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WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SOGNONVI?

In celebration of Mother's Day, we interviewed Carmen Sognonvi, resident travel expert and brains behind the popular family-oriented luxury travel blog Top Flight Family.



Carmen, can you tell us a little about yourself and how you came up with this idea for a blog?

I'm the creator of Top Flight Family, a luxury family travel [blog](#) and [Instagram account](#). I'm passionate about inspiring parents to travel the world with their kids, and I love showing them how they can do it in comfort and style. I started the blog when my husband Serge and I began doing more traveling with our daughters Sean and Ella. When we looked around for resources, we found that most family travel content dealt with budget travel, and most luxury travel content excluded kids. So there was this market that wasn't being served: parents who love traveling with their kids, but who enjoy more upscale accommodations and experiences. We had a hunch that we weren't the only ones, and we were right!

★ REVIEWS How did your career path take you to your current role? What is next for you

I had a long career in both print and digital media. In the mid-2000s, I published a popular blog about the intersection of race and pop culture. I appeared frequently as a commentator on race on media outlets like CNN, MSNBC, and NPR, and toured colleges as a guest lecturer on the topic. After our first daughter was born, I decided to dial it back and focus on helping my husband run his then-new business, a martial arts school in Brooklyn. I helped land [Urban Martial Arts](#) mentions in top business publications including Inc., Entrepreneur, and Fox Business. We were even named one of NYC's top 50 small businesses by leading radio station 1010 WINS! I think having such a comfort with both content creation and with sales and marketing have really helped me build Top Flight Family.



What is the best piece of advice you would give to someone looking to break into the highly competitive blogosphere or take an entrepreneurial step in their career?

If you're interested in becoming a content creator or influencer, the most important thing is to develop your unique voice. And by that I mean, what's your visual aesthetic? What informs your point of view? Our visual aesthetic is quite bright, colorful, and natural. Our point of view is informed by the fact that we're a multiracial and multicultural family who loves to travel the world. Yes, this content creator/influencer space is competitive in the sense that there are a lot of people interested in doing this kind of work, but if you're creating beautiful, useful, or entertaining content that expresses your unique perspective, no one can "compete" with you. Because there's only one you!

What's been your favorite place to travel? And your kids' favorite place?

Dubai and Hong Kong have probably been among our favorite trips so far. Dubai is just an incredible destination because whatever your passion is—whether it's adventure, or culture, or culinary, or amusement parks—you can customize your Dubai experience to be that, because there are just so many things to do there! Hong Kong was a meaningful trip for us because that's my hometown, and it was really special to be able to bring my girls there so they could see where I grew up. That said, our girls love them some Disney, so we've been on two Disney cruises so far, which were great. And getting to experience Disney World with a VIP private tour guide was just amazing!

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Can you describe your style and its evolution?

I wish I was one of those women with a consistent look, but to be honest my style is pretty eclectic. Some days you'll find me in feminine dresses and heels, other days you'll find me in band tees, jeans and boots, and other days I'll be in baggy sweatshirts and sweatpants, with chunky dad sneakers.

How do you think a heritage brand like Etienne Aigner can honor our deep-rooted history, but still remain relevant and innovative?

I think Etienne Aigner is doing it already! I love how your designers tap into techniques that historically made the brand unique—woven leather, for instance—but reinterpret them for today's styles. That's one of my favorite things about fashion in general: how motifs and styles from the past can be brought back again and again and reimagined for whatever is relevant now.

As a busy entrepreneur and mother on the move, how do you carve out “me time”?

Over the years I've come to realize that because I'm an introvert, I need a lot of alone time to recharge. My husband and kids now understand that when I retreat to my room to be alone, it's not because I'm rejecting them, but because I need that solitude to be a more effective wife, mother and entrepreneur. I've learned to ask for what I need from my family, and to create boundaries when I have to. I don't think it's healthy for women to completely lose their identity to being a wife and mother. Yes, those roles are a part of who I am, but there are many other aspects to me that deserve just as much attention and energy.

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What are some of the myths you're trying to shatter about traveling with kids? The first myth is that it's a waste of money to travel with kids when they're young because they're not going to remember any of it. I saw a meme online today that said "Deciding not to travel with your children because they won't remember the trips is like saying don't read them books because they won't remember the stories you read." Even if *they* don't remember the trips, *you* will, and those are valuable family memories. Plus, traveling at a young age teaches kids critical life skills like resilience, adaptability and endurance. The earlier they start, the more benefit they'll receive from these skills.

The second myth I'm trying to shatter is that traveling with kids has to be hard. There are many ways to make family travel easier and more comfortable. For example, we always travel carry-on only and all four of us have both TSA Pre and CLEAR. From the time we step foot in an airport terminal, it usually takes us less than ten minutes to be on the other side of security. And that's at LaGuardia and JFK - two of the busiest airports in the world! There are a lot of tweaks like this you can make to your travel habits to make family travel easier and even... pleasant!

Do you let your daughters dictate their own style or do you like to have a say in how they

dress?

If we're shooting content for Instagram, I'll typically pick out their outfits, just to make sure what we're wearing doesn't clash too much with the vibe of the photos we're creating. But outside of that, I let them do their own thing. It's fun for me to see them flex their creative skills and express their personalities through their clothes. This fall and winter, for example, they were both very into wearing shorts over wool tights. That's definitely not a look I would have come up with for them, but it was cute to see how much fun they had with it.

Can you share your most memorable Mother's Day?

My most memorable Mother's Day was definitely my very first one! It came just a few weeks after Sean, my oldest, was born. It was a little surreal to think that this holiday was now meant for me as well now that I

s a mother.

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