski, we hike).

I embrace all of these opportunities and the platforms that have allowed me to tell my stories, because I recognize that there aren't enough people who look like me who get the chance.

And that's a problem.

When voices are missing from the mainstream narrative, their absence is normalized. After more than 16 years as a travel writer, I still struggle to find other black storytellers in mainstream outlets.

This despite a 2018 report that African-American travelers, who make up about 14 percent of the U.S. population, spend around $63 billion a year on travel.

Many who have grown used to being an afterthought to prevailing conversations have carved out spaces of their own. It's how you get a *Green Book*—the printed annual handbook that, until its last issue in 1966, detailed the places that were safe for black road trippers to stop, eat, sleep, or stay out past dark.

It's what leads to the creation of Evita Robinson's Nomadness Travel Tribe, a lifestyle brand and community with a membership of 20,000 travelers of color. Or Outdoor Afro, founded by National Geographic Fellow Rue Mapp, which aims to reconnect African Americans with nature. It's why Karen Akpan's Black Kids Do Travel Facebook group exists—as a safe space for parents of color to share their travel triumphs and concerns. And although both Kellee Edwards and Oneika Raymond head up Travel Channel productions, the list of people of color as the face of any TV program in the industry is short.

Seeing and reading about people who look like us impacts how we travel because in those stories is the recognition that our lives—the accomplishments, hardships, history, and culture—matter.

But the stories of African-American travelers are essential for other reasons too. When mainstream travel pieces speak about safety, people of color know that we'll still need to save our questions about our particular fears for the direct messages of black friends and colleagues. ("Yes, I know the place is safe, but is it safe for *me?*") It's a system not unlike the ones friends in the LGBTQ community have developed.

And so when I take my kids, two black boys, into the world, I do so with all of these questions, opportunities, and responsibilities in mind. We have traveled to dozens of countries together, snapping family photos in front of the Eiffel Tower, the pyramids of Giza, the Great Wall of China, and Niagara Falls. I take them to places where their skin color is a fascination and to places where everyone looks like them. I've forced them into the travel narrative because they have every right to be there, but I also do it because I know that other families of color read our stories and, in our photos, see the possibilities available for themselves.

More diverse voices are needed, but you don't have to be a minority traveler to make a difference. Developing a more inclusive travel perspective requires no sacrifice. It isn't a charitable act; all travelers benefit when the fullest possible stories are told. And when we aren't getting the full

narrative, we are all robbed of facts and experiences that could prove transformational in the way we see the world.

Tourists, travel providers, outlets, and agents need only recognize the potential for tunnel vision and ask themselves whether there are perspectives missing in what we are reading and watching. And then, make every effort to seek them out.

As you consume travel, ask yourself: On whom is the camera focused? Whose story is absent from the historical tour? And those of us with a platform—be it blog, social media, TV show, or magazine—must offer more opportunities for people of color to hold the pen, the microphone, and the camera.

Inclusion is a recognition that the whole story—with its flaws and complexities—is far more beautiful than its individual pieces.

Travel makes us better, and multiple travel perspectives make us better still.