



# MUSICAL JOURNEYS

R&B star **Deborah Cox** embraces  
the pleasures of travel

by **Nick Chiles**

**R**&B songstress Deborah Cox can remember the moment when traveling began to change for her. It happened when she arrived in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, a few years back and realized she would have absolutely no time to enjoy the lush beauty of the place. She even has a name for the moment: maturity.

"Before that, I never really paid much attention to museums, to monuments, to really take in a place," says Cox, 34. "I was always on the go, thinking I have so much to do. But this one time I was on a cruise and we pulled up in Cabo. But I had to do a sound check, I had to do the show, and I didn't get to see how beautiful Cabo is. At that point, I said, 'Man, I have to make sure whenever I do shows in certain destinations, I have to carve out some time, take in the sites, eat the food, be a tourist.' I love that kind of stuff."

If there is anything that has been shared by generations of musicians and entertainers, it is the need to travel. In order to make a living, they must leave home. Cox has decided that she will embrace the excitement of exploring other cultures and learning about other peoples when she hits the road.

"To me that's the whole point of traveling," Cox says. "Discovering different cultures, taking in whatever other cultures have to offer. It's a big reason why I love to travel."

There are two places that make Cox's heart sing: Italy and Jamaica. On the surface perhaps they do not have a lot in common—except for the way they make her feel.

"In Jamaica, I love the food, the people, the culture," she says. "I love the landscape, the beautiful mountains, the waterfalls, the natural essence of Jamaica. In Italy, it's the history, the historic churches, the old architecture, the buildings, the churches from the first century. Also, of course, I love the shopping, the clothes, all things Italian."

Cox has been doing a lot of traveling of late, promoting her fifth album, "The Promise," which was released last November. The album is doing especially well in Canada, where the single "Beautiful U R" reached number 3 on the Canadian Radio Chart. Cox is from Toronto and is considered the top R&B artist in Canada. The biggest song of her career to date, 1998's "Nobody's Supposed to Be Here," for eight years held the Billboard record for the longest-running number one single on the R&B/Hip Hop Singles chart (14 weeks). Her music remains a favorite in

dance clubs: she has had nine number one hits on Billboard's Hot Dance Club Play chart. Only five artists—including Janet Jackson (18) and Madonna (39)—have had more songs reach number one on that chart than Cox. She will be returning to Canada this Summer for a tour, and also going to Australia.

With three young children—Isaiah, 5; Sumayah, 2; and Kaila, born in February—Cox is becoming an expert in traveling with small children, though she concedes that it's never easy.

"That is a movie—it's a production," she says with a laugh. "You have to make sure you have diapers, wipes, toys, activities for the plane, changes of clothes, strollers, car seats. It's a lot. You have to be really organized. But even so, traveling with kids can be a really heavenly experience. Though now with 3-1-1 and all the rules and security and things you have to go through, it kind of discourages you."

She usually travels with her husband of eight years, Lascelles Stephens, who is also her manager. Because her oldest, Isaiah, is now in school, he usually has to stay at home now when Mommy



Italy—one of Deborah's favorite places





a beach in Jamaica, another of Deborah's favorite places

and Daddy take off.

"It was easier when he was not in school," Cox says. "But now he has a routine, and we have to stick to it. I try not to be away for too long."

Cox says she can't help but do scouting when she's on the road now, looking for places she would like to return with her kids. When her son Isaiah was 3, they took him along on a European vacation to Greece and Italy.

"It was just beautiful," she says. "Isaiah loved it, even though he was that young. He was taking in a lot of stuff, sight-seeing. We thought he would get bored, but he really enjoyed it."

When she is on the road with her children, the one thing Cox looks for is a hotel with a kitchen so that she can prepare their meals herself, particularly for Isaiah, who has allergies. If she is without the kids, the bathroom becomes of supreme importance.

"I like to be in a nice suite with a really nice bathroom. That's important to me," Cox says. "I prefer smaller boutique hotels, where there's not a lot of traffic, not a lot of parties. After I'm performing at the party, I don't want to go back to hotel and have

another party. I want to chill. But it has to be nice and clean. I like to be practical about traveling. If I can get a great deal on a hotel, that's great. I hate paying for real expensive flights like any other person. I love to get a great deal, too."

And we can't leave out food. Cox loves that, too. She calls herself a "big eater."

"I love to try different foods; I love to taste whatever the locals eat," she says. "I think it's important. It helps you get into the city you're in, and appreciate the culture of the place you're in. I like to venture off and try different restaurants, even when I'm traveling alone."

Considering how much she loves Jamaica, it makes sense that Cox would choose Miami as the place she now calls home—far from the chill of Toronto.

"I grew up in the cold," she says. "It's a beautiful city, and there's so much to Toronto, but I always loved the ocean. That's part of the reason why I chose Miami. There's just something about the water. It's practically Caribbean itself and there's lots of culture. That's what I love about it."