

Community resources and development graduate loves to travel

Master's student credits her mother for inspiring her interest in global cultures, histories

By Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, ASU News
April 28, 2026

Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Evan Celeste Senat took her first international trip — destination: Jamaica — while in her mother's womb. In 2017, she went “back” to celebrate her high school graduation.

Senat, the outstanding graduate from the [School of Community Resources and Development](#), part of ASU's [Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions](#), is completing her online Master of Sustainable Tourism and certificate in social entrepreneurship and community development. Her trips to places like Jamaica, Italy, England and Malta solidified her love of travel.

At ASU, Senat was determined to study abroad to connect her studies to real-world learning. She took trips to South Africa, Costa Rica, Cuba and Marin County, California, during her graduate program.

“During my travels to South Africa, I was blessed with the opportunity to do a homestay in the rural village of Guyuni in the Limpopo Province, west of Kruger National Park,” Senat said. “For two days, three other ASU students and I played traditional games with the village's children and assisted with chores. It was an incredible experience to feel so welcome and to contribute to their household.”

While each experience was unique, shaping Senat's understanding of different places, the passion to explore derived from a single inspiration: her mother.

Growing up, Senat's mother drove an hour each way from their home in Belleville, Illinois, to work in Weldon Springs, Missouri, to support Senat. But her mother loved to travel, and she found time to introduce Senat to new places and cultures whenever possible.

After graduation, Senat plans to continue her work as associate operations coordinator at the [Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing](#). She also volunteers at the Tempe History Museum and serves on the Tempe Historic Preservation Commission. One day, she would like to create her

own travel agency that focuses on sustainable itineraries for ethically conscious travelers.

Read on to learn more about Senat's ASU journey.

Note: Answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Question. What was your “aha” moment, when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

Answer: I had never heard of sustainable tourism prior to ASU. I studied anthropology as an undergraduate and was lucky to attend a monthlong field school in Malta, a small island in the Mediterranean Sea. I was able to engage with locals and learn about the island's rich history. I originally thought I wanted to work in museums, but I love to travel and want to learn about people's histories and cultures. When I saw the list of programs for ASU Online, sustainable tourism instantly spoke to me.

Q: What's something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: Biocultural Conservation with Professor [Melissa Nelson](#) introduced me to Indigenous conservation practices and how they are often regarded separately from Western scientific conservation. We spent a week in San Francisco and Mill Valley, California, visiting teaching farms and receiving ecological lectures from experts. I learned about rematriation, which calls for a nurturing, restorative relationship with the land and the animals that rely on natural processes. I have a greater appreciation for holistic environmental practices and look forward to applying my new knowledge to sustainable tourism.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU? What was the lesson?

A: [Claire McWilliams](#), assistant teaching professor, taught me that one of the most important things a student can do is be involved. Through my participation in the Tourism Student Association, she helped me build a community of friends and associates in the tourism sector and introduced me to numerous networking opportunities.

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: My spot is the writer's garden at the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing. The trickling birdbath brings the most lovely avian company.

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

A: I would try to solve the issue of food equity/sovereignty. My Sustainable Food Management class with [Rebekka Goodman](#), associate teaching professor, taught me that sustainable food systems are achievable if governments, food suppliers and consumers prioritize eliminating food waste and creating efficient food distribution processes. Fruits and vegetables are essential for balanced meals and should be readily available to people at affordable prices. From my research in Biocultural Conservation with Professor Nelson, I learned that hunger is one of the most

powerful tools of oppression in America. Food is also linked to identity and culture, and many oppressed groups have lost connection to their culture and suffer from health issues as a result of food colonization. A large portion of the money would be set aside to fund startup costs for community gardens and seed libraries.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Evan Celeste Senat poses with kids in the rural village of Guyuni in South Africa, where she completed a study abroad program. Courtesy photo