Matt Bowles: My guest today is Shakeemah Smith. She is a location independent entrepreneur, travel influencer, and founder of Travel Like a Bawse, an online training program that teaches women how to solo travel the world safely, confidently, and without draining their bank account. Shakeemah has solo traveled to more than 55 countries, many of them for under 100 U.S. dollars. And she has coached over 1,500 women on how to start their world travel journeys. Originally from East Orange, New Jersey, she is now based primarily on the Caribbean Island of Antigua, where she's in the process of getting her second passport. Shakeemah has over 40,000 followers on Instagram and has been featured in Travel Noir, Essence, Forbes, USA Today, Insider, The Washington Post, and the list goes on. Keem, welcome to the show.

Shakeemah Smith: What up, everybody? Thank you for having me.

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to have you here. This is going to be an awesome conversation. But first, let's just start off by setting the scene and letting folks know where we are doing this interview from tonight and the fact that we have agreed to make this a wine night. So, let's also talk about what we are drinking. I am actually based in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, this evening, and I have just opened a bottle of South African Pinotage, which is tasting very nice. But where are you tonight, Keem, and what are you drinking?

Shakeemah Smith: So tonight, I'm in East Orange, New Jersey, from Il town, and I'm just having some Peach Moscato tonight. I'm keeping it cute. You know what I mean?

Matt Bowles: I love that. And we have to start off with Il town because we got a lot of hip-hop fans, first of all, that listen to the podcast, but also, we have people from 140 different countries that listen to the podcast that are not going to know and be familiar with a lot of the nuances of some of the real origins of the greatest hip-hop of all time, which definitely includes East Orange, New Jersey. And you grew up there in the 90s, which was during the golden era of hip-hop. So, can you just sort of take us back there and talk about what that growing up in East Orange in the 90s at that time?

Shakeemah Smith: Man, let me tell y'all something. It was a time like, you were lucky to be alive. Like Drake said, what a time to be alive. That was a time to be alive. Like, growing up in the 90s, we would see Queen Latifa, Naughty by Nature on Tremont Avenue. Like, you would see Lauryn Hill walking down South Orange Avenue like Wyclef Jean, Method Man standing on a corner. Redman, it was real. That was when you actually had to have talent to be a rapper. But it was absolutely amazing.

Matt Bowles: And you had some of the greatest rappers of all time that were from your neighborhood, literally. I mean, how was that as a kid just to be there in that environment and to know you're hearing all these folks on the radio and some of the greatest MCs that ever did it and they're from your neighborhood, it was just different.

Shakeemah Smith: It was like everything was so much more authentic. Everything was more real. you know, growing up in East Orange, and you actually could see Method Man walking down the street, and Queen Latifa is doing events in your neighborhood on your block, having a block party, giving out coats, Wyclef Jean. Treach is literally outside with Pepa. That was real on 9th Avenue. Like, that was real to us.

Matt Bowles: That's so amazing. That's so amazing. Because I was a hip-hop DJ during the 90s, and when a lot of those artists dropped their first albums, I mean, that's how literally I came to know about East Orange, New Jersey, from Naughty by Nature's first album that they dropped in 1991 because they repped East Orange in every single song. You could not listen to a Naughty by Nature song, let alone an album, and not be extremely clear about exactly where they were from. And so, these groups were putting it on the map. And these were some of the greatest artists and the greatest songs. And so, I became incredibly well aware of East Orange and existing, what was going on there. But, man, to grow up there in the midst of all that, I mean, what an amazing era.

Shakeemah Smith: I mean, you know, Whitney Houston is one of the biggest celebrities from my town, East Orange. And you know, when we were growing up, we went to Cicely Tyson Elementary School. you know, Whitney Houston was literally from East Orange. Like, we have so many talented people coming out of our city.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. So let me ask you this. As you were growing up, I'm really curious. How did your interest in travel develop and your sort of desire to travel the world?

Shakeemah Smith: So, it actually started with my mother. you know, I'm one of six kids, we from the hood. That's not a secret. I'm not ashamed of it because at the end of the day, that built a lot of character for me, you know, having to get very creative. And when I was a kid, you know, I'm the oldest of six kids, my parents, they're high school graduates and they're doing the best that they can. My mother couldn't afford. My mother and father could not afford to take us anywhere. But my mother bought me a globe and I would have to do a book report about different countries. And she would always tell me, like, one day you could see the whole world. The life is bigger than East Orange. And I'm from 3rd Ward, East Orange. I'm from Carnegie and Shepherd, East Orange, you know, so I'm not even from. I'm from the South Ward. Like, I'm not even from the nicer part of East Orange. But my mother always kind of reinforced that if I wanted to, I could actually see more. And that's pretty much how it got it started, just with that at home education. Even though we didn't have anything, she planted the idea that it was a possibility for me.

Matt Bowles: And what was the path from there to actually going on your first international trip? How did that actually happen? How did you make it a reality?

Shakeemah Smith: It was actually quite organic. It was a complete accident. I just started traveling with my friends, and then I ended up getting left on vacation by two of my friends on my birthday weekend in Greece. And from there I was like, yo, I'm never fucking traveling with nobody again. Nobody will ever have the one up on me to make me Feel like they could just leave me if we disagree on something. I really didn't have a choice to solo travel. I didn't really want to do it, but solo travel chose me.

Matt Bowles: And then you have been doing some serious solo travel ever since. You have now solo traveled to over 55 countries. And I would love for you to talk a little bit about that. Like, once you made that decision and you said, okay, I'm going to solo travel, what were your initial fears or concerns or trepidation and like, how did you go about sort of figuring that out and structuring that solo travel lifestyle?

Shakeemah Smith: Well, I think once I got over the money part, because, you know, me being black and from the hood, we think that, like, in order to travel, like, that's a white people luxury. Like, oh, well, we can't afford to travel. Like, only white people could do that. you know, that's a luxury. But once I changed my mind set and said, you know what? That is my birthright, things kind of started to fall in place from there.

The universe kind of conspired for my highest good from there. So, once I got over the money part, it was more so like, am I going to get snatched and sold into sex slave slavery? Because that's what people are telling me is going to happen. And I decided to do one trip. I said, you know what? I'm going to go to Paris and I'm only just going to do one trip. And, you know, as if I can make it back home. I may not like it, but if I can just complete the trip and prove to myself that I can do it, I'll never have to do it again. Let me just do it one time. And from there, Paris, country number one, France. you know, I felt liberated, and I was like, yo, it's over from here. I got it. I could do it.

Matt Bowles: I love that. Well, I want to ask you to break down some of the misnomers that people have about how expensive travel is and how you have been able to travel to a number of foreign countries literally for under $100. Can you talk about that?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. So, I've been to 55 countries, as you said, but my first 20 countries, I visited them for under $100. And like I said, you know, I'm from the ghetto, so I tend to get really creative about how I can do things with the least am financial resources. I'm one of six kids. My mom, we would go to get clothes and she would like, point out missing buttons and stuff, and they would give us money off and me and my five siblings will have clothes. So, I'm no stranger to being very creative to get what I need. And I went to my first 20 countries for under $100. And I did that by putting flights on layaway through this Black-owned company called Airfordable. And I also would actually go on SkyScanner and I would optimize the search engine to make it tell me what countries I could visit for under $100 and what month the tickets were all under $100. So, if I could find 12 different flights for under $100 and they were each in a different month, well, essentially, I just went to 12 different countries for $1,200. So that's how I was able to do that. I went to Guatemala for $62. I went to Panama for $82. I went to Costa Rica for like $66. Like I posted all of these receipts, but that's how I was traveling. So, I wasn't riding around and getting it, y'all. I was just trying to figure out how to optimize these search engines. So that way your girl was on a gram flexing, but not like exhausting my bank account to do it, you know?

Matt Bowles: Yes. Amazing. And SkyScanner is a super important resource for folks that haven't used that. We will link that up in the show notes so you can go and check it out. But the technique, which is important, right, which I have used as well, is to you put in the airport that you're flying out from. Okay? So, if you live somewhere and you fly out of the same airport all the time, that's the airport you put in. Or if you're a nomad and you're traveling around, it's like whatever airport you happen to be near, whatever country you're in, just put that one in. And then you, for the destination you put everywhere, right? And then that is going to show you the least expensive countries for you to fly to from the airport that you're in. And for the timing, if you put any time right, like whenever, then it'll show you the cheapest month to do it. And that way you can find, you know, a dozen plus countries that are going to be under a hundred bucks from wherever you are.

Shakeemah Smith: Easy, simple.

Matt Bowles: Now, I did not know, by the way, one of the things that you taught me, Keem, is that you could put flights on layaway. I literally had never even heard of that until I was watching your content. Can you talk about how that works?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. So, you know, growing up, you know, like I said, grew up poor. You know, we got it out the mud, but my parents did the best that they could. And so, layaway is this concept that, you know,

you want to purchase something and you essentially ask the merchant to hold it for you at the price that you know you're purchasing for it. And you just break down the payments until you're finished paying off the balance. So that's what layaway is for everybody who, you know, hasn't ever heard of that. So, when I was growing up, my mother would put our clothes on layaway, you know, so that way we could have clothes for the next school year. And so most people don't know that you can actually put flights on layaway. There's this Black-owned company called Airfordable and you find a ticket that you like on Expedia or Google Flights, you screenshot it, you send it to Airfordable, and you just make a small deposit, you make four installments, and boom, you got your ticket. So, if I wanted to go to South Africa and the ticket was $1,100, but your girl had to pay her rent, right. I will put that flight on layaway. So that way rent was paid and I was still going to South Africa regardless.

Matt Bowles: Right. So, you can lock in the best flight deals when they come up. But if you have a travel budget that, let's say is a monthly budget, and you can only spend this much on travel per month, but you see like an amazing flight deal, you can lock it in and then you can just continue to pay for that ticket monthly, even though it may be like way in the future. And that way you get the best deals and you don't have to break the bank doing it. That's amazing. So let me ask you this, Keem. When you started doing all this traveling, you were working at a 9 to 5 job. And I want to ask you about how you structured your travel, because in the United States, most people get like two weeks of vacation a year, something like that. And here you are going to a different country like every month. So, could you talk about how you structured your travel with a regular full time office job?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. So y'all, you know, I had to learn the art of finesse. All right, so let me put y' all up on game. This how I finesse that shit. So, at my job, we had two weeks' vacation time, we had sick time, but then we also had something called comp time. And basically, your comp time is if you work overtime, you can elect instead of Being paid time and a half in cash. You can elect for it to go to like a certain PTO bank and it's time and a half, but it's time and a half, not in the form of cash compensation, but in PTO time. So, what I would do to work the shit out, you know what I mean? Because, you know, we got to, you know, so instead of ingenuity in the hood, we call it ingenuity. Like we had to get, like real, you know, creative, right? So, this is what I did. The first two weeks of each month, I will work my OT, but I would do it in time and a half. So that way, if I worked four hours a day, that would technically be like six hours in overtime in the comp time, right? So, if I did six hours every day for two weeks, you know, I had more than enough time in comp time to take the vacation. And then the last two weeks of the pay period, your girl was out here asking for cash. So that way I could actually buy the ticket for the fucking flight that I was about to go on. And then when I would put in the overtime, I would always take it out of my comp time bank. So, they could never catch me for leave abuse because I was never using the vacation time. They could never say, well, you don't have no more vacation time. You motherfucking right I do. I've been using comp time this whole fucking time. What you think I'm here for? So, you know, I had to finesse it. So that way, for the first two weeks, I had the comp time. For the second two weeks, I had the cash to pay for the trip I was going on. And then at the end of the year, I would have all this vacation time because I never used it. I would only use comp time. So that was how I was finessing it. Another way that I worked it out. Check this out. Every month has a holiday, right? So, January, we got Martin Luther King. February, we got President's Day. March, we got Good Friday, right? So, what I would do was I would take a long weekend and just use the holiday. So, if *Martin Luther King Day* was on a Monday, I would take Friday off only, but then I would have Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. And then I fly back home on Monday night. So basically, I could hit up another country without even with only using one day a month. And of course, that was coming out of comp time,

but it was like a long weekend as well, because I always made sure that I traveled before or after a paid holiday. So that was how I was working it out. Between having time and not having issues with leave abuse and still trying to make the cash to be able to fund my dreams, I basically used my corporate job to float my dreams.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing. Can you talk a little bit about how you did your research for your trips and designed your itineraries? Because you basically said the destination selection, at least initially, was based on where you could get cheap flights from where you are. And so, you're like, okay, that's where I'm going. Once you decided that's where you're going and you grab that flight, what's your process for trip planning and itinerary creation?

Shakeemah Smith: So first I look up, I download the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. Most women who travel solo, one of our biggest concerns is safety, right? So, what I did was I researched and I found out that the United States Embassy has actually a safety program called the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. So, you can actually download it, let the U.S. Embassy know where you're going, and then you can also complete an itinerary with all your information, which hotel you're going to be at, which excursions you're going to do, where you're going to eat, you know, just anything, every single move that you're going to make. And you can actually send it to the U.S. Embassy in that country so they know that you're there. You can sign up for alerts, the U.S. embassy. So that way you know if something's going on in that country. So, the first thing that I do when I book a trip, you know, like that Guatemala for $66, I'm like, great, let me, let me reach out to the U.S. Embassy and let the U.S. Embassy know in Guatemala that I'm actually coming. Because remember, they're Americans, right? So, they're going to let you know, like a dog after 8 o'clock, don't go down this block. You need to know this. You need to understand that we have a lot of, you know, MC13s in Guatemala City and you need to keep it pushing when you get off that, when you leave the airport, like, you know, so I would say definitely contact the U.S. Embassy. And guys, this is a free service. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program is actually a free service for all United States citizens traveling abroad. You can, look, you can register with the local U.S. Embassy in that country and just let them know, like, yo, dog, I'm here, I'm here. And yeah, you know, I'm here in this country.

Matt Bowles: And then when you are actually planning the stuff that you're going to do in these countries. What is your sort of process for saying, okay, I'm going to Guatemala? How do I want to plan my three days or my four days or my week, or, like, however long you were going there for? What's your process for kind of designing a really epic itinerary?

Shakeemah Smith: I think it depends on what kind of mood I'm in. Because, like, sometimes, you know, I'm ready to turn up all the way up, and I'm on a hunt it. And then other times I'm like, you know, it would be really nice to just get some sun and be on the beach. So, I think, you know, it depends on what kind of mood I'm in. And then I kind of figure out, like, what is it that I want to get out of this vacation? And from there, you know, I start putting it together.

Matt Bowles: I love that. Well, I want to talk to you about a couple of the places that you have gone. One of the places that you've been that I have not been is Zambia. I've been to probably about 11 countries in Africa by now, but Zambia I have not yet been to. It's super high on my list. So, I'm definitely going to get specific tips from you when I go. But I want to just ask you about, how was that experience for you in Zambia?

Shakeemah Smith: Zambia was a whole vibe, but it was also a minute for me to kind of reflect on how fortunate I've been. Because travel makes you quite humble, and it makes you a storyteller. When I went to Zambia, I realized. Not that I hadn't really realized before, but it just kind of hit different that your worst day is somebody's best day. You need to be great; you know, you need to just practice more gratitude. So, I absolutely loved it. I actually sponsored four kids in Zambia. My mom and I decided to fund the school so that way they could feed the children. The children in Zambia only eat at school on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and outside of that, they don't get much food. So sometimes they come to school just to eat. And when me and my mom found that out, we were like, no, we're going to feed every last child in this school for just 30 days. you know, that was what we could afford, and that's what we did. And a part of my ego died in Zambia. I'm going to keep it 100.

Matt Bowles: And then you spent a while in Zambia, though, right? And you checked out a whole bunch of different stuff, including the animals. So, I want to hear about the safari experience that you had in Zambia.

Shakeemah Smith: I absolutely loved it. It was super authentic. I loved. Was amazing. I actually walked with a cheetah and walked with some lion cubs. And I'm not going to lie, I'm a thug, but I was scared as fuck. Like.

Matt Bowles: So, wait, then what happened with the elephant? You told me there was a story with an elephant as well.

Shakeemah Smith: So, guys, I went to Zambia, and if you go to Livingstone, Zambia, you can actually drive right across the border or ride a bike right across the border into Zimbabwe. And I decided to rent a bike and, you know, like, a motorbike and just drive over the border from Zambia to Zimbabwe. I had done it, you know, the past three days that I was there. Everything was supposed to be Gucci, right? Y'all, why I'm in Zambia and I'm trying to get back into Zimbabwe, and all of a sudden, I hear people going, no, throw the food down. Because, you know, I was. I had food on me, you know, because I'm like, well, I don't want to pay for no restaurants or anything like that. I have food at the hotel. They made my plate. I just strapped it to the back of my motorbike. No harm, no foul, right? Right. Wrong, dog, Wrong. So, this is when went left. So, people are yelling behind me in English, like, put the food down. And I look, and there is a wild elephant coming my way. And I'm like, man, that he can't even run that fast. Like, it's whatever. Like, I didn't think anything of it until he started being right under me. And I realized, yo, dog, I'm about to be elephant, like, soup. Like, this is what it's come down to. This is how it all ends. So, I just tossed the food down, and the elephant moved to the side. He immediately went for the food. And when I pulled over, the locals were running over to me, like, look at this dumb broad. The locals are running over to me, like, are you okay? Are you okay? And I'm like, I'm fine, but what happened? And they were like, these are wild elephants. They need food. They're looking for food. They have no way to eat. So, we never cross the border where they're waiting on the sides with food because they have truck. They're going to take your food. And I was like, bruh, I was today fucking years old when I learned that you cannot have food around wild elephants. Like, I just learned this, like. And so, I called my mom, and I'm like. And she like, oh, my God, what's wrong? And I was like, oh, I got chased by a wild fucking elephant. It was lit and she was, like, freaking out.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing. So, all right. I also have to ask you about your Australia experience because you have been skydiving, which is something that I have never gotten enough courage up to go and do. So, I want you to tell me how your experience was in Australia in general and how was the skydive experience?

Shakeemah Smith: It was absolutely amazing. The people in Australia were quite friendly, these Aussies. And let me tell you something about them Aussies. They could drink. They could drink. They were nothing but hospitable. I had a wonderful time. I felt welcomed. Australia was also very clean. You know, at least Sydney, like, Sydney was a beautiful, very clean city. The people were absolutely amazing. And, Yeah, I skydived 13,000 ft in the air.

Matt Bowles: Unbelievable. And how was that for you? What was the experience like? I've never done it.

Shakeemah Smith: I was scared. I was so scared. But I just wanted to prove to myself that I can actually do it. But I could have never imagined how good it would feel once I jumped out. Like, there was this feeling that you were falling, but it only lasted like a split second. But time was different. It seemed like everything went faster when I was skydiving. But when I opened my eyes and they touched my hand and was like, you know, move your hand, hands out, like, you know, it felt like I was flying. And I always got so much liberation from being on an airplane and being up that high and knowing that I was about to change the scenery and see something different and, you know, experience so much euphoria. But there was nothing like actually flying and looking at it, you know, 360 degrees. Not like. Not through a window seat window, but like actually flying in the air, letting the air touch you. You can feel the sun is hot on you. It was just. It was just a whole mood.

Matt Bowles: That's so dope. Did you make it over to Melbourne in Australia when you were there?

Shakeemah Smith: No, I only went to Sydney, so.

Matt Bowles: I have actually not been to Sydney, but I have been to Melbourne. And one of the things that I have been talking about Melbourne ever since I got back is how dope the graffiti art scene is in Melbourne. It is some of the most amazing street I've seen anywhere in the world because I look for that wherever I go. Because I love to experience cities through the lens of the street artists, for one thing. Because it's typically, you know, a very unfiltered, you know, anti-establishment expression in communication, you know, from. Particularly from marginalized groups that live in that, in that city, right? So I love to kind of see an impression of the city from the people that live there that's not filtered by the government or corporations and things like that. So I love street art and of course I love the art form of graffiti, right? I mean, just as part of hip-hop culture. And I love to see how that's been taken and adapted around the world and things like that. And so, you know, so I mean, I really, you know, I have gone on the street art tours and really studied this stuff. And some of the, some of the top cities in the world, Bogotá in Colombia and São Paulo in Brazil and some of the places that have like legendary street art. And I will tell you that Melbourne, Australia of all places is like way up on my list because. And you're going to appreciate this too, the street art, the love for specifically East Coast 90s hip-hop in Melbourne, Australia is ridiculous.

Shakeemah Smith: Wow.

Matt Bowles: The graffiti art, right? They have all these like graffiti alleys, like whole giant sections that are just all of this graffiti art. It's not just the iconic, you know, stuff that you would see all over the place on T shirts like the, like Biggie and Tupac. They have that, right? But it's not just that. They have massive murals to Pete Rock and CL Smooth, A Tribe Called Quest. They have a mural of the Apollo Theater with Rakim's name in the limelight performing at the Apollo. They had three Boogie down production album covers as giant full length wall murals, BDP like all of this in Melbourne, right? I walked into a random pizza shop in

Melbourne and There is a DJ who has, first of all technique, 1200 turntables, okay? And has 12-inch vinyl records that he is pulling out of milk crates.

Shakeemah Smith: Wow.

Matt Bowles: Okay. And putting on the table. And it's all 90s east coast hip-hop that he's playing song after song after song. I'm like, where am I? It was crazy.

Shakeemah Smith: That was. What's up? you know what, when you said the milk crates, a little voice went off in my head. You ever heard; you know that voiceover on TikTok? It says, tell me you're ghetto without telling me you ghetto. And you got the milk crates.

Matt Bowles: Like, listen, I was a DJ in the 90s, right? So, it was all 12-inch vinyl and we put them in milk crates and we carried the milk crates. I'd hire a buddy of mine to go do the DJ gigs to carry my record crates and my equipment and take requests and stuff like this. But it was literally, like that's how it was back then, right? Like I would go to the record store every Tuesday and cause that's when the new records would come in and I would listen to all the new 12-inch singles that came out and I would buy the ones that I liked and I'd buy two copies of them so I could mess with them on the turntables, right? And then you would literally go home and count the beats per minute to figure Wout how fast this song was. You would sit there with a timer and you would count the beats per minute. And then you would, and then you would put a sticker and you would write with a Sharpie marker, 104 beats per minute. And then you would have your milk crates, your records organized by speed so you would know which ones you could mix with the other ones with just slight variations on the speed so you could beat mix. This was literally the process, right? Now, of course, today, people that are starting to DJ now, I mean, that's like some archaic, you know, they're like, what are you talking about, dude? It just says it on my thing and I don't have records, I just have the, you know, I mean, you know, I just bring it off my laptop and it just appears there, you know, all this kind of stuff. So, like when this dude had like milk crates full of 12-inch vinyl and he's pulling them out and putting them on there, I'm like, man, respect. This is some throwback stuff. Yeah, for real.

Shakeemah Smith: That's what's up.

Matt Bowles: It was ridiculous. So, yeah, so I have a lot of love for Melbourne, but yeah, so, but I had not been to Sydney though, so you have to give me some tips next time I go to Sydney. But I do want to ask you, I want to ask you if you, you can build a little bit on the safety for. Particularly for solo female travelers. Right. But safety in general, right. Like a lot of folks, that's a barrier for them, right? To go world traveling, especially to go alone. What are the biggest misconceptions, do you think about safety when traveling the world?

Shakeemah Smith: I think the biggest misconceptions is that, oh, don't go out there because it's unsafe. You will get snatched. You, you know, something will happen to you. I've been to 55 countries, you know, besides the U.S. and the United States is actually the most unsafe place that I have ever been in in my life. I lived in Paris. I'm currently getting my citizenship in Antigua. And I'm actually making my exit out of the U.S. because it's so unsafe. So, you know, as a woman who has seen only 17% of the world, I can assure you that the United States is actually the most unsafe place there is. It's actually not, you know, unless you're going to Afghanistan or, you know. Just something that's, you know, Syria, like, somewhere that it's like bombs going off every day. Other than that, the United States is actually what people should be afraid of, in my opinion.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit as well about your Antigua citizenship process and why you are choosing to get your second passport and residency in Antigua?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah, I mean, you know, it's no secret that, you know, black people often just feel unwanted here and unwelcome. If I'm being totally in a moment of transparency, I do have a nephew. He is 13 years old. And when my grandmother was growing up, her parents had to explain to her Emmett Till. And when my mother was growing up, they had to explain, you know, Rodney King. And now I'm, you know, got my nephew, and now I'm trying to explain to him Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland and George Floyd and Tamir Rice. And, you know, I just decided that the only way for me to extend the life of my nephew, a Black child who will turn into a man one day, the only way for me to extend his life is to exit the U.S. because I don't want him going to school and getting shot up in school. I don't want him to be walking home and having a bag of candy in his hand and being shot. I don't want him to go for a run and not make it back home. I don't want my son, my nephew because he is black and is minding his own business, to be killed. I don't want him being killed by police or killed by, you know, any race of a person that feels that he doesn't have the liberty to walk down the street or to go for a jog or anything. So, I decided that the only way for me to see him turn into a man is for us to leave the United States. And I'm willing to buy his citizenship out of the U.S. and give him the passport, so that way he has a chance to live fairly.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. And you've also been taking him around the world with you. You two have been. You two have been to, like, what, seven countries now? And he's only 13. Can you talk a little bit about your decision to do that? Why you feel it's been so important to do that. And what you think the impact has been on him so far, just at age 13?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. You know, at the end of the day, the universe is friendly and I'm blessed. I'm blessed that I'm in a position to be able to show him the world, because when I was growing up, I just had book reports about what London might be like. I didn't think I would actually be able to see it. And, you know, you know, ill town, you know how that is. you know, it's people selling drugs on one corner and you got the, you know, the good angel on one shoulder and the bad, you know, the devil on the other, and you're just like, yo, I don't want to become a product of my environment. Luckily, I had two parents who worked really hard. It's six of us, me and my sisters and brothers. All of us are college graduates. When I would come home from school, from college, we didn't have any lights, and I would feel guilty, like, you know, they're putting me through college, but we don't have electricity when I come home to visit. So, there was a lot of pressure there. But my mom said, listen, y' all are going to do something different than us. And I wanted to give my nephew all of the experience that I never had. So, it was important to me for him to see, like, you know, I don't have a choice between, like, joining a gang or selling drugs. And, you know, like, those are not even my options. My options are, are we going to Greece for the AGNC or are we going back to London? you know, because I love Leicester Square, you know, this is his options. And, you know, it kind of gives him a broader view. He's more grateful. And now he has so many, many different possibilities in his brain because he's like, okay, Tanti, it's my 14th birthday. I know it's Covid, but I love London. I love going to the Tate Modern. Are they going to be open? So, he's able to experience so much just because his auntie decided to just get out there and do it one time. So, I want to make sure that he knows that there are so many. Regardless of what color he is, he knows that he has a lot of options and that he. He can do what he wants and he's deserving of that.

Matt Bowles: That's so awesome. I love that. The other thing that I want to talk to you about, that you have done, which is super impressive, is talk about your entrepreneurial journey, because you started, first of all,

just doing the thing, and you started doing all of this yourself. Then you developed your expertise in how to do it. Then you started realizing that you could teach other people how to do it and monetizing it, right? And you started it off as a side hustle. And then when you eventually were able to leave your job and do this full time and be the location independent entrepreneur that you are today. So, I would love to hear a little bit about that journey, because I feel like there's a lot of people in that position where it's like, you know, they're passionate about certain things, they do certain things. They, you know, they love it, they're experts at it, you know, but they don't know how to parlay that and monetize that into something that can produce more income eventually than even their job does, right? And that allows them to get out of the corporate job and really do what they love as an entrepreneur and have ultimately then the location independence, right, that you now have, and the total freedom of mobility. You can go to any country you want and stay there for however long you want and do your thing and move around. And you achieved that, right? You wanted to achieve that. You hustled for it and you got it. So, for people that are in that corporate job right now, and everybody has stuff that they love, everybody has stuff that they know how to do, everybody has stuff that they're good at and that other people ask for help with, right? Can you talk about your entrepreneurial journey and how you were able to build your passion and your expertise into a business that allowed you to leave your job?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. So, it was super organic how it all happened. you know, I started solo traveling, and girls on the gram was reaching out to me, like, damn, I see you solo traveling. How you doing that by yourself? And I'm like, well, actually, I have a system, you know, on how to do it. So, if you want to meet up, you know, whether it be over FaceTime once a week, or in person at a coffee shop at Starbucks, we can meet up and I can show you how I actually solo travel and all the steps I take. And that just turned into me actually solo traveling and a girl from Forbes reaching out. And she was like, yo, I just so happened to type in this hashtag, I see you doing your thing. Let me interview you. you know, you've been to almost 50 countries by yourself. Let me talk to you. So, me and the writer from Forbes met. She asked me how I was traveling the world and all of my trick systems and everything like that. And then next thing you know, I was in for Forbes, like, you know, girl from East Orange made it to Forbes just by doing something that I loved. And once people started finding out more about who I was and how much information I had, you know, I've been solo traveling by myself for years and I just started getting a lot of attention and, you know, I stopped letting people pick my brain without monetizing the fact that I knew something. And I think as entrepreneurs when we're first starting, we have this imposter syndrome, like, should I take money from them because do I really know enough? you know, guys, at the end of the day, if you know that you're really good at something, there's always a freshman class, right? So, consider yourself a senior or a junior. There's all, you always have a freshman class. There's always somebody who doesn't know as much as you, you know. And so, my definition of an expert is I have more than general knowledge on a specific subject, right? So, you know, me traveling to 55 countries as a female solo traveler, I have a little bit more than general knowledge on what people know about solo travel. So, if you guys have something that you're really good at, you're really passionate about, and you're really knowledgeable about, don't have imposter syndrome and think, hey, I got to have Forbes articles and all this other stuff to actually show people how they can get where they need to go when you already have what it takes. you know, believe in yourself enough to say, hey, I know that I can help you and I'm going to charge for it.

Matt Bowles: So, can you talk a little bit about the course and the coaching program that you built and that you currently offer now?

Shakeemah Smith: Sure. So, my course is called Travel Like a Bawse because I'm a boss. Okay. And so Travel Like a Bawse is a six week online coaching program that teaches women how to travel the world safely, confidently, and most importantly, without draining your bank account. So, whenever I work with women and they're taking this online course, it's completely self-paced. But also, in addition to the self-paced course online, I also coach women one on one every week for six weeks. And even as they take each of their solo travel trips, I'm always there via telephone to make sure that they get the support that they need while they're on vacation as well. And I also share all of my itineraries with you. So that way when you want to go to Guatemala, you already know who the driver Is you already know who my photographer was. You already know which Airbnb I stayed or hotel. You already know where I went to get a COVID test, enter to reenter, you know, Antigua or the United States. So, yeah, I absolutely love what I do.

Matt Bowles: That's so dope. Can you talk a little bit about how you built and scaled the business from a side hustle where you just had people hitting you up on Instagram and it was kind of a casual thing where people were finding you and you were meeting with people at coffee shops and stuff like that, and how you eventually were able to scale a side hustle that you were passionate about into a business where your income exceeded what you were making in the corporate world and you were able to just leave your job and do it full time. What was that transition like for you?

Shakeemah Smith: So, the transition was basically me fine tuning my product. I knew that I could teach women how to solo travel, you know, just the way I did, as safe as I did, and also using the same methods, you know, that I did. And so basically, I taught it to so many Women that after 100 or 200 women, the questions were all always pretty much the same, right? And so, I said, you know what? How about I just evergreen this? Because I fine-tuned this and it has gone through the wash with so many hundreds of women, I'm going to evergreen it. Once I evergreened it on ever webinar, I put it on the Internet and now it runs every 15 minutes. And women literally buy my course while I'm sleeping. And so, for anybody out there who wants to, you know, scale their business, the only way that you're going to scale is to evergreen. Because if you're trying to do, you know, 20 women with a cough at a coffee shop, you know, every week, or 100 women at a coffee shop every week is going to. You're going to burn out. So, I decided to evergreen so that way I could talk to hundreds of thousands of women a day and them all get the same information, you know, without me having to experience that burn now.

Matt Bowles: I love that. And you know what I got from that? What you just described? If I'm distilling down some of the principles of it, the first one is that you really tested and interviewed your customer to understand again and again and again, customer after customer after customer, what are their questions, what are their concerns? What are their biggest fears or perceived obstacles, right, that they have, that they want to overcome, that they will pay you to tell them how they can overcome. And you just did this so many times that you knew exactly who your avatar was, exactly who your current customer was, exactly what their concerns were, and exactly how to resolve them. And then once you did that level of market research, which I think is really important, then you were able to create a universal evergreen product, which is your gateway sort of free webinar, which is amazing, by the way. I watched the whole thing and it is outstanding. I mean, it's like super high value content that's also hilarious and entertaining. So, I'm going to encourage everybody to just check it out, either because they're interested in your product or just if they want to see an outstanding example of amazing marketing, we're going to link it up in the show notes so people can go check it out. But then all you have to do from there, once you have your funnel set up and you have your free webinar that then at the end of it offers people to go into your paid content, then all you have to do is

just marketing and you can just turn up the spigot on the number of people that you drive to your webinar. And as your lead flow goes up and you convert those people, your income goes up, right?

Shakeemah Smith: Absolutely. Like, once I was able to evergreen it, at this point, Travel Like a Bawse has women in 12 different countries. And all of this started from my phone, dog. Like you would have thought I was trapping. Like, I ain't have a computer. I didn't have shit. I just had an idiot. I had a system that worked for me with at least 34 countries and I was like, yo, you know how many women are out there that actually want to travel the world? They got the bread. They actually probably not even scared to do it. It's just that they don't know where to start and they don't think that they can actually do this without other people around. And I was like, you know what? I got something for y'all.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. That's so awesome. I also want to ask you a question about personal brand building. You now have over 40,000 followers on Instagram and I want to ask you about that and tips for people on personal brand building and how you were able to do that.

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. So, listen, if you have a product and you know, you're testing it and you want to refine it until it's your perfect product, if you want to build a brand, definitely start to develop relationships with other people in the community of your niche. So, for me, cash money is cool, but relationships are also a form of currency. So, what I would do was my audience is women who want to travel. I would reach out to Instagram pages like Travel Noir, Jet Black, Travel, Black Travel Feed. And I would say, hey, listen, I have this course. I've been featured in Forbes. you know, my shit is legit. you know, you can come check out my webinar for free, dawg. And if you think you're awesome, audience can benefit from having this information. So that way they can start their travel journey with enough knowledge that makes them comfortable, they have safety tools, and they don't have to drain their bank account to do this. Check out my webinar and let me know if you think that there's some value there. And if you think your audience can benefit from having this information. And from there, if there was an Instagram page such as Travel Noir, and they have 500,000 followers, they were now sending 500,000 followers to my Instagram. So that way they can come check out the webinar. So, I'd say make sure that you've put your product through the wash, so that way you can defend it from the mountaintop. And that is refined, because if you put it in front of, you know, 2 million people, then it's either going to be a big yes or a big no. Like, this is either going to be great or an epic fail. And then once you have that refined product, start rubbing shoulders with people who have the audience where your niche actually hangs out. you know, I, you know, coach women who want to travel. So of course, I would go to Girls Love Travel Facebook group. They have 500,000 followers. Of course, I would, you know, contact the admin, because I know that not only are these, you know, women, but these are also women who are interested in travel. And I got this free webinar. You got 500,000 women. Of course, they're going to be interested in this course, you know, so if you want to have some type of brand identity, the first thing that you have to do is make yourself relevant in this community of where your audience is. And you get that relevancy by just making sure that you're constantly in their face. you know, that you're someone who adds value, you know, just being more relevant. I have a saying there's no such thing as competition. I don't have any competition at all. There are only people who might be a little bit more relevant than me. Right. So, you know, that takes the pressure off. So, I definitely say show up, develop those partnerships, because that's a form of currency and just make sure that you, you know, do things to make yourself relevant.

Matt Bowles: All right. Also though, your Instagram pictures are bonkers. Like, your Instagram feed is next level. And I want you to give. Yeah, for real. We're going to link it up in the show notes for sure, so everybody

can go follow you on the gram. But I do want to ask you about that because a lot of people are saying, okay, if I really to want to, you know, build my personal brand, let's say on Instagram or, you know, an image-centric platform. What tips do you have for that? Because you got some pretty solid hacks, right, for like, how you're getting like professional quality photos and epic spots, you know, in all these places that you go, can you share a little of that behind the scenes?

Shakeemah Smith: Of course. So, people often say like, well, if you solo, how you getting all these pictures, sis, come on. I told you that I'm like the queen of finesse. All right, so whenever I go on a solo trip, I just go on Airbnb and instead of clicking stays, I just click the button that says experiences. So, there's usually a photographer in every country. You can do a photo walk or photo tour, right? So, let's say I meet the photographer in Paris and you know, my photo tour is literally $98. I basically get two hours of photo with him. So, I bring like six different photos, outfits, and I'll email the photographer before I get to Paris and be like, dog, this is a two-hour session. I'm going to bring six outfits and I need to take pictures in all different parts of the city. How many places can we cover in these two hours? And it basically helps you get your content all out the way you know, when you first start. And so basically that's how I get, you know, a photographer in every country. I just pay. Like in Colombia, it was $36 for a two-hour photo shoot and I brought like seven different outfits. So literally, you know, again, this is all about finesse. This is all about doing the most with the least.

Matt Bowles: Okay, I love that. All right, I want to ask you one more question before we wrap this up and move into *The Lightning Round*. When you think back on all of the places that you've been and the people you've interacted with and the experiences that you've had over your many years of travel, how has all of that travel impacted you at this point in your life? Why do you continue to travel? What do you get out of It. What does travel mean to you?

Shakeemah Smith: I'll be honest with you, and, like, you got me, like, in this particular place because I've never actually said this before for ESSENCE interview or Forbes interview. So, this is like a Maverick exclusive. If I'm being completely honest. I'm able to do a little bit of healing and a little bit of growing in every single place. And when I leave from every country, there's a part of me that's been reborn again, and there's a part of me that has also died. It's a lot. When you're traveling to different countries, you are able to slow down time a lot. So, you're able to think about some of the things that you did or some of the things that you didn't do, missed opportunities. And whenever I'm solo traveling, it's really a moment of clarity and reflection for me, and I'm able to make peace with a lot of things and also make new personal agreements with myself, create personal expectations with myself, be a lot more confident, and then move on to the next country. And whatever I didn't like about myself, I left it in that country. And whatever I liked about myself; I took it with me to the next country now.

Matt Bowles: What an amazing answer. You are amazing, Keem. At this point, are you ready to move in to *The Lightning Round*.?

Shakeemah Smith: Hey, I was born ready. you know, I'm from Carnegie and Shepherd. I was born ready.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right. What is one book that has significantly impacted you over the years, you'd most recommend people check out?

Shakeemah Smith: Ask and It is Given by Esther and Jerry Hicks.

Matt Bowles: All right, if you could have dinner with any one person who's currently alive today that you've never met, just an evening of dinner and conversation with you and that person, who would you pick?

Shakeemah Smith: Beyonce.

Matt Bowles: That's a great pick. All right. Knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back and click time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Keem?

Shakeemah Smith: Jump. If you're on a ledge and you don't know what to do, just jump. You might actually learn to fly.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome. All right, of all of the places that you have been at this point, what are your top three favorite travel destinations you'd most recommend people check out?

Shakeemah Smith: So definitely Antigua, because I'm actually living there. Right. Dope place. I absolutely love it. Another place that I definitely recommend is South Africa. There is a lot of history in South Africa. If people can just go to South Africa. I went to South Africa. I saw the bullet holes in Nelson Mandela's house, the tree that he planted. you know, it's so much history. You can actually look, learn to speak Xhosa, you know, meet with the Zulu tribe. And that was just a place where I just felt absolutely amazing about myself. And another place that I absolutely loved is Paris. That's where I gained my wings, you know, that's where I took my first solo travel trip, and I never looked back. Paris made me believe in who I was and who I could be. So, I'd say those three.

Matt Bowles: That's awesome. Okay, Keem. What are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you've never been. The highest on your list you would most love to see.

Shakeemah Smith: So, I want to go to Tokyo. I have to get to Tokyo now. Like, that's, like, some next level stuff. So, I want to get to Tokyo. I want to get to Bora Bora, the French Polynesia. Like, I. It's like a dream for me to go to Bora Bora. And another place that is just absolutely, like, somewhere that's on my mind hardcore is New Zealand. Everybody tells me New Zealand is so clean. The people are so nice. You got to get to New Zealand. So, I'm hoping to get to New Zealand.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. Yeah. You do already have the ticket for Tokyo, and you and I have talked about Tokyo pretty extensively, so definitely hit me up when you're ready to finalize that itinerary. Some more specifics. Yeah, but that city is lit. You are going to have an amazing. All right, Keem, we are now coming to the final and most important question of the entire interview. I'm about to ask you your top five hip-hop emcees of all time. But before I ask you that question, I want to just give you the opportunity and sort of ask you to share a little bit about what hip-hop music means to you and what you love about hip-hop.

Shakeemah Smith: Hip-hop music, for me is all about life. You know, it's the fact that you can immediately be uplifted just by listening to someone else and their story, their illustration. Hip-hop has changed my life because it's kind of let me know, like, hey, you can keep going and move forward, you know, Hip-hop is like water to me.

Matt Bowles: That's so awesome. All right, Keem, last question. Who your top five?

Shakeemah Smith: All right, so definitely Biggie Smalls, for sure. Tupac, Jay Z, Nas, and this one going to sound real random, but, yo, Eminem is a crazy lyricist, people. He is so underrated. Like, I think of. I think of, you know, Biggie Smalls. I think of Tupac, I think of Jay Z, Nas. But Eminem, people be sleeping on that, boy. So, I definitely would say those are my top five.

Matt Bowles: That's so awesome. That's amazing. All right, Keem, I want you to share how people can find you, how they can follow you on Instagram, how they can connect with you. And I also want you to take a minute and talk a little bit about your course and who is really your ideal customer, the people that might be listening to this podcast, what types of folks should potentially work with you, and at least come and check out your introductory webinar and. And your course offering.

Shakeemah Smith: So, if you're a woman and you're, like, between the ages of 22 and maybe 40, and you're like, hey, you know what? Listen, I want to start my solo travel journey. you know, I want to learn how to do it safely. I want, you know, to have the confidence. you know, I want to build up the confidence to actually do it. I want to have the knowledge that makes me more confident in taking that step. you know, I want the support. Then definitely reach out to me. My Instagram is *thepassportabuser*, and you can actually go on Travel Like a Bawse. And you can go on TravelLikeABawse.com. Click the button for the free webinar and just come get lit with me. Come get lit. Bring your wand just like we brought it tonight. Bring the weed. Bring whatever you want. Just bring your pen and pad. Be ready to take notes and just learn. The webinar is completely free, so all you have to do is just show up with a pen and pad and be ready to learn. I got you.

Matt Bowles: I love that. And if they come from the Maverick show and they use the code **Maverick**, is there any special treatment that they're going to get?

Shakeemah Smith: Yeah. So, guys, my course is actually 497, but for everybody who shows up from your boys audience and uses the code **Maverick**, I'm going to take this course from 497 to just 97. Use the code; **Maverick**.

Matt Bowles: All right, we are going to link all of this up in the show notes. We're going to put Kim's social media handles. We're going to put the link to her free webinar. We're going to put the code and how you get your mega. That's about a 75% discount off of the course. We're going to have all that in one place. Just go to TheMaverickShow.com, go to the Show Notes for this episode and definitely please do yourself a favor and watch her free introductory webinar. It is amazing. I learned stuff from it that I never knew. I've been full-time traveling the world now for over eight years. I learned stuff that I didn't even know and I literally was laughing probably every five minutes out loud. It is so entertaining and hilarious and substantive. So, I encourage everybody to check it out. We're going to link it up in the Show Notes. Keem, this was amazing. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Shakeemah Smith: It's an honor.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night everybody.

Shakeemah Smith: Good night.