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ESSENCE Network: Founder of Up In the Air Life Shares 3 Destinations Every Black Woman Should Experience!

UP IN THE AIR LIFE CREATOR CLAIRE SOARES SHARES HER TOP TRAVEL TIPS AND THREE DESTINATIONS EVERY BLACK WOMEN SHOULD VISIT.



BY CHARRENE K. JACKSON · JANUARY 20, 2016

If life-changing travel is on your 2016 to-do list, Up in the Air Life creator Claire Soares has you covered. This Black travel tastemaker has traveled the globe creating unique experiences for professionals from dinner in Thailand's most legendary rooftop to organizing a trip to see Janet Jackson perform in Paris this spring. She turned her love of travel and organizing into a community of more than 10,000 global travelers. See her top travel tips and three destinations she thinks every Black woman should visit.

Name: Claire Soares
Age: 30s
Title: Founder and Chief Experience Maker of Up in the Air Life
Location: An airplane or airport lounge
Hometown: Woodbridge, VA
Twitter: @upinairclaire
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/upintheairlife/>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/upintheairlife/>

The gig: With Up in the Air Life, I curate international excursions and magical experiences for professionals and provide insight for our [online community](#). In 2015 we hosted seven trips including Yacht Week in Croatia and Greece, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia and Thailand. We offer fully hosted trips and someone on my team is on every trip. We always give swag bags and surprises along the way, like dinner at Red Sky Bangkok, one of the world's best rooftop experiences, or upgrades to first class.

The journey: I've been creating trips since high school. I was class president and planned a trip from Virginia to New Jersey for more than 100 seniors to go to Six Flags, so this has been in my blood. I went to school for computer



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science and continued planning trips for friends. After graduation, I worked for Lockheed Martin as a test engineer and would write user manuals and test software. While traveling as an adult, I saw a gap in the market for people like me who wanted incredible experiences. Like flying in an airplane over Dubai, which is something I did with friends, I planned a trip to Yacht Week in Croatia in 2014 for friends and decided to make this a business. I still have a day job now in sales. The goal is to be able to do full time.

Her top travel tip: Get a travel credit card. Any card that you're getting airline points would be a good benefit because you can put your monthly spending on the card, pay it off and that will translate over to points. If you sign up for an airline card, you'll often get a 50,000-point bonus just by putting \$3,000 in the card the first three months. That bonus is basically almost two domestic round-trip tickets.

Look into lounge membership. If you're doing a lot of international travel, look into the lounge membership through Priority Pass or you can buy the Lounge Membership Card on eBay.

Dress in layers and BYOsneak. Food on an airplane is so salt-laden and not healthy. Grab a salad or good meal at the airport and then take it with you on your flight. Bring nuts and fruit.

Places Every Black Woman Should Experience: Bahia, Brazil. It's also called Salvador. I just love that place. There's a lot of brown people, beautiful beaches and culture there. Everyday at sunset everyone claps. For \$20, you can sit on the beach and drink all day. The people are so nice.

Cartagena, Colombia. This place is near and dear to my heart. They have a nice, strong African heritage, and right outside is a state called Palenque. Palenque is actually a UNESCO protected place and it's the only colony that was built by African freed slaves that still exists. They've been there longer than Black Americans. They have their own language and their story is amazing. The people there are just so gracious.

Rome and Florence, Italy. As a Black woman in America, sometimes it feels you're not celebrated as much as other women. Italy was definitely somewhere where I felt like as a Black woman you get a lot of attention. To go somewhere with people with fair skin, where they are really checking for you was just an eye-opener. The other reason why I like



Italy is because if you grow up in America, you learn a lot about Rome, Caesar and the Vatican, and it was special to see all that history in person while feeling desired.

Her favorite travel memory: My first trip to Paris. I went alone, did the Folie Blanche Tour of the city and took a nap at the Eiffel Tower.

Confessions of a travel entrepreneur: As a business owner, people respect you when you keep your word. And if something doesn't go right, fix it. I remember overhearing a clerk on a trip tell someone that she had a transportation issue and that I brought a bottle of champagne to her room. People remember what you do to make it right.

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Her beauty bag: my favorite product is lip gloss. I use a stay-on red lipstick as my go-to lipstick.

Her travel bag: I like to travel with backpack rollers and my favorite brand is Flip Gear. They have a nice extended, it's like a backpack roller with backpack straps. I like to be light.

Her travel anthem: When I'm walking through the airport, I listen to Rihanna's So Hard. It gets me pumped. When I land, I almost always listen to Usher's song, Daddy's Home. I'm back to see my dog and loved ones.

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Financial Advice She Ever Received

LAUREN SIMMONS WANTS BLACK WOMEN TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR FINANCES IN 2021.



BY D'SHONDA BROWN - APRIL 14, 2021

When Simmons became the youngest female trader at the New York Stock Exchange back in 2017, she felt grateful that she even passed the Series 79 — which has an 80% fail rate — let alone make history. While this may not have been her initial goal or intent, Simmons certainly has been a way paver and certified pathmaker in the financial industry. She says that she never had “a direct interest” in equity trading until she was offered a position at the New York Stock Exchange.

“At the time, I wasn’t thinking that I would be making history by being the youngest or the second female African-American female equity trader,” Simmons admitted to ESSENCE. “I was only interested in securing my first job out of college and being successful in that role.”

As a powerful black woman in the world of finance, and notably the second Black woman in the Exchange’s 226-year history to hold her position, Simmons recognizes the power of the word, “no.” While the two-letter word can have an ugly label and sometimes triggers feelings of rejection, fear, or frustration, she has partnered with [Pure Leaf](#) to champion the many achievements of women that all started with them saying “no”. Simmons describes the brand’s messaging as “beautiful” for putting positive power behind such a small word with large negative connotations.

This [#InternationalWomensDay](#), we’re celebrating women like Lauren Simmons, who have said NO to limitations so they can say YES to what really matters. Click the link to our Instagram Stories and share your NO with our [#NoIsBeautiful](#) filter: <https://t.co/CyqFrrnLAE> [pic.twitter.com/CyqFrrnLAE](https://t.co/CyqFrrnLAE)

— Pure Leaf (@PureLeaf) March 5, 2021

“I said ‘no’ to limiting beliefs so I could say yes to shattering glass ceilings and continuing to push myself into different spaces that people often doubt I can. Women, people in general need to hear there is a positive in everything,” she said passionately. “The importance of ‘no’ is that you get to choose to write your own narrative, move past people who doubt you, and say ‘yes’ to pursuing anything your heart has to desire.”

When it comes to financial literacy, Simmons expresses the importance for not only Black women but for all gender identities, sexual orientations, and age range. “Unfortunately, America ranks 14th nationally when it comes to financial literacy. There is this common misconception that if you work in finance you are great with your personal finance — not true,” she depicts.

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She continues, "Financial literacy is beyond reading numbers but also is deeply rooted with our overall relationship with money. Most people like any relationship have bad habits whether it's [being] possessive, greedy, or fearful. The key is to change how we approach money." Simmons suggests starting points such as budgeting or checking on your bank account weekly. She personally recommends Nerd Wallet to ESSENCE readers as a social budgeting tool to keep track of your finances.

For Black women, taking ownership of your finances in 2025 starts with a simple conversation, according to Simmons. Whether it be friends, family, colleagues, or even your romantic partner, openly discussing money is a great way to begin. She says, "I find it interesting that we are in a society that can freely talk about our partners but when it comes to speaking of anything money-related it's taboo. Whether that's credit scores, salary, debt, the list goes on and on."

When asked about the best piece of money advice she's ever been given, she responded, "Believe that you can make and keep money." Though finances may be a bit more difficult to manage in the midst of a pandemic, especially with hardships and lack of job opportunities available for those of us disproportionately impacted, women like Simmons encourage us to turn a "no" into a hell of a "yes" as a means to charge the batteries in our backs.

WORDS: ALYSSANDRA WALKER | PHOTOS BY: JESSICA | STYLING: JESSICA | MAKEUP: JESSICA

HOME / NEWS

Barefoot Awards \$50,000 To Black Women-Owned Businesses With #WeStanForHer Campaign

THESE BADASS WOMEN ARE CHANGING THE WORLD WITH THEIR IDEAS,
STARTUPS AND BUSINESSES.



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BY KIMBERLY WILSON - APRIL 14, 2021

We stan for Black female entrepreneurs — and thankfully, we aren't the only ones!

Barefoot recently partnered up with the New Voices Foundation to award five women with \$10,000 to help develop their businesses and support their entrepreneurial endeavors. What better name to ignite this initiative than #WeStanForHer? The campaign celebrates and supports Black women entrepreneurs in order to drive toward economic equity for the Black community. The grants celebrate, recognize, and uplift Black women-owned businesses and their founders' unique journeys.

"The #WeStanForHer program is a celebration of the Black community. To continue to see positive change, Barefoot is committed to recognizing the talents and gifts that stem from resilient Black women," says Shannon Amah, Sr. Associate Brand Manager for Barefoot. "As a brand that strives to bring people together by creating moments of fun for everyone, directly supporting the efforts of Black women-owned businesses is essential to our mission. We stand to learn a lot from the Black community and, true to our values, Barefoot will always listen to the inspiring voices."

These badass women are changing the world with their ideas, startups and businesses and they will not only empower you, but they'll make you want to start your own business.

Teas With Meaning



Committed to doing everything in life with meaning, Kamila Mitchell founded Teas With Meaning. As an organic loose leaf and bottled tea blend company based in California, Teas With Meaning looks to bring beneficial properties with each cup.

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She'Neil Johnson-Spence established Base Butter as a Pennsylvania-based skincare company on a quest to redefine the perception of beauty and its impact on our relationship with our skin.

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Founded by Elaine Eagle-Akande, Maryland-based Sweetkiss makes the best-tasting, low-calorie, yet nutrient-dense packaged foods that have targeted functional health benefits, using real ingredients carefully sourced from local businesses within the community.

[Sarep + Rose](#)



Robin Sarkis founded New York-based Sarep + Rose to create global social impact by merging style and function through everyday fashion and home accessories.

"New Voices Foundation is thrilled to once again join forces with Barefoot to support Black women entrepreneurs on the 2021 #WeStandForHer grants program," says Richeyia Hall, Chief Impact Officer. "By investing capital, access, and expertise through coaching and mentoring in this new group of Black women business owners, we are continuing our mission to create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, and to have a lasting impact on our economy, and in the communities and families of Black women."

For more information about the New Voices + Barefoot #WeStandForHer Grant recipients or for more details about #WeStandForHer, visit: <https://www.barefootusa.com/we-stand-for-her>.

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Former Bad Boy Rapper Black Rob Passes Away at 51

THE HIP HOP STAR BEHIND "WHOA!"



Paioneer



BY KEVIN L. CLARK / APRIL 18, 2025

It has only been a week since the passing of rap icon Earl "DMX" Simmons, and now the hip-hop community is mourning the loss of another star. Buffalo, NY rapper, Black Rob, has sadly passed away from kidney failure. He was 58.

During that same week of mourning DMX, a video surfaced of Rob in a [hospital bed](#), sharing love and respect for his fellow hip-hop star. The visual caught many people off-guard considering that music fans hadn't heard from or seen him for quite some time. "I feel everything about X," Rob said in the clip posted by DJ Sall. "X was positive. Love to X."



© 2025 JEFFREY M. A. A. 04/18/2025

The "Whoa!" songwriter and former Bad Boy artist would reveal in the days that came afterward that he was [also homeless](#) and battling health issues, including kidney failure, which DJ Sall confirmed. "Of course, I've been dealing with this for five years," Rob admitted. "Four strokes ... I don't know

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what to tell you man. Shit is crazy. The shit is hard. I don't got no house to live in — except maybe an apartment. Me and my man be trying to get [it] together. I'm telling you man, this shit is strange. It's hard, you know what I'm saying?"

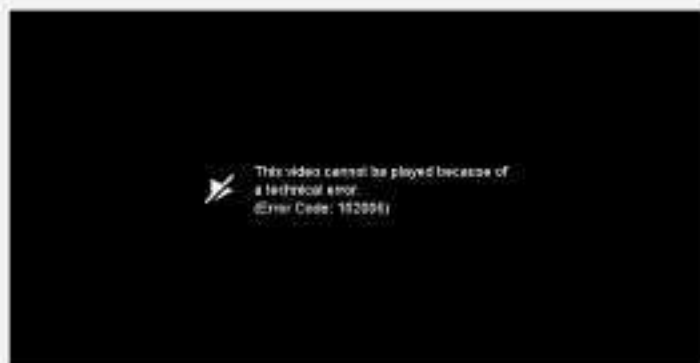
Uddo reached out to help Rob anyway he could — and did just that — which another former Bad Boy rapper Mark Curry **admitted** via social media. "And you are reaching out, and you're trying to help," Curry shared about Puff's assistance. "We not going to say he's not — Puffy is really trying to help." As a former recording artist on Bad Boy Records, Puff has made it known that he wanted to ensure that Rob was taken care of in the best way possible.

Rob, as part of Bad Boy Records in the late 90's and early 2000's, was responsible for keeping New York hip-hop on the charts after the notorious B.B.S. murder. Born Robert Ross, he was also responsible for popularizing the "Harlem Shake" dance, while his debut album *Life Story* went platinum, mainly from his chart-topping hit "Whoa!"



Rest in peace, Black Rob.

89% 100% 100% 100%



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Did You Know These 13 Celebrities Were Jehovah's Witnesses?

MARQUES HOUSTON RECENTLY SHARING THE NEWS OF HIS BAPTISM TO COMPLETE HIS CONVERSION TO THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS FAITH SURPRISED A FEW OF HIS FANS AND GOT THE INTERNET BUZZING ABOUT CELEBRITIES AND

RELIGION. AS IT TURNS OUT, MARQUES ISN'T THE ONLY BLACK CELEBRITY WHO IS CURRENTLY OR HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS FAITH. HERE'S A LOOK AT 13 FAMILIAR FACES WHO WERE EITHER RAISED OR LATER CONVERTED TO THE RELIGION. SOME OF THESE MAY SURPRISE YOU!

BY RACHAEL DAVIS / AUGUST 16, 2016

01 Jill Scott

Songstress Jill Scott was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith but has stated in recent years that she no longer practices the religion.



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02 The Wayans Family

One of two family units on our list, the Wayans were also raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith.



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03 Terrence Howard

"Empire" star Terrence Howard has expressed interest in joining the Jehovah's Witness faith and his current wife is also raising their children in the faith.



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04 Notorious B.I.G.

Rapper The Notorious B.I.G., aka Christopher Wallace, was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith by his mother Voletta Wallace, who is still active in the religion today.





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05 Sherri Shepherd

Actress and television host Sherri Shepherd was raised as a Jehovah's Witness but no longer practices the faith.



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06 Serena Williams

Tennis champion Serena Williams was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith and confesses to practice many of her beliefs stemming from the religion today.





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Jessie J

Jesus is waiting for you.

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Q7 The Jackson family

The Jackson family was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith, but several of the family members, including sister Janet, no longer practice the religion.



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Q8 Marc John Jeffries

Marc John Jeffries, who you'll recognize from films like "Losing Isaiah," "Get Rich or Die Tryin'" and "Notorious," was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith as a child.





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09 Venus Williams

Like sister Serena, Venus was also raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith by their parents.



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10 Naomi Campbell

Supermodel Naomi Campbell was raised as a Jehovah's Witness but no longer practices the faith.





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11 Marques Houston

R&B singer and actor Marques Houston just recently completed his conversion into the Jehovah's Witness faith and has been actively celebrating his involvement with the religion on social media.



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12 La Rule

Rapper Ja Rule was raised in the Jehovah's Witness faith but later left the religion after his mother was deprogrammed.



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13 Prince

Prince was a practicing Jehovah's Witness for years after converting to the religion in 2005.



MIKE JENNINGS/GETTY IMAGES/REUTERS

HOME - ENTERTAINMENT

Comedian Dave Chappelle Is Going Back to Africa

Comedian Dave Chappelle Is Going Back to Africa

THE MARK TWAIN PRIZE WINNING FUNNY MAN WANTS TO MOVE TO GHANA, WEST AFRICA.



BY KEVIN L. CLARK / APRIL 18, 2021

Dave Chappelle is looking to return to Africa, possibly for good, according to his recent sit-down chat with supermodel icon **Naomi Campbell**.

The two had a conversation on the latter's *No Filter with Naomi* podcast, where Chappelle shared that he was inspired by Stevie Wonder and wanted to follow in his footsteps with a move to Ghana, West Africa.

"Now those in the room that know Stevie personally [have heard him] say this thing many times through the years that we've known him," Chappelle says. "But this last time he said it, what he said was, 'I am moving to Ghana so that I can be valued and respected more.' That's almost exactly the phrase he used." Both artists, who have impacted the world, in addition to Black and pop culture, have frequently commented on how racism and indifference to Black lives in America forced them to change their way of life.



Chappelle, who famously ended the *Chappelle Show* to live in South Africa, finds it appalling that the idea of **Stevie Wonder**, a 25-time Grammy Award-winning artist is undervalued and disrespected, given all that he has created for the world. "As a Black American, who amongst us is more valued and respected than Stevie Wonder?" Chappelle asks. "The idea that he would feel this way at this stage in his life and career... I think that Stevie is the

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soul of American culture and if the soul leaves the body then this thing is dead. I thought I'll follow him over there, or I'll go myself. I'll do it for him."

Since 2015's "Year of Return" initiative, Ghana has been a hotbed for Black Americans—*celebrities and regular folk alike*—who find the West African nation as a possible new home. Now in its second pillar, "Beyond the Return," is aimed at not only promoting tourism, but also fostering economic relations, trade and investments from the diaspora in Africa and the world at large. "We feel that given the wealth that African Americans and Black Americans have, given that spending power — we felt that it is about time that we start the conversation about coming back to where you came from," Akwasi Aggreyman, CEO of Ghana Tourism Authority *shared* with Black Enterprise.

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Chappelle's aspiration highlights a growing sentiment within the Black community—to escape persecution and assault from white America. With the legendary comedian planning to possibly uproot himself from the country of his birth, Chappelle shared that he wanted to build something there—a comedy club or homes for rent—in the foreseeable future.



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A STRING OF NEW FILMS AND SERIES, INCLUDING "BRIDGERTON" AND "ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI," HAVE A FEW THINGS IN COMMON: ENGLISH ACTORS WHO HAVE STOLEN OUR HEARTS.



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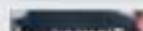
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