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Up in The Air Life Founder Shares How She Built a Million Dollar Travel Business

NOVEMBER 1, 2020 ALL PHOTO / ILLUSTRATION HERE

Up in The Air Life is an international travel company founded by Claire Soares. The company is focused on showcasing luxury travel and amazing experiences that you've never imagined.



Claire Soares

What inspired you to create Up in the Air Life?

I started *Up in the Air Life* because I felt there was a gap in the marketplace. A majority of the groups in the black travel movement, even today, are geared towards budget trips. After traveling all over the world I was searching for something more upscale. After a trip to Dubai where a friend of mine rented a private jet for us to soar over the city, I realized I wasn't the only one interested in unique experiences and seeking the finer things in life.

So, I created *Up in the Air Life* with a mission to "inspire, connect and grow."



Clients in Egypt at the Pyramids

There are now many Black Travel related companies. What sets yours apart?

Affordable luxury is *Up in the Air Life's* calling card. These exotic trips are curated "for us, by us" and allow us to relax, unwind and successfully network with other Black professionals around the world. That's something that's still new to Black travelers. Plus we like to spoil our guests in thoughtful and intimate ways. This past May, for instance, we hosted a private lunch with wine and bubbly on the Great Wall of China in a remote location protected by police so our clients could enjoy the view.

Last month we surprised our clients on our Champagne Life trip with a special tasting with the only Black Champagne makers in

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I don't remember what prompted me to buy my first satin bonnet but I'm pretty sure that I bought it from a...



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We want every trip to be such a unique experience where our clients, who have historically been ignored in the travel space, feel deeply respected and special.



Tour Leader in Egypt on a Chariot Ride

Believe it or not I never planned to start a business. My plan was actually to start a blog to help people plan their own adventures.

At first I organized trips and Meetups for free because my friends would ask me to - I was good at it. It wasn't until I planned a yachting trip to Croatia for new friends I met in a Facebook travel group that 15 people bought into at \$1,997 each, followed by a trip to Mexico that was similarly successful, that I realized I was on to something.

Your company has reportedly brought in (close to) \$2 million in revenue just four years. What business practice/s do you feel contributed the most to this accomplishment?

Before I started my own business and eventually quit my job to run it full time I was a sales executive for a Fortune 500 global travel and expense management company where, at certain points, I worked sales opportunities from millions to billions.

During my tenure there I learned a lot about how to build a successful team, how to incentivize them, how to establish necessary partnerships worldwide and how to manage an extensive budget. Most importantly I learned the value of stellar customer service by my frequent travel at upscale hotels.

At Up in the Air Life we get to know the people we're serving before each trip. We call every client prior to a departure to answer questions, get them excited and learn a bit about them. We hang out with them in special Facebook groups so we can find out their favorite music, what kinds of foods they like or when their birthday is, so we can use that information to make their trip that much more special.

Champagne, France who spoke about the industry and challenges with being the only Black Champagne House. We're also givers. For almost all our trips we like to surprise guests with "pre-gifts," books or other surprises that tell them about the food, culture, or photography of the destination they're going to.



Tour Leader in Brazil at Selenite Steps

Many people would live to travel the world but are constrained financially. What advice do you have for the aspiring world traveler?

I would suggest them to start saving by eliminating some services they can get for free. Canceling cable is something I did early on to save \$1,200+ annually. Also reducing your cell phone plan if possible and using WiFi more often. Another way to save is using Ebates.com for regular purchases. Then use the savings to save into an account for travel.

At Up in the Air Life we aim to make our trips more affordable by allowing clients to plan a year or two out with low payment plans. Our trips cover six continents and cater to various travel desires from Food & Wine, History & Culture, Exploration in Africa, Yachting, and Luxe Life trips. Prices for trips and events range from \$1,999 to \$5,299.



Clients at a Wine Vineyard on our first trip to Croatia

What have you learned about yourself on your journey as an entrepreneur?



Clients in Paris at the Eiffel Tower

What is the most fulfilling and the most challenging part of your business?

The most fulfilling is watching people cry from joy or excitement at the places we take them or the gifts we give them. On several trips we surprise clients with pictures of loved ones framed in their room. Often times this is a huge surprise, and in some cases brings tears of joy as they can see loved ones on the nightstand when getting ready and while going to bed. We listen. We pay attention. We care, and if we make a mistake we like to fix it right away.

The most challenging is not being extended the credit I need to grow my business. It's a challenge many small business owners face. Despite the amount of money we make and the fact that I pay off our business credit card immediately each month, banks won't give me any additional credit. With those additional funds I would be able to develop new products faster and improve existing products that our clients already love.



Clients in Mexico on a beach

You now live in Mexico? What made you decide to make that move?

Short answer – a better quality of life. A slower life with no stress, daily inspiration, and a quiet space to grow my business. My best friend being there is a bonus and I get to be an auntie here!

I live by the beach, I'm part of a growing community of Black, entrepreneurial expat friends, I'm just a couple of hours away from the U.S. and I'm in place that's super affordable, which allows me to focus on scaling my business faster.

What you've learned

I've learned how to be a better listener, how to not take things personally, and how to have thicker skin. I've learned that you will make mistakes, but the grace you have with mistakes and your response to accepting the lesson is what makes you and your business stronger. It's also what will continue to define you. Most importantly you have to forgive yourself for making mistakes.

At all times if you focus on doing your best at that given moment you will not have any regrets later (The Four Agreements). I've learned to follow my gut over doing what others think I need to do when I am at an impasse. In the end, you will face the decision and I believe it's better to bet on yourself. Your ability to differentiate yourself and leverage your magic is what will push you as the front runner.



Clients at the All White party in Mexico at our Annual Meetup

What advice do you have for aspiring entrepreneurs?

1. Start today! Join FB Groups for budding entrepreneurs and come up with your first products.
2. Invest in Yourself – Whether its business coaches to help you build your business or taking time to improve your craft you have to work on your craft.
3. Understand your market – Be aware of what's out there and understand the gaps in the marketplace.

-Tony Oluwatoyin Lawson (IG @thebusyafrikan)

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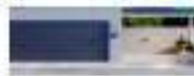
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