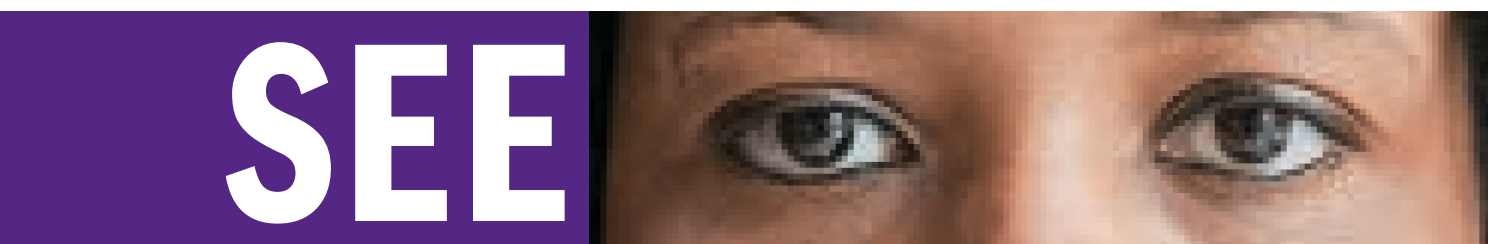


Take an up-close look at the lives of some of the immigrants making New York City great, right now. Photographs by *Kyle Dorosz*



OUR FAIR CITY has always been known as a cultural melting pot, and that sentiment has never been truer than it is today. NYC's percentage of immigrants is the highest it's been since 1910, with foreign-born denizens comprising a whopping 37 percent of the city's makeup, nearly tripling the 13 percent national average. The city boasts some of the most diverse communities worldwide: Jackson Heights, Queens, alone is home to 167 spoken languages. With that in mind—and the current immigration debate that's flooded the media—we

decided to take a look and ask: Who is New York? According to the 2015 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, its most recent report, the city's largest immigration populations are from, in order, the Dominican Republic, China, Mexico, Jamaica, Guyana, Ecuador, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, Bangladesh and India. Here are just a few of the stories about making a go of it in NYC, from New Yorkers who were either born in or are first-generation-American descendants of those countries. ■ *Lisa Brown*



Dennis-Benn in her Bed-Stuy apartment

JAMAICAN HOT SPOTS

Duck into Crown Heights boutique **Martine's Dream**, the brainchild of Jamaica native Debbie Martine, for color-popping caftans, dresses, blanket wraps and more. → 681 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn (347-750-7668, martinesdream.com)

At coffeeshop **Meme's Healthy Nibbles**, a hangout for recent transplants, you can expect to hear Jamaican as often as you do an order for joe. → 707 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn (718-493-1375, memeshealthynibbles.com)

The Jamaican food chain **Golden Krust** slings jerk chicken, curried goat, braised oxtail and other essentials from our neighbors to the south. → Various locations (goldenkrustbakery.com)



Nicole Dennis-Benn

35, BED-STUY

A first-time novelist blossoms in Brooklyn.

that everything I'd been running away from up until that point came back.

How did you end up in the U.S.?

My dad left Jamaica in 1983. I saw him through letters and barrels of gifts he would send. Fast-forward to high school: I was very depressed. I just crashed one day. My mother picked up the phone, called my dad and said, "I think she'd be better off living with you in America." They bought a one-way ticket, and that was it.

Has your idea of "home" changed?

At this point, home is where I make it. I still call Jamaica home. That's where I was born; that's where my childhood memories are. But Brooklyn is where I'm a new woman. This is where I have my anchor now.

When did you first feel like a real New Yorker?

In 2012, my wife and I got our bikes and started riding around Brooklyn and Manhattan. There was no fear, and we knew the streets so well. The Nicole who came here as a teenager in 1999 would not have been riding through the streets like that.

What's next?

Now I have a platform, and I see all these things happening to immigrants, who, like myself, had come for more. [They're] being told, "No, you don't belong there." In my quiet moments I say to myself, "I'm a real New Yorker, I've had this journey from Hempstead, Long Island, to Brooklyn. Now I'm the woman that I've always wanted to be, but there's more work to do."

What do you miss most about Jamaica?

The food. The people. Just hearing the sounds. I walk down Fulton Street [in Brooklyn] and then take that left to Nostrand Avenue and just walk down Nostrand; you hear Jamaicans. There's a man on Lincoln Place and Nostrand. There's a woman on Caton Avenue who sells her juices and oils, like the women did in the markets back home. They bring me back home without me having to buy a \$400 ticket.

■ *Heather Corcoran*

"Brooklyn is where I'm a new woman. This is where I have my anchor now."

Rodriguez overlooking the Hudson River in Washington Heights



“I have asked myself, How far can I go because of my name?”



Alejandro Rodriguez

23, HARLEM

A young first-generation American shares his journey, in his own words.

I GREW UP in Florida but would visit my relatives in New York every summer. My parents were born in the Dominican Republic, and when they came here they lived in Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights. After I dropped out of high school, I came to Harlem because I wanted to feel liberated. I was very in denial about my homosexuality, because I didn't want to disappoint my Latino parents who left everything to come to the States. I wanted to become a star, but little did I know I would be working so hard just to survive.

Coming to New York, I had to learn a lot about myself as a gay black Dominican male. There are a lot of Dominicans in this area, but for so long I wasn't proud of my sexuality because of judgment. Most Dominicans in New York are Catholic or Christian, and I hated the feeling of being the black sheep.

DOMINICAN HOT SPOTS

The Dominican Studies Institute of the City University of New York opened its doors to the public in 2010 as the first exhibit space in the city exclusively devoted to work by and about people of Dominican descent. It organizes lectures, exhibitions and film festivals. → 160 Convent Ave (212-650-7000, ccny.cuny.edu)

Waterfront lounge and café La Marina is nestled along the Hudson River, just below the Cloisters. It brings an island vibe to NYC, throwing get-downs where you can merengue and salsa dance. → 348 Dyckman St (212-567-6300, lamarinayc.com)

Check out 30-year-old Malecon for lunch, and nab homestyle meals like sopa de pollo and cow-feet soup. → 4141 Broadway · 764 Amsterdam Ave · maleconrestaurants.com

Outside that community, even my name gave me difficulty: Alejandro Rodriguez, such a Latino name. When people hear it, they assume I don't know English. I have applied to jobs and been told that I don't have the qualifications, but I do. I've had people say, "Oh, wow, you do speak English." Obviously, I was born [in America] and speak English fluently. I have asked myself, "How far can I go because of my name?" I know it can hinder me, and I know that a lot of large corporations probably just see me as a spic. But I also know I can go far and open boundaries for other Latinos.

To be honest, I don't think I've ever fit in anywhere, even in New York. I fell into drug use at the age of 21 to fill a void. Then stress led to overeating, and I gained more than 100 pounds. I was even in a relationship where my boyfriend would slap me in my face. Finally, I realized enough is enough. I didn't want to live like that anymore. I've messed up since then, but I pick myself up and dust myself off. I've been sober for a year now. I just took a GED placement test, so I can finish [high] school.

I lost 70 pounds in three months and another 20 in six months, and I have learned that love is kind and pure, and I will not be anyone's punching bag. I am working hard and living my truth, and I know that I will make it as long as I stand strong. Even if I am standing alone. ■ As told to Ruth Umoh



Island to Island Juicery Brewery

PROSPECT LEFFERTS GARDENS

It's all in the family at this new Brooklyn brew haven.

ISLAND TO ISLAND Juicery Brewery (642 Rogers Ave, Brooklyn) opened its doors just last month in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, but it has been a long time coming. "When I was pregnant, I wanted to create recipes that people could enjoy the same way you could enjoy a cocktail," says Danii Oliver of the brewery's impetus. She and her husband, Kevin Braithwaite, started a juice-and-kombucha label soon after, called House of Juice, and then set their sights on a brick-and-mortar, beer-focused location that would become Island to Island.

But the seeds for the new suds spot were planted way before Oliver and Braithwaite's daughter, Ivy, was even a glimmer in the couple's eyes. Oliver's parents met in Corona, Queens, not long after both emigrated from the Caribbean in the '70s, and their future master brewer grew up hearing stories about her father's

childhood in rural Trinidad. "Coconuts, guava, mango, avocado—you name it, [Danii] had it," recalls Oliver's mother, Christine Brooks-Oliver. "She also had her vegetable garden, and she made her own coconut oil. I just wanted Danii to know her culture."

Braithwaite also hails from New York City. He used to watch his parents concoct fresh ginger-apple juice and listen to tales of his grandmother, who made guava jelly and soursop-and-tamarind juice. "We moved for the American dream," says Braithwaite's

“The goal is to take the best of what the land has to offer and make it sweet and pleasurable. It's the same thing as in the islands.” —Danii Oliver

Trinidadian-born mother, Annette David, who landed in a diverse neighborhood in East Flatbush, Brooklyn.

Not far from Braithwaite's childhood home lies Island to Island, which caters to fresh-fruit and craft-brew fanatics alike: The brewery offers cold-pressed organic juice and smoothies, house-made kombucha and jun, a plant-based menu of small plates and rotating taps of beer and cider made from mostly New York State ingredients, like sorrel IPA cider and ginger shandy. "Really what Danii is doing is from her ancestors, but she's doing it in her own way," says Brooks-Oliver. Her daughter agrees, acknowledging the impact of her Caribbean roots in her ferments and claiming that her goal is to "take the best of what the land has to offer and make it sweet and pleasurable. It's the same thing as in the islands, just different land and different fruits."

The brewery's hood, Prospect Lefferts Gardens, is not the same place it used to be. But Oliver strives to grow the business in a quickly changing neighborhood, claiming she sees herself as an educator and connector between the longtime Caribbean population and those who are newly moving in. "We aren't here for one person or the other, we are here to support the community," she says. "It's very divided, but we hope people come to realize that we have all been here for a very long time."

■ Suzanne Cope



Christine Brooks-Oliver, Danii Oliver, Annette David, Ivy Braithwaite and Stanley Oliver, from left, at Island to Island Juicery Brewery

TRINIDADIAN HOT SPOTS

Family-owned Caribbean-West Indies spot Allan's Bakery has been around for more than 40 years, attracting sweets addicts throughout the city with its currant rolls and coconut bread. → 1109 Nostrand Ave, Brooklyn (718-774-7892, allansbakery.com)

Come for the spicy pepper sauce and stay for the cocktails and dancing at Flamingo Restaurant & Mantra Lounge, a South Ozone Park dining destination with an attached nightclub. → 120-6 Rockaway Blvd, Queens (718-835-1000)

Founded by four brothers in 2009, MangoSeed serves Caribbean-inspired eats and tropical tipples in upscale digs. → 757 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn (347-529-1080, mangoseedrestaurant.com)



“The nation is divided. We want these kids to know they are welcome here.” —Caceres

VARIOUS COUNTRIES

Rafael Hernandez Dual Language Magnet School

HIGHBRIDGE, BRONX

Teachers & Writers Collaborative helps foster the next generation of bilingual scribes.

THE RAFAEL HERNANDEZ Dual Language Magnet School, otherwise known as P.S./I.S. 218, sits atop a hill overlooking Highbridge in the Bronx. Located north of Yankee Stadium in a predominantly Hispanic community, it serves nearly 1,000 students in grades K–8. I’m at the institution for a session set up by Teachers & Writers Collaborative (*twc.org*), an organization I volunteer for that tasks professional scribes (like me) with promoting literary arts in

schools throughout the city. My mission today? To get a group of sixth graders—in a classroom decked out with handmade art—to explore bilingual poetry, an endeavor that will culminate in a student-generated anthology of Spanish-English poetry. The project is particularly meaningful in this community, where 90 percent of pupils are Hispanic and 32 percent identify as English-language learners.

When I started volunteering in the fall, it seemed that most students viewed the project as just another school assignment. But now, having heard the anti-immigration rhetoric in the media, most approach it with new urgency. “Why do they hate us?” one soft-spoken girl from the Dominican Republic asks me during our discussion. “I love my country. They don’t even know me.” (The students in my class also hail from Mexico, Bangladesh and many other countries.) In short, more and more, the conversation has changed from one of academic obligation to one tinged with confusion and anxiety.

To school principal Sergio Caceres, Ph.D., this trend makes sense. “Many parents are

afraid,” he says. “Since the election, the kids have been more subdued. Everyone has questions.” The school has a varied approach to addressing these concerns—about parents being split from their kids, about families being detained, about other immigration issues the media has been covering.

On a late winter day, the class I work with holds a showcase to present its anthology to families and friends. Some mothers come, juggling babies on their laps or pushing them in strollers, and listen proudly while their older children read aloud. The poetry meanders from celebrating identity and recognizing links between ancient and modern art to identifying struggles in home and adopted nations. Impressive stuff.

Afterward, the students gather in groups to examine their work in print. “The nation is divided,” reflects Dr. Caceres. “And when the conversation turns to immigration, it resonates. We teach both English and Spanish because we want this school to be an extension of home. We want these kids to know they are welcome here. Our doors are open to the whole community.”

■ *Samantha Facciolo*



Reverend Ravi Vaidyanaat

57, FLUSHING, QUEENS

A Hindu temple keeps traditions alive in Queens.

TUCKED INSIDE A residential area of Flushing, about a 15-minute walk from the 7 train station, is a long-standing Indian-American community. Founded in 1977 on the grounds of a former Russian Orthodox Church, New York Ganesh Temple (45-57 Bowne St., Queens; 718-460-8484, *nyganeshtemple.org*) has the distinction of being the first official Hindu temple in North America. And these days, it attracts devotees from beyond the tristate area—Canada and Guyana, to name two countries—as well as nonfollower foodies, thanks to Anthony Bourdain, who extolled the selection of dosas and South Indian delicacies offered in its basement cafeteria.

Reverend Ravi Vaidyanaat, who has managed the center for a decade, overseeing its 12 full-time priests, explains that the temple features Hindu idols in a mainly South Indian tradition. As such, the temple brings priests from cities like his hometown of Chennai, as well as Bengaluru and Hyderabad, South Indian urban areas where they undergo rigorous schooling and live alongside elders, starting as young as age 7. Eventually, usually after marriage at around age 30, they settle down wherever in the world there is an Indian diaspora, from Canada and the U.K. to Australia and parts of Africa. Or Queens.

A day in the life of Hindu priests here starts early, around 4am, when they conduct personal prayers. Work at the temple then commences at 7am and lasts till 9pm. What kind of duties are covered? All 16 major sacraments, or rites of passage, of a Hindu person’s life are observed here, spanning from before birth (pregnant women perform rituals for the protection of their unborn child) to after death (funerals). On weekends, the sound of chanting fills the air as parishioners pay respects by offering gifts of food to place on the altars.

Vaidyanaat sees an increasing need for the ancient traditions the center upholds—particularly among young people. “Nowadays life is very demanding,” he says. “Everybody competes with each other. They want to do well in their professional life, in their educational life. They’re confused. They don’t know what to follow.” Sounds like a lot to take on, but the priest assures, “If you properly guide them and if they’re engaged, it will be easy,” noting the center’s dance, art and cultural programs aimed at younger generations.

There’s fear in the Indian-American community today, too, says Vaidyanaat, following reports of hate crimes and discrimination across the country—which isn’t to suggest he’s pessimistic. “New York is a global village,” he says. “There are people from every country here. And Hinduism itself is not a religion, it’s a way of life. We don’t have such stringent rules. It helps people with how they need to lead their life.” ■ *Jessica Jiaojiao Wu*

Vaidyanaat outside New York Ganesh Temple



“Hinduism itself is not a religion, it’s a way of life.”

INDIAN HOT SPOTS

Now in its 20th year, **Basement Bhangra** takes over SOB’s each month for a wild night of Punjabi beats by the likes of DJs Rekha, Petra and Shilpa. → 204 Varick St (212-243-4940, *basementbhangra.com*)

Snack on chaat and samosas while watching Bollywood movies at the single-screen

gem **Bombay Theatre**. → 6825 Fresh Meadow Ln, Queens (718-358-2929, *bombaytheatre.com*)

Taste a fusion of North Indian, Nepalese and Indo-Chinese flavors at the Jackson Heights mainstay **Delhi Heights**. → 37-66 74th St, Queens (718-507-1111, *delhiheights.us*)



Tong in the kitchen of Little Tong Noodle Shop

CHINESE HOT SPOTS

Massive takeout destination **Fei Long Market** peddles pay-by-the-pound Szechuan cuisine in Sunset Park.
→ In 6301 Eighth Ave, Brooklyn (718-680-0118)

The **Museum of Chinese in America** looks back at the group's struggles, accomplishments and cultural milestones in the U.S., dating back to the 1700s.
→ 215 Centre St (212-619-4785, mocanyc.org)

Lam Zhou Handmade Noodle stuffs diners at a few tables and a makeshift bar with a view of chefs in the back kitchen trying to keep up with the demand for pork dumplings and piping hot beef broth soup swirled with homemade noodles.
→ 144 E Broadway (212-566-6933, lamzhouhandmadenoodle.com)



Simone Tong

35, EAST VILLAGE

A white-hot chef goes on a food-shopping spree in Chinatown.

"IF YOU CAN survive this shop, you can survive anywhere in Chinatown," chef Simone Tong says as she pushes through swelling crowds at the narrow Deluxe Food Market on Elizabeth Street. "Logistically, this is a headache every time," she adds, laughing and dodging a group that's charging toward the shop's produce room in back. Tong heads directly for the steamy buffet trays, admiring rotisserie chicken and a glossy braised beef tendon that shimmers with the same ruby sheen as a platter of General Tso's chicken but is texturally worlds away from the Chinese-American dish.

Tong, who was born in Chengdu, China, spent her childhood in many places—Beijing, Shenzhen, Macau, Hong Kong, Singapore—before attending high school in Melbourne and graduating from the University of North Carolina in 2006. In 2010, back in Asia, she watched an episode of *After Hours with*

"I come here and get really excited, discovering new things every time."

Daniel Boulud and "immediately fell in love" with a featured restaurant: wd-50. She dropped everything to enroll in New York's Institute of Culinary Education and, upon her graduation, secured a gig with chef Wylie Dufrense in his legendary and eclectic kitchen.

On her days off, Tong would head down to this market, not only to seek a taste of home but to source ingredients for laksa, dandan noodles or hand-pulled chicken, which she'd cook for the staff meals at wd-50. "When I first came to New York, I was really nervous to shop here. But now I'm like, 'I got this,'" she says.

Today Tong is actively seeking a Chinese immigrant who is "good at handiwork"

to assist with the dumpling making in her new restaurant, Little Tong Noodle Shop (177 First Ave). The East Village eatery opened last month and serves Mixian rice-noodle dishes, which originate from China's Yunnan province and are still a rarity in New York's growing Asian-noodle landscape. To find the perfect base for her dishes, Tong blindly tasted 25 types of rice noodle, many of which can be found in the basement of Hong Kong Supermarket, a fluorescent-lit metropolis stocked with everything from mung-bean linguine to soba.

Upstairs at the supermarket, she sniffs packets of Szechuan peppercorns, trying to single out the most fragrant and tingling. Passing tanks of live sea bass, crabs and lobsters, she stops to pay homage to a chili-oil hero, the woman on the front of a bottle of Lao Gan Ma, incidentally one of the most successful female entrepreneurs in China.

Outside in the chill, she stops once again to consider a group of elderly shoppers scrutinizing heads of cabbage. "They're making sure they get the best one," says Tong, noting that she rarely sees shoppers in their twenties or thirties at these Chinatown grocery stores. "I think [millennials] just want to go out to eat. Hopefully when they get older, this still goes on," she says. "I come here and get really excited, discovering new things every time." ■ *Melissa Kravitz*



Isla de Corredores

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

A Latina running group braves the weather.

IT'S 6PM ON a Friday, and while many people are drinking their way into the weekend during happy hour, I'm lacing up my sneakers with Isla de Corredores, a group of Latina women who've been running together through the streets of NYC since 2011. That's not to say we don't like to share an adult beverage or two, but being part of New York's lively running scene means we like to sweat first and chug later.

We hit the streets of upper Harlem, dodging mountains of two-day-old slush. "I started the group because I wanted to create a space for women who felt like they didn't quite fit into other running groups in the city," says Karen Filippi, who gave it the name that means "island runners." The outfit mostly consists of women from various Caribbean countries, but it welcomes anyone who drops in to run during one of the usual Monday-night get-togethers.

"Running has helped me see the city in new

ways," says Lina Rosario, who moved here from the Dominican Republic when she was seven, as we make our way down Amsterdam Avenue. "There's always a connection to the island," she says. "We're always going back for any kind of break—just to get back into the culture. At least that's how it is with my family."

Bachata music plays out of an electronics store as we continue to run on 135th Street. "It's so vibrant up here," says Josephine Reyseve, who also moved from the Dominican Republic, but as a teenager. "That's one of

the reasons I love running in Hamilton and Washington Heights," she says, just as a police car zooms by, sirens blaring.

As Reyseve explains it, hitting the pavement is a common denominator for the group, something many members discovered as adults, which came as a bit of a culture shock to friends and family back home. "For women in the Dominican Republic, if you wanted to change your body, the alternative was usually to go get liposuction. Now women are into running as a sport," she says.

Like Reyseve, Fior Checo also moved here from the DR as a teen and found that running helped ease her homesickness. "Isla is family," she says. She ran her first marathon, right here in NYC in 2014, four months after she had a double mastectomy. "And by the way, ladies, I spoke to my doctor yesterday," she says, just as we hit a long stretch of hill incline. "And he said I'm cancer-free!" The women cheer. And, as if on cue, a truck next to us honks so loud, it drowns us out. "Oh, it's good to be alive!" shouts Rosario, over the noise.

■ *Nadia Neophytou*

"There's always a connection to the island."

—Rosario



Isla de Corredores running on Broadway