

PART 3  
**2021 Year-in-Review**  
***Nekose's adventures as a digital nomad!***

**Summer Vaccine Time**

Before leaving Guyana, Sawida and I decided it was best to get vaccinated in the U.S. before continuing our adventures. We were not illegible for vaccination before leaving the States and increasingly, proof of vaccination was required for international travel, along with a negative PCR test. The Pfizer vaccine required a 3-week waiting period between the first and second shot. Then, another two week wait, after the second dose, to be considered fully vaccinated. I left Guyana in the middle of June and planned to be home for about 6-weeks. In addition to getting fully vaccinated, coming back to the U.S. would enable us to plan for the rest of the year. Sawida was selling her house and I had to plan my home base for when our travels ended. I also needed to discover my jewelry in my storage unit and had to go to Tabatha's wedding at the end of June!



*Lara & Me at Tab's wedding  
in June*

When I left Georgetown, I headed to my temporary housing location at the Jusu McMansion in Bowie, MD. Lara is my homie from high school, and I have been out of college (PSU undergrad) for more than 20 years! Her house has a ton of space, and I knew I would be warmly welcomed by the entire family. Lara has been to so many family gatherings, walks, and vacations that my aunts and uncles check in on her well-being, "How is Dr. Lara doing? Tell her I said hello." For more than a month, I seamlessly integrated into the Jusu family where I was reminded that responsible adult supervision is a tenant of good parenting. "I'm going to Panera, catch you babies later," is just not acceptable—so sayeth the law! Although I do know a bunch of latchkey kids who turned out just fine.

Personally, I always doubted my ability to be a jubilant soul if I had to parent alone, without any consistent, tangible help and children need some joy in their lives. I was also good on the 'we're together but I'm primary parent while you get to be fun auntie' front. The Jusu parents appreciated my presence because they got to have some of that come and go as you please life that I love. As long as Auntie Kose promised to watch the kids, they could roll out. As with kids, pets also need your time and a set schedule. I've thought about getting a dog for maybe a decade, and every time I'm like I can't have some poor dog mad at me because I went to happy hour when he needed to go poop poop. Also, I can't be mad at the doggie 'cause I have to be home to let him out when I want to go to happy hour or have to work late. Even during the pandemic, I was like I would have to consciously schedule exercise time with a doggie instead of laying on my couch.

When you are the responsible adult in the house, children actually come to you to help them with stuff! Auntie Kose was in full effect. If the kids were beefing with one another, we had civil discourse, shared our feelings and frustrations, and talked through them. I was fair and judicious with any squabbles, letting each party present their argument then putting systems in place to quell future hard feelings. Plus, the kids would have random conversations with me about stuff because I am conversant. You can ask Auntie Kose anything and she will tell you an age appropriate version of the truth, while earnestly listening to your feelings and trying to respect and understand them. It's much easier to be a happy parent when you are not stressed out!

I also left my mark on the Jusu pantry when I reorganized the whole thing! I was so proud of myself. I was having trouble finding my snacks that I didn't buy, and I shouldn't have been eating anyway, so I let my OCD tendencies take over and did a full scale clean out and reorganization. I love organizing stuff. I find it relaxing and calming. Lara invited me to organize more stuff, but I passed on that. The snack issue was solved and now they could see what they had without unnecessarily re-buying stuff like Will & Grace (the parents) used to do! Like lotion, organization is my friend. There were many good times at Lara and John's!

## Getting to Anguilla

We chose Anguilla as the second stop on our digital nomad journey while we were still in Guyana. I had been to Anguilla once before and fell in love with the beauty, calm, and peace of the island. I activated the Caribbean family network to find lodging and one of my cousin's knew someone with property to rent. Sawida and I sent our deposit for our place in Shoal Bay Village via Western Union after we were back in America. Sawida, who had come back to the States before I did, would arrive in Anguilla two weeks before me.

Anguilla's borders had been closed for practically the entire pandemic and they had only recently opened to visitors about two months before our July arrivals. What we would soon learn was that their re-opening process was not going smoothly! Their host of entry requirements included use of their online "portal" to upload proof of vaccination, a negative PCR test, and housing information. Anguilla required an approval of all of these things, and after all the documentation was in place the Minister of Health had to individually sign off on everyone's entry paperwork. In theory, it seemed as if this was a secure system to safeguard the well-being of residents and visitors, but in practice it was a hot ass mess.

Anguilla didn't know what the hell they were doing and was not ready for the influx of visitors. At this point in time, more people were getting vaccinated, and folks thought the end of the pandemic was near because the Delta variant was milder than original COVID for the vaccinated. In all honesty, they should have just left their borders closed longer and invested in a functional portal. The first signs of trouble was with Sawida's entry. She put all of her documentation into the system and still had not gotten the necessary approvals to enter Anguilla. Unless you had a private plane to fly directly into the country, most people flew to St. Maarten then took the ferry over. Sawida's approvals didn't come through until she was in transit on her flights, and that was really because of my cousin who reached out to someone she knew at the portal. Anguilla is a very small island.

## Dresser Gate

The second sign of trouble was dresser gate. Since Sawida arrived before I did, she was scoping out the lay of the land and noticed that my room didn't have a dresser. Before our Guyana trip, Sawida specifically requested dressers, something I had not considered. In our discussions with the Guyana landlord, we were like, 'we are women, we have bras and panties that we want to put in dresser drawers please,' and he made it happen. In our conversations with our Anguilla landlord, who was a woman, dressers had not come up. I had specifically reached out to her to make sure we both had desks. I told her that I understood that having two desks was not a reasonable requests, but since we were both working from home we would need two. The landlord had one desk that was left by a previous tenant, so I offered to pay for a desk for myself. However, I made clear that desk would be given to my relatives or sold upon my departure. You wasn't getting free furniture from me.

The landlord discussed the situation with her "husband" and they found another desk and some desk chairs. Their primary pre-pandemic renters were typically medical school students, so they wanted to keep the desk. They said it was a rare find, because the island was small, and they would pay for it themselves. Cool, I thought we were straight until Sawida called to say my room didn't have a dresser. I still had two weeks before my arrival and was swamped trying to make sure I was packed for the second phase of the trip and moved into the place I would be living after my return to the U.S. Sawida was working with the landlord to get the dresser, and all seemed like it was moving along smoothly until a few days before my departure. I still didn't have a dresser and Sawida looped into the conversation with the landlord.



Map of Anguilla

Sawida and I always split all of our expenses down the middle, rent, utilities, groceries, everything. Since I had the bigger bedroom in Guyana, she would have the bigger bedroom in Anguilla, and we would continue our split. In the group chat I'm like I'm not trying to pay rent to not have a place for my undies. Unlike Guyana, the smaller bedroom didn't even have an entrance to the bathroom. My stick was looking real short and dresser gate nearly derailed the entire second leg of our digital nomading. I seriously contemplated not going. Upon further discussion with Sawida, she wasn't feeling the location anyway. We were in the village of Shoal Bay and not close enough to comfortably walk to the beach. She tried it once and it was mostly uphill in the very hot sun. Plus, everyone kept checking to make sure she was okay because folks don't really walk in Anguilla. We decided that we did not need to stay in Anguilla or at least not at that location and that we would be flexible in seeking alternative housing arrangements.

### **My Anguilla Entry Struggle was Real**

Dresser gate was compounded by my actual experience getting into Anguilla. Everybody and my literal mama was on the list to visit us. They had heard good things about the small Caribbean island, until I nearly didn't get into the country. There were many other signs this was going to be an ill-fated journey. First, the PCR test that I took at Walgreens did not come back in time for me to upload the results into St. Maarten's (SXM) portal system. Everyone going to SXM, even if it was just in transit, needed to input their PCR results in that portal, which was at least functional. I had to scramble to get a second coronavirus test and ended up getting both an antigen and a PCR test as a precaution. The shelf life on antigen test results is shorter than PCR tests.

The Walgreens test did not come in until the evening of the day of my flight, more than 72-hours after the test was taken, which is absolutely ridiculous in the middle of a pandemic. Because my second set of testing was done in a rush, I did not have official approval from St. Maarten before leaving for the airport. All I had was a confirmation saying that they received my information. When I got to the airport, the American Airlines lady was like, we can't let you on the plane. I was like, but I have to stop in Charlotte anyway and I'm sure my approval will come through by then because the St. Maarten portal turn around is less than 12 hours. She was like, nope.

Airlines had been paying a lot of fines for not doing their due diligence in checking folks' travel materials before boarding and American was like we not about that life anymore. The agent at the counter said she could put me on the flight the next day and I could come back then with my official approval. I thought about it and said to myself maybe Jesus wanted me to have some extra time in the States. I asked the agent to put me on the Friday flight. She was like it's not our policy, we typically reschedule people for the first available flight and that is tomorrow. I was like do me and my first class ticket a solid lady, y'all done got my money. She put me on the Friday flight. I was so glad I had taken the extra 'rona tests, as they would still be valid for entry to both SXM and Anguilla.

I go back to catch my flight two days later with a print out of my approval and the same lady is like I need to see this in color. St. Maarten's approval comes in bright green. I have a black and white printer, so I had to pull up my acceptance on my phone. I thought that was very printer racist. You can read that I was approved. What if I was an older person that didn't have a cell phone? Were you really going to turn me away because I didn't have a color print out? I'm allowed to board the plane at BWI, but I hadn't gotten my Anguilla approvals. American only cared about where they were dropping me, not about my actual final destination! I had put what I could into Anguilla's bootleg ass portal and had emailed my vaccination proof since the portal would not let me upload it.

As I was taking off from Charlotte to Anguilla, the portal people are contacting me, at my cousin and Sawida's insistence, and asking me for dumb shit like the proof of vaccination I had already emailed. Competency was not their strong point. On my way to Anguilla, I'm chatting with my fellow first class patron, and he is telling me that he too was having portal issues and hadn't gotten his approvals. He was an Anguillian native residing

abroad and they weren't trying to let him in either! As I progress through customs and immigration in St. Maarten, I thought I was set because I started seeing approvals. Boy was I wrong, as I found out when I got to the port. *Everybody* was having the same issue with Anguilla's portal.

I got to the port in the morning and kept watching the ferries leave without me. People's approvals would slowly come in and they were allowed to board, but not mine. At one point I had all the approvals, but I still needed an actual entry certificate with a number on it to be allowed to board. I didn't have a certificate. The portal was now saying I had to pay \$600 to get my certificate. Apparently, when Anguilla decided to open up their borders, they were running a dual system. If you were vaccinated, you didn't have to pay but if you were unvaccinated you had to pay the \$600. I had called over to Anguilla and spoke to some rude, uncaring lady who finally tried to help at the end of the conversation but still, I didn't have a certificate.

By this point, I had been at the port for hours looking pitiful and talking to everybody. There were multiple people where it was their second or even third day trying to get over to Anguilla. The whole staff was praying for my certificate. They called over to Anguilla themselves and explained the situation. They were told the certificate would be sent directly to the port and the nice lady who worked for Calypso Cruises let me get on the last ferry. They were literally holding the boat for me. She was the best. When I left the port, there was a white woman who was going to Anguilla because of a death, and she hadn't gotten her approvals either. Anguilla is still a British territory, so she was working her political connections but wasn't going to be able to get on that last boat. She would be spending the night in St. Maarten, as was my acquaintance from the plane who was supposed to fly over on a small plane. I gave that lady a real hug, even with the 'rona out there. There whole process was ridiculous and quite traumatic.

I earnestly didn't think I was going to get into the country and thought I would have to arrange for lodging in St. Maarten until I could figure out my next steps. I was thankful I got in but knew this was an unacceptable situation for any visitors. Initially three or four of Sawida's friends where planning on visiting and getting themselves a villa, she had even connected them with a local realtor to get property listings. The vaccine mandate thwarted their plans as well as those of one my friends, who would not have been fully vaccinated before her departure. I told everyone who wanted to visit that even with vaccination, getting into Anguilla would be a crapshoot involving a shitty a portal, multiple steps, and inefficient people and systems behind the scenes.

### **You Need a Car in Anguilla**

Although Anguilla is a small island, things are not close, and it is hard to get around without a car. There are no sidewalks and no real taxi cab system outside of the resort and ferry port areas. A car was a necessity, or we would be stuck waiting on the kindness of family and strangers. After my arrival I started researching rental places and got a few recommendations. I settled on Gumbsie, of the Gumbs family, and it was a good choice. I told Gumbsie where we lived, and he swooped me up to take me to his rental business. I negotiated for a left hand drive car at a very reasonable price. We could have gotten a brand new right hand drive vehicle for a \$100 more, but I didn't want to take any chances in a newer vehicle, especially while driving on a side of the road I was unaccustomed. I was hoping that having the steering wheel on the opposite side of my regular car would prompt my brain to remember I was driving on a different side of the road.

I was nervous about driving in unfamiliar territory, so Gumbsie took me on a test drive to help get acclimated to right side of the road navigation. I was a bit close to the edge of the road, so the bushes kept brushing up against the car. He too was now thankful that I chose the older vehicle! The drivers in Guyana were INTENSE, and there was no way I was even going to attempt driving there. In Anguilla, it was a necessity cause, I wasn't fitting to stay home! Me and Gumbsie ran errands for an hour. The landlord only gave us one key for the front door, like me and Sawida were going to be tied at the hip, so I went to the hardware store to have another key made. Since we were getting keys made and Gumbsie was a car man, I asked him if there was anywhere

on the island that could make me a key for my Honda Civic. He knew a guy and I had everything necessary on me. The Honda dealership wanted to charge more than \$200 for a key I had made in Anguilla for \$60. Gumbsie was like I really should get back to work, and I was like come on Gumbsie you know I need to drive around some more. He capitulated and we drove around for like an hour. Gumbsie was a good dude, and I would definitely rent from him again.

**Shoal Bay Village Wasn't for Us**

Sawida and I were solidified in our resolve to leave Anguilla before our originally planned October departure. We were not feeling our accommodations *at all*. The wicker furnishings was uncomfortable, a fly had died in between my bedspread and sheet before my arrival, and my bed shifted every time I moved. Plus, I still didn't have a dresser. I literally bought a plastic container from one of the island stores for my undergarments. The road that led to the house was unpaved and super bumpy. The surroundings to the house were extremely dry and looked desolate. The backyard used to have a garden and now it just had dry humps of land that looked like burial plots. There were no screen doors so we couldn't even open the front door and back door to try to achieve a breeze. There were too many bugs and insects to even attempt that. On the whole, things were unappealing, and the place had a *depressing energy*.

After my arrival at the very end of July, we paid the landlord for the month of August and the utilities due. We told her we would be moving out by September 3, but she could keep our security deposit. I had done the math and she would have made at least \$700 in profit from this arrangement. I thought we were being very magnanimous. She would have plenty of time to find new renters while keeping some extra cash. In the meantime, I had started taking swimming lessons. I got the swim instructor's information from the landlord daughter at the children's swim lessons, right before my adult classes. I know she was irked in her soul that I was living my best life while she was busy being grumpy in her spirit. I always said hello and greeting her and the baby so warmly, but her energy was always off-putting. That lady needed some joy in her spirit.



*Anguilla Carnival  
Eyes Wide Shut with Anthea*

I firmly believe that seeing me living my best life was why she got a bug up her butt and sent us a message, about two weeks after we told her we were leaving early, saying that she had checked with her lawyer and because we weren't staying until October, she was entitled to our security deposit plus the utilities. I was like bitch I can read. I sent her a Letter Lady special saying I need you to read the lease you sent to us, we did not give you short notice of our intent to vacate. You had more than 30-days' notice. If you upset because we spoke to you like a person, instead of emailing you, this is your email. Furthermore, if you want utility money, I need my security deposit back and then you can get utilities. I was also like, you ain't the only one that knows lawyers so what you trying to do? That lady was raising my blood pressure during the month of my birth with her negative energy and bad juju housing. The only other renters in her adjacent property were those who needed to quarantine for a few days.

When we visited my Cousins Juene and Anthea at their house, I remembered why I had fallen in love with Anguilla in 2012. Going into the driveway had a peaceful and serene energy. It was also lush and beautiful. There were plants, fruit trees, flowers, and positive vibes, the complete opposite of our lodging. I asked Cousin Juene how her yard was thriving when our landlord said Anguilla was experiencing a drought and that's the reason her yard looked like a desert. Cousin Juene was like we pay for what it is important to us, and I will pay a high water bill because I value my plants, fruit trees, and flowers. Curb appeal is important. Our landlord was used to renting to students who were not accustomed to, or did not care about, the amenities that mattered to working adults. In an island country, where tourism is king and your traditional source of income has left the island, you really have to step up your game and shift that negative energy.

## My Birthday Fun

In addition to shenanigans with the landlord, work shenanigans were heating up. Although I wasn't looking, I wanted a role at another organization when it came across my desk. I found out I didn't get the job at about the same time I found out that the restructure at my current job, that started in January 2021 and had no end in sight as of August 2021, meant that the boss who hired me was shifting positions and her boss, who was the head of the entire department and had taken a liking to me, would no longer be leading the department. My future employment at my current job was now on shaky ground. Prior to these developments, I wasn't terribly worried about the restructure and honestly thought I would land on solid ground. I decided to lean into enjoying life during my birthday week and to not worry about anything.

The Jusu family was not deterred by my Anguilla entry horror story. The kids were not happy that they were left at home when Lara came to visit me in Guyana, so she planned their next family vacation to Anguilla. None of them had been there before and Lara booked Shoal Bay Villas for lodging. The hotel workers were like, we got you. The staff took care of the portal requirements for **both** Anguilla and St. Maarten. All the



*My Anguilla birthday festivities with Sawida and the Jusu family*

Jusus had to do was send their passport and flight information. Lara lined this trip up with my birthday because I would be off from work and could really hang out. The Jusus are some world travelers and the kids have been to half the number of countries I have been to at a quarter of my age!

Their visit was just the pick-me-up I needed. The beaches, bays, resorts, and restaurants were the main attraction in Anguilla. There were so many great places to eat, like Myra's a local lunch lady. Surprisingly, our rental car from Gumbsie fit four adults and two kids! It was an older boxy car and larger than the newer car I didn't choose. We spent our time hanging out at the Jusu villa,

which had a direct walk out onto the beach, and at various eateries around the island. The view from the villa was absolutely gorgeous. A peaceful environment and curb appeal really matter! We even met an older black lady who befriended us while we were eating at Madeariman, which was walking distance from the villa. After striking up a conversation, she asked if she could join us. Her friend was sick that day, but she was still out and about. We hung out a few times and I joined her and her friend for dinner at Sharkys one night.

We ate at many places during bday week—Dolce Vita, an Italian restaurant at Sandy Ground near my swim lessons; Tasty's restaurant, a brunch favorite of mine and Sawida's that had equally delicious dinners, the owner Dale was great; Hanks and Zemi Beach House on Shoal Bay. My cousin Richelle works at Zemi, and they had an awesome band. That buffet was expensive. We also had a birthday boat ride with a Black father & son charter company and went the Four Seasons for the most expensive coffee and dessert I have ever had! "Anguilla is expensive," became Lara's refrain. I told her to tell her 9-year old not to order \$50 lamb chops anymore and they should skip the \$40 per person breakfast buffet at Zemi, no matter how beautiful and scenic the ambiance!! Even when Lara bought groceries for breakfast and snacks, costs were at a premium because practically *everything* is imported. Anguilla was so expensive.

Anguilla is considered a rich person's luxury vacation spot, valued for privacy and seclusion. I saw that when we visited Cap Ja Luca, a Belmond property on the island. The manager, Kevin who we were connected with through Dale, gave us a tour and treated us to lunch. He told us these wonderful stories about the guests and really needs to write a book. Lunch was so good, Sawida and I went back for dinner on a different day! If I ever get \$1,000 - \$3,000 per night to spend on a hotel room in paradise I will be back as a guest instead of a visitor! I totally get why people go to Anguilla for a private getaway. At my birthday dinner, we saw Jemele Hill and her husband coming into the restaurant we were we dined, Veya. Since the island is a rich man's getaway, even Lara was like I need to come back here when I'm in a higher income bracket. Hilarious.

**Sherlly's Birthday = Hello St. Maarten**

Since getting into St. Maarten was much easier, Sawida and I figured any visitors could come see us there. Originally, we were planning on leaving Anguilla together on Labor Day weekend and had already found our Airbnb. Sherlly was supposed to come to Anguilla for her birthday at the end of August, but she wasn't going to meet the vaccine requirements by then. She still wanted to get out of the States so I told her St. Maarten was a good choice because all they needed was a clean COVID test, and either antigen or PCR would do. At first I wasn't going to join her in SXM because I was not confident I could return to Anguilla. As far as I was concerned, I was still illegal—I never got a certificate. I would have really had a problem if all my belongings were in Anguilla, and I couldn't get back in after visiting Sherlls. Then, here comes Lara making me feel bad, 'How you leaving her alone on her birthday.' Although she wasn't going to be alone because I had already reached out to the Tinder dudes.

I knew the only way I could pull it off being in SXM for Sherlly's birthday was if I left Anguilla for good. This meant I would have to pack up all my stuff and figure out housing for after her trip ended, which would be a week sooner than when we were supposed to move into our Airbnb. I contacted our Airbnb host and asked to add a week onto the stay at the beginning of the trip. I was in Anguilla for a total of three weeks before packing up and taking the ferry to SXM. Sherlly got to the island two days before my arrival, and we would have four days together, so I joined her at the Commodore Suites. It looked so nice on the internet, but it was not in real life! Talk about lax cleaning standards and broken elevators. It was centrally located for hanging out purposes and that was the best part. Photos, and even videos, stay lying.



*Sherlly and Me  
Cutting up on the Commodore roof*

I decided to upgrade us to the Sonesta Ocean Point all-inclusive resort in Maho. I had never been to an all-inclusive resort before so this would be a first for me. We were advised to stay on the adult side because it was nicer, albeit more expensive. I booked and the Sonesta did not disappoint. It was all you can eat and drink. I like my three meals a day, and sometimes snacks, so the Sonesta was right up my alley. I understand why drinkers love a good all-inclusive. If you want it, there is a constant supply of cirrhosis of the liver. Four large bottles of liquor—rum, vodka, whiskey, bourbon—greeted us

when we walked into our room and was replenishable. Additionally, liquor was available at the pools and all the restaurants. It was truly all in-inclusive.

One day someone kept knocking on our door, all insistently, even though we hadn't ordered room service. It was the liquor valet. We hadn't cracked open any of the bottles in our room, but he was like, 'Are y'all sure you don't want any more liquor.' No thank you sir, we won't be getting alcohol poisoning during this trip! We're cocktail people, so we had drinks made by the bar tender when we ate.



*The view from our room at the Sonesta*

I would definitely do another all-inclusive. Sherlly is vegan with additional dietary restrictions, so she eats *certain* twigs and berries, and gets offended if you only try to feed her salads! The chefs were still able to make her some real food that was delicious. Hats off to our favorite Sonesta chef who even whipped us up some plantain porridge. I too was getting in on the vegan offerings! We had a really good time. The Sonesta felt like a real vacation, which I needed! It was centrally located in Maho, so in addition to the activities the resort offered, there was plenty of night life in the surrounding area, although those folks didn't look like they were in a pandemic, so we kept our distance. I would definitely go back to the Sonesta Ocean Point!

**Landlords are either wildin' or wonderful**

Apparently on the day I left Anguilla, the landlord came through with a dresser. There was no communication about this occurring. She, and the man who she wasn't actually married to, showed up with a dresser and of course saw my room was empty. I'm sure that didn't make them happy! That made everything worse for Sawida. The landlord got another bug up her butt and started wildin' out. That lady was so unstable. I wasn't there, but Sawida gave me the blow by blow. Plus, via our WhatsApp group, the landlord was still pushing to get utilities while keeping our security deposit. Our stance on that had not changed.

The way I heard the story was the landlord came to talk to Sawida, but she was in her bed half nekkid trying to nap. She told the landlord to come back later since she wasn't expecting her. At some point, the landlord, who is Guyanese by the way, starts cussing and fussing loudly in the yard, but Sawida is not one to match that energy, whereas I can match crazy with crazy if necessary. Inconsideration and misdirected anger really bothers me. This is why Jesus and Lara led me to St. Maarten. Thou shalt not catch a case in Anguilla. I need gainful employment and health insurance; those are harder with a record. When the landlord did connect with Sawida, she told her she needed to get out of the unit before the end of the month, even though we had paid for the entire month. Of course, Sawida was like you got your August money lady.

I wasn't even out of the country for more than a few days and at some point on another day, the landlord has a whole other meltdown. In addition to cussing and fussing, she TURNED OFF THE ELECTRICITY. At first Sawida thought it was a power outage, until she realized this bitch had cut the power to the unit. Sawida thought she was messing with her because of my absence. She and Haleema have told me there is something about my spirit that gives people pause when they want to start acting crazy. According to Haleema, I get crazy eyes that are scary, even when I'm not saying anything. Probably especially if I'm not saying anything because when I stop talking I start planning. I can see why crazy eyes and the axe murderer version of my face can be unnerving, especially when I start taking my deep breathes and saying, 'Calm down Nekose' to myself, but it's out loud. I am self-soothing so I can actually calm down! This is why f' them consequences Nekose goes therapy, so that the Nekose that recognizes anger as hurt can thrive and move on.

The landlord and fake husband get into a huge fight that Sawida can hear. He leaves shortly after the power is returned. Sawida deduced that the only reason the power was returned was because a quarantine party had arrived and the bottom floor units shared the same circuit breaker, it was not because the landlord came to her senses. It was clearly unsafe for Sawida to stay near this unstable woman. Her realtor friend had started looking for a temporary location but Dale, our homie from Tasty's, came through with the best offer. He had a studio unit as a part of his rental property, and he wasn't even going to charge her. He enlisted one of his relatives to help her leave in manner that only required one trip from the house to the cars. After all this, Sawida came over to SXM early. She made sure the landlord didn't get her keys back until September 1 even though she was gone by August 29! The landlord didn't even have the sense to have extra keys.

Meanwhile in SXM, our Airbnb host was amazing. Greta is a super host for a reason. The whole place was spotless, she had food in the fridge for us, proper pots and pans, a full set of matching dishes, a coffee maker, lots of good silverware, pot holders, a built in desk, TVs in the living room and both bedrooms. The difference in our accommodations between our previous locations was striking. She took me grocery shopping and helped me get situated with my cell phone before we rented our own car and got mobile. She even cooked for us on a few occasions and welcomed us to get fruit from her many fruit trees. I appreciated Greta so much that I spent \$50 buying my own tiny desk / table, which I left if for her. She deserved a thank you gift. If I ever go back to SXM and don't want to stay at a resort, I'm looking Greta up. She kept trying to get me and Sawida to consider buying. She was tired of being a landlord and was like, people are not as considerate as you two! Sometimes one landlord loves you and the other you would fight in the street. That's life.



*Greta's Fruit Trees  
St. Maarten*



### Visitors, Dating, and Excursions

Like Anguilla, SXM is a small island so there wasn't a terrible amount to see, but we still explored. SXM is actually two countries on one island, Sint Maarten is the Dutch side and Saint Martin is the French side. Greta's home was on the Dutch side but less than a mile away from the French side. In addition to hotels, resorts, and beach areas, the Dutch side is full of casinos and strip clubs. It is definitely the party spot for a vacation. Folks in Anguilla said they go to St. Maarten to party! We had two visitors, at different times, GG who came in shortly after Sawida arrived and Ije who came at the end of our stay. Once again, we found the best places to eat and hang out, including Loterie Farm and Tijon perfume making. Greta showed us around some, but once we got a car, we were independent again.

The men were still the best tour guides. They knew all the places for food and fun and had various resources. In SXM, our rental car and my barber came from their contacts! Since dating apps are location based, there were more men in SXM and the surrounding islands than actually in Anguilla. Therefore, I had proactively started talking to folks in SXM once we decided it was our next location. Of the two or three men I was chatting with, one was definitely down for helping Sherlls out. He was a native of the island but had lived in NYC for a while. I knew he and Sherlls would get along and connected them. He picked her up at the airport when she arrived, picked me up at the ferry port when I came to town, and got Sawida when she arrived too! He even got GG from her hotel when she transitioned to staying with us. He was a one man tour guide for both sides of the island. I got him some baked goods before I left Anguilla and a lovely thank you card, then I treated him to dinner and gave him another thank you card. He was so helpful in getting us settled in SXM.

I dated men in I both Anguilla and SXM, but the vibe was kinda weird, especially in Anguilla. In both places, the people who actually lived there were from throughout the Caribbean. There weren't that many natives.



Sunset Cruise SXM

I couldn't really put my finger on the culture in any location and still can't articulate precisely what I mean by weird. To me, there is always something off about places whose financial stability is primarily dependent on tourism. Everything is skewed when the best way to earn a living is predicated on appeasing folks, especially rich white folks. As per usual with dating, I stay amazed at how men get to operate in the world. One dude was in Saba, and he invited me to take a boat or flight over to his place to spend a few days with him. He was working and couldn't leave but wanted some in-person company. We met online and this is our first conversation. You are a complete stranger in a different country. I won't be on ID channel sir.

Another man was American but in SXM for medical school. He was a few years younger than me and was looking for a potential life partner, but he had two young children who lived in the U.S. that he would not get see regularly. Although he had a good job in that States, before embarking on his quest to be an anesthesiologist, it wasn't fulfilling. I totally get following your passions, but this meant he wasn't going to be around to parent his kids for at least four years. Proximity to them was not a priority for his residency either so it was going to be longer than four years. For as much as I understand following your dreams and building the future that you want, I also understand responsibility. Men stay getting to be fun auntie and not actually a full, or even part-time parent. Similarly, our tour guide had multiple children with multiple moms and only one of them lived in SXM! I definitely have more stories for *Where you on your medication when you proposed to me?*

### Lessons Learned

I learned so much from my travels. As I continue to grow and evolve as a person, the lessons abounded. First, I like nice accommodations. Although the Airbnb was more expensive than our Anguilla and Guyana housing, it was what I value in a living situation. If I do Airbnb in the future, I will definitely look out for super hosts! Secondly, bug sprays can set off fire alarms! In Guyana, our insect repellants kept triggering the alarm despite

the high ceilings. It's something about the chemical particles hitting the sensors in the alarm, which would NEVER shut itself off. I had to climb up on the super tall ladder on more than one occasion, which I didn't appreciate! By the time we left, the batteries were ajar in every single smoke detector just to stop that infernal beeping, which by the way did not beep when the janky old generator switch got smokey!

Additionally, I finally got the reference my mom always used for taking a shower, "throw water pun my skin." When we stayed at Auntie T's house, we mixed hot kettle water and cold tap water in a bucket to bathe. You literally had to throw water on your skin because the water from shower was too cold use alone! Another lesson was I'm not as smooth as I like to think I am! During a conversation with Lara while she was in Guyana, I was priding myself on not flashing Sawida. I like being comfortable at home and have a bottoms optional policy, especially when it's hot. I was telling Lara that in all this time, I haven't flashed Sawida once. Sawida was like, you flash me all the time, I'm just used to it and don't say anything. I was patting myself on the back for no reason!

The utility of living with someone was also reiterated for me. Sometimes you just need some help! One day in Anguilla, I decided to lace up my sneaks and jump rope wearing a zip up the front sports bra that I bought before the trip. I absolutely loved it; it was so supportive. The very next day I could not get into that bra. THE VERY NEXT DAY. I was like Sawida, I'm not sure what is happening because this is the bra I jumped rope in yesterday and I did not grow a cup size overnight. It took a whole lot of team work to zip me back into that mean bra. There was a moment where we both thought I was going to have to give up the ghost. My boobs were putting up a real fight, 'We shan't be constrained.' It was quite demoralizing. How your bra gonna play you like that? Coming with the 'not today homie,' instead of 'I got y'all.' I'm still mad at that bra!! When I'm feeling lucky about it fitting, I see if I can go work out in it out or if it's a hinder my circulation kind of day.

Another lesson was that airport workers stay profiling Black women. I have read numerous articles on the subject, and it has happened to me before, but this was my most egregious incident. On my way back to States from Guyana in June, I was singled out for additional "screening," that kept yielding positive drug residue tests. How sway? I do not do drugs, I don't smoke weed, edibles will have you passed out in the dressing room of a massage parlor in Colorado so that's out, and I have a two drink limit when I do drink. They wiped my shoes and bags and said the machine was still reading it for drugs. They tumbled up all my stuff and questioned me about the snacks I was carrying.

They had me hemmed up for so long I started to get concerned. At first I wasn't worried, but then I began to get upset wondering what's going on here. The lady who was "testing" me was nice enough but I'm like come on sis, this is ridiculous. Maybe there is something wrong with your machine because my auntie didn't give me plantain chips and 3-lbs of cheese (in my checked luggage) as a cover for drugs. I am Guyanese and was visiting and working from home for four months, that's why I have two computers and two phones, and all of this buddle. When I checked my two suitcases, I started to have an issue because my 25 inch monitor was so well wrapped amongst my clothes, the workers could not discern what it was. I explained that it was a big ass monitor that I used for work. As I started to unwrap it, and the worker was like you're good, go on ahead, only for me to be hemmed up with my carryon luggage.

Black people profiling Black people is the worst and there was no evidence I was doing anything nefarious. They finally let me go after another person rifled through my belongings and the original woman called to check with a supervisor. It irked me that they didn't think their machine could be the problem. How often is it checked and calibrated? Nothing is infallible. As they were pawing through my items the woman decided my afro pick could be a weapon and confiscated it, seriously, my afro pick. I was there for at least 30 minutes. Thank God Tonia was there and a whole bunch of other people were spectating too and wondering why I was hemmed for so long by some bootleg ass machine "readings." There were no drug dogs around. That's one thing about Black folks, if they got the time, they will be spectators. Clearly, I'm tired of being profiled, it is exhausting, and I should write a letter to the airport officials about that nonsense.

The last lesson I will share comes from what I refer to as the “cheap bitches” incident. I learned that fight you in the street Nekose is exhausting. It’s much more joyous to have a joyous spirit! At the beginning of our Guyana stay we had a really nice local taxi man that completely under charged us for taking us to the grocery store, waiting until we got our groceries and then taking us back home. We didn’t know he was just being a sweet old man. Then we had some other taxi men who heard our accents and would change the prices. This particular driver charged more than what we typically pay coming back from Aunt Joyce’s house. He tried to say it was because I stopped at the ATM, but I was in and out before the traffic light changed so no time was added to the trip, plus he chose a route that was going to be fraught with traffic at that time of day. We were like how sway, and he was like pay what you owe, or I’ll take y’all to the station. We didn’t know what the station was! It was the police station, whatever dude!

I take out my half of the money, give it to him, and leave the cab. I had had enough of this conversation. This further pisses off the cab driver because he didn’t realize we split everything, as Sawida was taking out her half. When she comes into the house, she’s like that man called us cheap bitches. I may be a lot of things but a *cheap* bitch ain’t one of them. I flew back outside like I got ya cheap bitch homie. He drove away but in true Wills fashion, I was not done. I looked up the location to the taxi hub and walked over there on vengeance and spite. I needed him reprimand since I couldn’t give a proper cuss out. On my way to the taxi hub, one of the men from online dating saw me walking and pulled over to talk to me. I didn’t recognize him y’all. I was so hot and only had one agenda. I don’t even know what he said to me, but I assumed he was a new dude trying to pick me up, so I said nothing, gave him an ‘I don’t have time for this today’ look, and kept walking.

I calmed down after I complained at the taxi hub and started talking to the workers. Then I really calmed down in my spirit. I was like phew, it took so much energy to be that angry over some inconsequential dumb ass man who insulted me, that I was ready to hand him his ass in the streets. That was f’ them consequences Nekose flaring up. I can’t be catching a case in my homeland. I was failing at keeping chill in my soul and not overreacting about some dumb shit. I have to keep the joy in my spirit because I’m not stroking out over some nonsense. All anger does is raise my blood pressure and I’m not already on blood pressure medicine! If I’m going to be mad, I’m going to channel it appropriately. Dude from the dating site called me later and I was absolutely confused about what he was taking about until he told me it was him in the car. Well, your care was different sir, and I was mad. I told him when you are woman walking, you have to learn how to tune things out because the number of comments can be constant even when you are not in a joyous mood!

### **Back to the U.S. in October**

I was in St. Maarten for seven weeks. I decided to return to the U.S. in October, instead of continuing to travel, because of work. I needed to figure out my employment situation and I’m glad I made that choice. I can’t relax in the Caribbean when I’m worried about my bread and butter. On the day I left SXM, I was told that I had only PARTIALLY skills matched in the organizational restructure. I partially matched to two positions 1) the role I had already been doing, except the new role would support communications across the association, instead of just one team, and would require me to learn how to kiss reporter’s asses and 2) a writing position that would also support comms across the company.

Although I wasn’t hired to be a writer, I had written a ton of content for the organization, so I told them I wanted the writer job. That’s when they were like, nah bitch you misunderstood. A partial skills match means you would have to interview for all the jobs you to be considered for. This is not what they said when they started this God forsaken restructure. I was not happy. I heard some poor woman had partially matched to six different roles. Could you imagine having to interview for six different jobs, in a company you already work for, so they can then decide where to stick you. I was hot about the prospect of two interviews. Plus, they had already given me a sham interview for another comms position that was outside of the new structure and had wasted my time. They already knew who they were going to hire and was just jumping through hoops to cover their asses. I was over it all.

I gave it some thought and said you know what, I'm not playing the Hunger Games. I'm good on that front. I will not be interviewing, and I am also not resigning. Y'all can figure out what you want to do with me. When I came to this realization, I Letter Lady'd my employer. Writing is cathartic for me, so I started the email with an earnest expression of my feelings, "I'm writing this message with the utmost respect and earnestly because my bandwidth is lower than it was in the middle of the pandemic when the state sanctioned murder of Black people finally hit the crescendo of the public conscious. This organization has continued to talk about mental health; however, it seems like disingenuous rhetoric as the continued uncertainty of the restructuring has been the primary source of mental health issues for myself and many of my colleagues." I was *partially* matched to a writing position.

I thought I was being very judicious with my words. After all, I wasn't like 'fuck all y'all,' however my friends were like Nekose, these white folks think you gonna sue them. I was honestly writing to unburden myself and to let them know, in no uncertain terms, that I would not be interviewing. Work still tried to convince me to interview, telling me it was just formality. That was some BS because some people were offered roles that they didn't need to interview for. I still said no and figured I would be fired, therefore in conversations with them I made clear we would have no problems *unless* they messed with my unemployment! Messing with that would be the reason we would have real bad blood.

About a month later they came back to me and was like, you know what, you can write, and you can have that writer job without an interview. Didn't nobody else want to be a writer for y'all, I see. The HR lady looked so relieved when I accepted the position! It was like a literal weight lifted off of her shoulders. I like a steady paycheck and my health insurance. If you not kicking me out, I'm going to stay until I find greener pastures—unless you are so much of a succubus staying would stifle the life out of me. I'm older, however, and have learned to live with a level of suffocation. Needless to say, I spent the rest of the year job hunting, in earnest, because I didn't "win" anything at work. I was handed a consolation prize for a job not many wanted because my employer didn't want to be sued. There was clearly no growth potential for me there. It was time to take my talents where they would be appreciated, and where I could continue to grow.

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From February to October, I was in a state of travel and survived the 'rona only to come back and have Omarion / Omicron get me in December! After almost two years of dodging the virus, I'm pretty sure I got it at my kickboxing studio that was majorly slacking on their sanitation protocols and not requiring masks. I had fallen into a place of complacency, where I felt a bit impervious to getting the virus. I didn't get sick from any of my time gallivanting around the world and what my brain had not yet computed was Omarion was dancing its way into everybody's body at a much more contagious rate than Delta, and even original COVID.

I had increased my level of being out in these petri dish streets that is America. I was out an about and enjoyed going to my cousin Sherisha's wedding in NYC at the beginning of December. It was a good time! Before leaving the country in February, I was the queen of SYBD (sit your butt down). I was not eating *inside* of restaurants, I definitely wasn't going to anybody's gym, and the only time I left the house was to buy food and other supplies, while being all the way masked up. When I came back in October, I stopped doing my due diligence the way I was at the beginning of COVID hell. I know so many people who got the virus in December, and not folks I was hanging out with, which proved how rampantly Omicron spread. Thankfully, I did not need hospitalization or oxygen. It felt like the flu, then I was tired and needed naps for about two weeks. Then I was fine. I firmly believe I would have been a lot worse off had I not been vaccinated.

I survived the 'rona and ended the year feeling better than when it first started! By then I was comfortably settled into my new housing in Laurel, thanks to Miss Mc Bride, my elementary school reading teacher. The deer frolic in the woods behind the complex and the birdies come to visit me. Reading is fundamental y'all! I will be in the DMV for at least the next two years and was looking towards what 2022 had to offer! Hope y'all have a great year.

Love, Nekose 