

COMMUNITY & CURRENT EVENTS

FIVE REASONS TO TRAVEL IN 2019

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Image Courtesy of WE

Lifelong travellers share the transformative power of exploring new destinations.
Warning: May inspire wanderlust.

I was out of breath. Dirt kicked up behind each stride, as I focused my attention on my relay partner a mere 50 meters ahead. Closing in on the final stretch of my 5 km contribution to the race from Nairobi to Naivasha, I knew I had failed my best intention to finish strong; I'd have to settle for mediocre. But, then again, finishing so-so isn't bad for someone's first run through the Great Rift Valley.

What inspired this Canadian gal to run a relay race through the Rift in Kenya during her early 20s? Exactly how did I find myself kicking up dust with bomas (traditional Kenyan homesteads) to the left of me and acacia trees to my right? The answer to these questions sums up why I love travel so much.

When I think back to that time and recall my Kenyan counterparts urging me on with cheers—eliminating any chance of me throwing in the towel and walking—I'm filled with wonder. I marvel at the seemingly magical thread of events, while in reality, conscious and deliberate choices led me to that unforgettable time and place.

This wonderment, mixed with humility—the result of experiencing the extraordinary in the everyday—is why my passport continues to fill up with stamps today. I first experienced the thrill of this combination as a 17-year-old on a ME to WE Trip to Kenya (my first time in the country), and I continue to experience it more than a decade and 30+ countries later.

No need to take my word for it, though. Below, five of WE's global aficionados—each a connoisseur of travelling with intention—share how travel has shaped their lives and why their wanderlust is sure to continue into 2019.

1. Change your perspective and find direction.

If the zombie apocalypse arrives, I know who I am calling: Dwaine Taylor. The first time I met Dwaine was during a facilitator orientation for a ME to WE Trip in the Dominican. The group had yet to arrive when I picked up Dwaine from the hotel for a casual lunch. He came prepared with an essential survival kit strapped to his back (rope, compass, first-aid kit goes without saying). The guy was prepared.

It's a trait that makes Dwaine an exceptional facilitator—and why it was hardly a surprise when I learned Dwaine first wanted to be a lawyer. His career path changed following a 2013 service-learning trip to Guatemala, where he realized he wanted to apply his process-first approach to philanthropic work. "It completely changed my perspective on what it meant to be a functioning member of society," says Dwaine, reflecting on his time living on a homestead on the Northern coast of the country. "It changed my perspective on what it meant to help, what it meant to help others, what is meant to help cohesively and create an impact on people's lives."



“Travel is fundamental in my life. It’s allowed me to grow into myself... to gain confidence and identify what my passions are.”

DWAINE TAYLOR

Image Courtesy of WE

2. Bring on the challenge.

Alannah Ford’s decision to leave her small-town of Bracebridge, ON to go on a ME to WE Trip to Kenya as a 17-year-old was a big one. Her inspiration? A talk from WE founder Craig Kielburger.

“I heard Craig speak. At the time, I had no idea who he was,” Alannah admits.

The talk inspired Alannah and three friends to look at global inequities in the world. They decided to fundraise \$10,000 for a school in Kenya. Then, when one of Alannah’s friends suggested they fundraise to travel to Kenya themselves, Alannah agreed.

“I had no idea how big the impact would be on me, and how big travelling to Kenya was from my small town. I was really nervous. It completely changed how I looked at the world. It teaches you how to be empathetic, it teaches you about others. The biggest takeaway was learning—you realize how much you don’t know.”



“ Before I went, I had no idea... I was really nervous. But the **impact was incredible.** It completely changed how I look at the world and taught me so much.”

ALANNAH FORD

Image Courtesy of WE

3. Grow as you go.

Joanna Lim will never forget her first time going on a ME to WE trip to the El Trapiche community in Nicaragua. “We got to break ground on the first school ever,” she shares. “I’ve been able to go back a couple times: seeing the classrooms being built, having a clean water project and seeing the students grow every trip I go back, has been really impactful.” One student in particular continues to stand out—a young girl rising through the ranks of her school, whose mom is now making a secure income through the women’s group with WE.

As Joanna has witnessed the continued growth that's happened in communities overseas, she's also seen herself grow as a person and a facilitator. Take for example, the 9-month stint Joanna spent as a leadership facilitator in China. “My grandparents are Chinese, but I had never been to China before,” Joanna shared. “When I was in Beijing, seeing that piece of culture that was actually connected to me as a person... was really interesting.”

“Every time I travel it reignites something in me that makes me want to go back and do it again.”

JOANNA LIM



Image Courtesy of WE

4. Forge life-long connections.

It took Ryan Kern one week to fall in love with Ecuador. But, his love-affair with purpose-built travel started years prior.

The baseball player from the mid-west US is now the go-to for family and corporate trips in the Amazon. For Ryan, it all comes back to family.

His grandmother introduced him to WE in 2011, when he was looking to explore a world outside of college ball. He went to Kenya with ME to WE for the summer as a junior facilitator.

“I fell in love with the approach,” Ryan says. “The sustainability aspect, the social justice aspect... I just fell in love.” His role as a junior facilitator quickly turned into a full-time facilitator job, giving way to a thriving travel career.

“ I realized I loved the place probably a week in... I found myself in the Amazon jungle, around a bunch of strangers, that somehow didn't feel like strangers but rather felt like family.”

RYAN KERN



Image Courtesy of WE

5. Learn from experience.

Having clocked in time in front of the classroom, Julie Paquette understands the opportunity for learning from travel. Julie, a Montreal-based teacher and seasonal facilitator with ME to WE, sees each trip as an opportunity to learn something new about yourself and the world around you.

One of the countries Julie cites as her own teacher is India, the country where she began her career in travel. Facilitating a group of 20 teens through a brand-new culture, including unwrapping the caste system with people who live it, opened up the true meaning of travel for Julie—experiential learning.

The more Julie experiences, the deeper her passion for knowledge becomes: “It gives me this need and craving to want to learn more and try new things. And, I’m constantly being humbled because I realize how much I don’t know about the world... it makes me want to educate myself and others to improve the world.”

“ I’m not just learning from reading a book, or hearing stories, or getting people’s opinions on a certain country. I’m forming my own opinion because it’s **real education**, from my own eyes.”

JULIE PAQUETTE



Image Courtesy of WE