

# WHYTT

MAGAZINE  
ISSUE FOUR

www.whyttmagazine.com | £10.95

*Tessy Anthony De Nassau*

Queen Of Hearts  
Building the future

Breathtaking  
Brilliance

*Aston  
Martin*

DBS Superleggera

# THE STATE OF BEING

More than just the glamour

# Nina Naustdal

*Maude Hirst*  
Empowered Woman

*LAVAUD*

Could her's be the Lockdown Lessons





# Women on the road. Does visibility matter?

*Abigail King shares her stories of the sisterhood from the road. And answers the most important question.*

**T**he car stalled, the goat bleated and the camels continued to stroll on by. Through the sand that swirled into a dreamy, autumn haze, I saw the fork in the road and the route I needed. I pulled the scarf from my head and shifted gears. It was time to get going.

Women who travel alone get asked a lot of questions, at least by those who stay at home. Is it safe? What about children? Are you lonely?

But after so many years of questions, it was only this year that someone asked the most important one.

From the sands of the Sahara to the sticky trails of the Borneo jungle where the stars mix with monkeys in the night sky, I've managed to build a life and even a career around a love of travel and a passion for the road.

Yet still, when someone asks what travel is like for women, it





takes a while to find the words.

I don't really think of myself as a woman, not instinctively, and certainly not as a white woman. If I think about it at all, I don't even think of myself as a person. I feel like a bundle of ideas, thoughts and creative energy. And, with age, a bespoke collection of aches and pains with the occasional signature scar.

The body, the packaging on the outside, is the least of it.

And while we all know the world doesn't see us that way, there are moments on the road when it almost could be true.

Driving through the flames of Kakadu National Park in northern Australia, for example. Here is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited lands and yet, for miles, there is no-one to be seen. Aboriginal people make their mark in impermanent ways here: through rock art that is painted over time and again and spoken stories instead of the written word. That, and avoiding visitors.

But most of the time, travel serves to highlight what we look like to the world. From Argentina to India, the Forbidden City in Beijing to the dirt tracks near the Serengeti, I have had my taste of celebrity.

Where white skin is not the norm, wanting to touch it most definitely is. Queues form in the street to take a photo when I walk by.

The laughter, on the other hand, takes a little more getting used to. In Japan, a nation at home on a series of simmering volcanoes, it's customary to bathe in the thermal springs of an onsen. So far, so lovely. But you have to do so naked. It's enforced.

And under such conditions, where white skin turns to red, in a culture where it's not considered rude to stare, or even to laugh, well, the notion of invisibility fades.

I think of it as a ladder, with those shy giggles and snapping photos as the very first rung.

The kindness of strangers is the next. The woman with silver whispery hair who directed me towards the stone gates of the temple in Tokyo. The Parisienne who warned me to hide my phone.

When I headed to Detroit, I'd heard warning after warning from Americans not to talk to anyone; the place was dangerous. My very first encounter involved two women



Abigail King





hollering after me to let me know I'd dropped my jacket.

In Tanzania, home to snowy Kilimanjaro, it was the same. My kanga had slipped, the large, patterned cloth popular in this part of east Africa and worn as a skirt. With the risk of underpants on display in a crowded, conservative market, a group of strangers surrounded me, shielded me, spun me around and tucked everything back in, all where it should be. To the tune of raucous laughter – from them and from me.

This blend of humour, help and heart crosses the line that's the difference for women. Had that been a group of men closing in on me, so, too would a sense of terror.

That bond of safety leads to faster friendships, like banding together to cross a night border in Bulgaria or the woman who handed me a machete in Mexico to keep me safe at night (I didn't need it, we shared food the next day.)

But what about where women are less visible? As I pulled out of Marrakech, stalling amid the camels, groups of men approached and laughed, not a woman to be seen. And, of course, when I lived in Saudi as a child, women weren't allowed to drive.

In neighbouring Oman, waiters carried screens on either side of me as I walked through a restaurant, shielding my silhouette from sight. I dined, with my husband, in an enclosed family booth. But, strange as it sounds to say it, nothing felt derogatory. It all took place with humour and good grace.

And the story is complex. Dubai, for example, has segregated seating on public transport and strict laws on behaviour. Yet the after-conference party hung women from chandeliers as ornaments, glittering and pouring champagne.

Jordan's desert sees men amid the searing rocks of Petra, while women bake bread at home. But in the city, women wear their hair loose, their clothes tight. They speak English, run businesses, tell jokes and share their fiery, cloudy arak drinks with foreigners like me.

In short, the world is tangled, wild, changing and beautiful. In some places, invisibility fits like a cloak, in others the street is a spotlight.

But the most interesting question about travel as a woman today came this year, after lockdown and the decimation of the travel business, around which I base my life.

They wondered if I'd had regrets. Whether I wished I'd spent the last few decades following another career, living another way.

"Was it worth it?" they asked.

Despite the lack of security and the current splintered dreams, how could I think back over all these collected moments and answer anything but this...

A raucous, joyous yes.. W