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# Sherwin Banda Leads the Charge for LGBTQ+ Travel in Africa

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Sherwin Banda, the president of African Travel Inc., is a trailblazer in helping to curate LGBTQ+ friendly experiences in Africa and encourage African-American travelers to visit, too!

At Vacationer Magazine, we always enjoy shining a spotlight on people and companies that make a concerted effort to help LGBTQ+ people travel around the world safely. Sherwin Banda, the president of African Travel, Inc. is one of those change agents.

Born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa, Banda currently lives with his family – his husband Craig and their son Noah – in Los Angeles, which is where, six years ago, he became president of a travel company that curates inclusive travel experiences in Africa.

In this interview, I catch up with Banda in an honest conversation to talk about common myths associated with travel in Africa, safety measures to keep LGBTQ+ travelers safe, his mission to get more African-American travelers to visit the continent, and how a global pandemic has affected tourism in Africa.



Sherwin Banda (far left), Craig (middle), their son Noah (with red scarf), Jeffrey Solomon (front right), and friends on a pilot safari for same-sex families. (Photo Credit: African Travel, Inc.)

**Vacationer Magazine: What inspired you to join The Travel Corporation, as president of African Travel Inc. and to offer unique safari experiences for LGBTQ+ travelers?**

**Sherwin Banda:** This year African Travel celebrated its 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I joined African Travel, Inc. because the brand embraced my love of travel and my love for the African continent. Having the connection to Africa made it an easy choice to join The Travel Corporation as president of African Travel. I love bringing the African destination to life for guests who have not experienced it yet.

We are a same-sex family and travel for us is all about inclusivity. Our team at African Travel has intimate knowledge of the destination and can craft experiences for our LGBTQ+ community that is truly world-class and safe.

**What do you think is one of the major misconceptions about LGBTQ travel in Africa?**

A common misconception is Africa is not LGBTQ+ friendly. Most people don't know that South Africa legalized same-sex marriage in 2006 which was years before the U.S. recognized same-sex marriage. There is still a long way to go to have gay marriage recognized across Africa, however, LGBTQ+ people are living and thriving in the destination.

Lodges, camps, and hotels across our experiences are well-vetted to meet international service standards and the specific needs of LGBTQ+ travel.

Another misconception is that Africa is very expensive and only a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Africa provides a multitude of diverse experiences for every budget and interest.



Sherwin Banda (Photo Credit: African Travel, Inc.)

**Many countries, including African countries, rely on tourism as a stream of revenue. How have you been able to navigate the global pandemic to not only keep your business afloat but also encourage tourists to continue traveling to Africa?**

The pandemic caused many guests to postpone their travel. Most guests are traveling one to two years later, and we have protected their itineraries to ensure they live their dream of a safari in Africa. We've also kept advisors and clients connected with Africa by hosting virtual events and for those that were ready to travel we made their trip a reality.

The good news is that Africa is open and has moved up on many people's bucket lists because of the wide-open spaces.

**Please tell us how you identify yourself within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum and does how you identify directly impacts how you travel?**

I identify as a gay man. It's important I am safe and feel included when I travel to any destination. The people I meet should have the sensitivity and inclusive language to serve travelers from the LGBTQ+ community. This feeling of safety and inclusiveness will allow me to delve deeper into local culture and foster meaningful connections with the people and places I visit.



Malay Quarter, Cape Town, South Africa (Photo Credit: African Travel, Inc.)

**You've been an important travel pioneer and inspired so many travelers, including LGBTQ+ travelers. Do you think it's important to see queer people of color, specifically Black and African people, in positions of leadership and travel?**

It's essential that people of color are represented in leadership roles since the world is diversifying faster than previous predictions. According to the latest U.S. census bureau, new estimates show that 4 out of 10 Americans identify with a race or ethnic group other than white. By 2032 according to the Economic Policy Institute, people of color will be the majority of the American working class. Our industry needs to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

**Growing up, who were your role models? Why were they important to you?**

I grew up in South Africa during apartheid and the people who became the consciousness of our struggle for freedom were ordinary people who didn't have big titles or status. They were religious leaders, teachers, and our elders within the community. Our elders were the protectors of our traditions and our memories.

Listening to their stories of freedom prior to apartheid cultivated a desire for change within the youth. Our religious leaders challenged us to find an alternative without compromising our traditions or sense of humanity. Those early learnings shaped my desire to live in a life service to others committed to inclusivity for all.



Sherwin Banda taking a selfie in Kenya. (Photo Credit: African Travel, Inc.)

**Where do you see African Travel Inc. in 5 or 10 years? Do you have any new plans or ventures you can share with us?**

Each of our safaris has meaningful immersive *Make Travel Matter* experiences for our guests designed to their individual needs and our goal is to showcase the best that Africa has to offer. When we look at the next 5 to 10 years, we want each guest to have a deeper understanding of Africa's cultural heritage and impact.

We are looking at new ways we can share new experiences with all guests, especially for the African-American community. Traditions that are still alive within the African-American community started in this ancestral homeland. Walking in the footsteps of their ancestors and the local communities in Africa is an exciting opportunity for us.