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Matt Bowles: My guest today is Beth Santos. She is the founder and CEO of [Wanderful](#). An inclusive global community to help all women travel the world. Wanderful reaches over 45,000 women each year through a thriving online membership network, local chapter events in 50 cities, global summits and small group trips. In 2014, Wanderful launched the annual [WITS Travel Creator Summit](#), a leading event that centers all marginalized people in travel and empowers travel creators to use their voices to champion change in the travel industry. Wanderful is also the creator of the annual [Bessie Awards](#) to honor women of impact in travel. Beth was named one of the 17 changemakers shaping the future of the travel industry by Business Insider, and she is the author of the new book: [Wander Woman: How to Reclaim Your Space, Find your Voice and Travel the World, Solo](#). Beth, welcome back to The Maverick Show.

Beth Santos: Hi, Matt. Great to be back.

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to have you back. [Our first interview](#) was one of my favorite interviews that I have ever done on The Maverick Show.

Beth Santos: Aww.

Matt Bowles: I have been recommending it to people regularly and saying to them “you have to listen to the Beth Santos interview, you have to listen to it.” And so, for anybody here opening up that has not yet heard that interview, we are going to link it up in the show notes. And I want to encourage you for sure to go listen to it. It was a few years ago and it was evergreen, and incredibly relevant and incredibly important. And so I want to encourage everybody to [listen to that one](#).

But today we have a whole bunch of new and exciting things to talk about. Let's just start off, though, by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from. Unfortunately, we are not in person. I am actually in the Blue Ridge mountains of Asheville, North Carolina today. And where are you, Beth?

Beth Santos: I'm in the rainy and cold garage of Boston, Massachusetts today. Not nearly as pretty as Asheville, I'm sure. Although we get our nice seasons, too.

Matt Bowles: Indeed, you do. Well, let's just start off talking a little bit about the [Wanderful community](#) for people whose first introduction this is to the Wanderful community. Can you just share a little bit about Wanderful in general, and then, you know, can you talk a little bit maybe about how it has evolved and grown since we spoke about it three years ago?

Beth Santos: Yeah, definitely. So for those who are coming across [Wanderful](#) for the first time, we are an international community of women who love to travel. Really, that's who we are at its core. And we started as a blog in 2009. I was traveling on my own and just found a need to share my own story and to connect other women who are experiencing travel, especially solo travel, but not always, as it is for the first time. And now, not only do we have an online presence, but we also host events in cities all around the world.

We have a global chapter network. We launched an app over the pandemic. It was during the pandemic, actually, that we really launched our online membership community. And the idea was to

create kind of a third space for women to ask for tips and advice from each other and to meet one another. You can sort of geolocate people based on city.

So when you're traveling, you have an instant group of people that you can meet up with and have dinner with and get advice from, and really just connecting women together and helping each other. And then we also do virtual events. In 2020, we launched it just before the pandemic, and then all of a sudden it was this crazy night and day experience where we woke up in the morning and all flights had been cancelled and everybody came into the membership app and they were like: "I miss travel so much". And it became a space where you could actually voice that and have other people who got it and kind of have that emotional connection.

And, ever since then, it's really grown. We've built out not just a traveler level membership, but we have a creator level membership for content creators and influencers who are building travel businesses. And then we have a small business membership that also has accountability and mastermind circles for women who are building businesses and travel and want access to travel,

possible consumers, possible partners, or just a friend who's kind of going through it at the same time. So it's definitely expanded. We still do our virtual events. Oh, and we started doing trips of course, because we didn't have those during the pandemic at all. We had to stop that. So we started actually bringing trips back in.

Of course, you get a bunch of travelers together and what they want to do is travel, but this is my favorite thing: In 2022, maybe at the end of 2022, we launched this concept that I just made up, which I now love. And it's called a global meetup. And the basic idea is it's not quite a trip. It's a solo travel friendly trip where basically we book a room block at a hotel somewhere in the world. We work with a local member to plan one activity per day. Usually it's supporting a woman owned business if we can. And then people just show up for it. And it's fun because it's like a trip where you have somebody to travel with. You have a big group of people that you can have dinner with. There's an activity that you can do to check in every day, but it's also not like a group trip in the sense of your day isn't planned, so you can go off. You can pair off and be like, I really wanted to go to the contemporary art museum today. Who wants to go with me? And you just go. So it was a hit. We did the first one in Mexico City and we had 40 women come. And then we did one in Scotland. We're doing one in Lisbon this year. It's been really cool just to create spaces that allow people to travel in their own way and let them be them.

Matt Bowles: Well, let's also talk about the [WITS Travel Creator Summit 2024](#). I am coming out to attend. You are going to be there. I counted and there are at least 10 [Maverick Show guests](#) that are also going to be at WITS 2024. Can you share a little bit about what is the WITS Travel Creator Summit, who is it for, and what is it going to be like this year for anybody that wants to join us?

Beth Santos: So we launched [WITS](#) in 2014 for content creators to come together and to learn from each other. Initially, it was very much an event that would kind of help you build a business in a space where, in 2014, content creation was still very new. People were not really making money from it. It was still a part time thing. Fast forward to today, people are doing this full time, making six figures. Other people are not. Depends on what you want to do with it, but it's shifted in a lot of ways where there is still a lot of tactical of how to do this, how to grow, how to build.

But then we also talk on a little bit higher level—What is the travel industry that we want to see and how can we use our grassroots voices as creators, as people who have our fingers on the pulse of the

consumer, and we're talking directly to the consumer, what can we do to advocate for a better industry? And so we talk about hard topics. We talk about fun topics. We talk about things that haven't been mainstream in travel. We talk a lot about D. E. I. In travel. We had a really great keynote on disability last year. This year is the same. We always do a local panel of people talking about the destinations always in a different destination every year.

So, this year it's in Utah. Which is really fun. We're in Salt Lake City. We're splitting up the conference. So the first day is keynotes and panel discussions and sessions. And then the second day all 500 content creators are going on experiences around Park City and people are going skiing, people are doing yoga in a yurt, there's a horse meditation experience, I mean, it's just wild. It's cool. Cause we're creating content. during the conference too, and also learning at the same time. So it's a really fun way to do it.

And we have a panel of local influencers talking about, well, let's really dig into like Utah's culture. And what are some of the challenges that the state is having and how are we working on that? And we have real conversations about places. So it is a really fun event. We're super excited about it. And yeah, it's going to be so great to have you there.

Matt Bowles: It's going to be amazing. I just signed up for my Park City event, Beth. I'm doing a whiskey tasting that starts at like 915 in the morning or something like that. I'm like, that sounds perfect. I'll take that one.

Beth Santos: That's awesome. Those people are going to be the fun people on the tour. That's for sure.

Matt Bowles: It's going to be amazing. I have been so impressed from top to bottom of the organization of this conference, all the incredible things and options you've put together for people.

The other thing, of course, I want to ask about as part of this conference, people can attend. [The Bessie Awards](#), of which, again, I counted, there's at least five Maverick Show guests who are nominated this year for a Bessie Award, so I will be there, of course, rooting and cheering and supporting them, but can you share a little bit about what The Bessie Awards are, and then what the actual event will be like?

Beth Santos: Oh, that is so exciting. So [The Bessies](#) are an award show to honor women in brands of impact in travel, really taking a minute to celebrate the people who have made headway in the last year, that have accomplished really neat things. There is a creator of the year award, there's a collaboration of the year award. We also honor impactful pieces of writing, things that have really resonated with our community, with the travel industry at large. And then there's also industry side awards. There's a social impact award. There's a journey woman award, which is to honor a woman who has basically dedicated her life to the travel industry.

So it's a really fun night. There's a musical performance. Everyone gets all glammed up. There's a red carpet. We take pictures. And it's also, I think a moment, and I really like to lean into this is, it's like a moment of reflection for everyone. I don't think it's just about who's nominated and who's winning and the who's who of travel. It's also about everyone taking a moment and sort of recognizing how far we've come in a year and the things that we've each done and taking a minute to celebrate that. And we'll have some fun activities at the event where you can kind of reflect on what you've done and just honor yourself a little bit, which will be nice.

Matt Bowles: Well, the other thing that you have done since we last spoke on this podcast is that you have launched your own podcast. It's called [85 Percent](#). I, of course, am a subscriber and a listener and a big fan, but can you share for folks what the name means, why you chose to name the podcast 85 percent and then what folks can expect from the podcast?

Beth Santos: Yeah, [85 percent](#) is all about trailblazing women in travel and I interview every season a really amazing group of women that are what I believe are changing the travel industry for the better, making it more representative of women, more inclusive, especially for women, but really across the board and the 85% title comes from a fact that drives me absolutely insane, which is the fact that 85 percent of travel decisions are made by women. And I really wanted to lean into that because I think we, as a society, forget how important women are to the travel industry. I think we always kind of think about women in travel as the sort of niche part of travel, and we forget that it's actually the majority of travel. That title is really paying homage to the fact that Women dominate this industry.

We're sort of gaslighted into believing that we don't. And let's lean into that. And let's highlight that. And let's talk with some of the women who are actually fundamentally making this industry what it is.

Matt Bowles: Well, we are definitely going to link your podcast up in the show notes. Also, anywhere people are listening to this podcast, you can just, as soon as this episode is over, just go and type in [85 Percent](#) and there you will find Beth's podcast. You can subscribe to that as well. And she has some really incredible people on there. Beth, I also, of course, want to talk about your new book. I bought it literally the day it came out. I was waiting, you know, the presale thing, and then I bought it the day it came out. I have just finished it, and I am so impressed. I'm so inspired. And I just overall think that this book is so important that it is now out there in the world. But let's just start off talking about your selection of the title of this book. The full title is [Wander Woman: How to Reclaim Your Space, Find Your Voice and Travel the World Solo](#). Can you talk about your selection of that title?

Beth Santos: Thank you so much. And thank you for reading it. That's a great question. Nobody's asked me that question. So I'm really excited about this. Well, first of all, the Wander Woman part was fast and easy. I just knew that right away. And actually, it was something that I had suggested to the editor, and then I said, there's a lot of Wander Woman stuff out there, so I don't know if we can actually use this for like trademark or whatever. And she was no, actually, this is great. And then we had it there for a while. I think it was called Wander Woman, how to travel the world solo. And I kept looking at that and I was, no, it's not there. And the problem I had with it was it sounded like a guide. And if you read this book, it's really different, I think, from a lot of books that you have read, it doesn't come across as a guide at all. It also doesn't really come across as a memoir, though it has elements of both of those things.

It actually falls into the self-help genre more, in my opinion, even though you're going to find it under travel reference, that's where you'll find it at the bookstore. But it reads like a self-help book and it talks about some of these really global concepts that happen, not just externally, like how to pack your bag, but happen internally, like how to deal with the emotions that you're going to be going through realizing that the world is much bigger than you ever thought before, because you're experiencing this now for the first time. And so, I think that's where I was, I want to have a title that reflects that. And it just came to me, I just like spat it out one day. And my editor was like, yes, and we went for it.

Matt Bowles: Well, as you know, I was literally texting you as I was going through the book and giving you my feedback in real time. I would listen to a few chapters and then give you my feedback in real time. And one of the things I think I want to start with in this book that really jumped out to me as I was

going through the first few chapters, is that this book includes not only your own reflections and lessons and advice on travel, but you chose to include quotes from a very diverse array of female and gender expansive travelers.

This is probably the most diverse compilation of perspectives I've ever seen in a single book. And it's not just racially and ethnically diverse folks, but blind travelers, disabled travelers, plus-size travelers, transgender travelers, neurodivergent travelers, etc. Can you talk a little bit about your choice to do that and why it was so important for you to use this book to platform and amplify those perspectives?

Beth Santos: I feel very strongly about some of the myths that we believe about what travel is supposed to be and who travel is for. And those things come from marketing. They come from the images that we see when we talk about travel and the people that we see as the active agents of travel, as the travelers. And those people tend to be old white guys. And that's part of why this 85 percent thing I get so wrapped up about, because we keep believing that there's only this small segment of people that are traveling and everyone else is the exception to the rule. And I really wanted to illustrate how not only are the travelers that are actually out there endlessly diverse. But also, they do have their own challenges and their own questions and their own experiences and their own positives and their own negatives and their own travel story to tell. And, I wanted to create a chapter that illustrated that. But also, I feel you can't just do that as one person, as yourself, and I didn't want to speak for anyone.

And so I reached out to some of the people that I admire the most. Some of them I know super well. Some of them only in passing, we maybe had spoken at a wonderful event, and I just asked them to tell their own story and to tell me not just the challenges that they faced with their various intersections, but also what the great things about traveling were.

And even I was surprised, I think, sometimes when people would say: "You know, a lot of people think that this thing I experience as a negative, but actually I see it as a positive and here's why." So I really wanted to give a very nuanced perspective of the fact that anyone can travel and I'm not going to be a white woman telling you that. I'm going to bring in people who can speak. Freely from their own perspectives and share their own stories. And hopefully that is just the jumping off point of helping the reader feel a little bit less alone, a little bit like: "Okay, I do see a little bit more of myself in here and maybe this is a possibility for me."

Matt Bowles: Well, as I was going through it, as I mentioned to you, when I was texting you, I was smiling because, number one, you shouted out a number of people that I'm personal friends with, that have been on [The Maverick Show](#) and that I'm a big fan of what they're up to. And I loved to hear that. And it made me smile.

The other thing though, that I told you, it took me a really extended period of time to get through that first part of the book because all the people that you were shouting out and talking about and quoting that I didn't yet know, I was listening to the book on [the audio book](#), and I would pause it and then I would go to Instagram and then I would look them up and then I would follow them. And then I would go back to your book and then there'd be another one. And then I would pause it and I'd go to Instagram and follow them.

Beth Santos: You're like, goddamn it, Beth, stop talking.

Matt Bowles: I think it's a really great resource though for people, because you really have compiled this incredibly important array of travel voices and perspectives. And, for people, as they go through your book, like I did, they are welcome to then just follow those people as well and get their ongoing input and commentary on stuff. So, I thought that was a really, really wonderful and inspiring way to start the book.

The other thing then that came after that, that I was so glad to see was how much you dedicated to Reframing the dominant narrative about travel safety. When you and I had our podcast interview a few years ago, that was one of the central themes that really was one of the most important parts of our conversation. I put it in the title of the podcast episode. And as I've had conversations with travelers over the last few years, female travelers, I have said, you have to go listen to [the Beth Santos episode](#). And that's one of the main things that I'm sending them there to listen to is how you have reframed and encourage people to think about the travel safety narrative, because I think it's so important. And so when I got to that part of the book and I saw that the conversation that we had had, you had really fleshed that thesis out in the book in a way that I thought was incredibly important.

So, can you share a little bit about the importance of reframing the dominant narrative about travel safety, some of the dynamics of victim blaming, and the importance of challenging the way that female travel safety is marketed to white women in particular?

Beth Santos: Safety is by far the biggest concern I hear from women when we're talking about solo travel and whether it's their own concern or whether it's the concern of a friend or family member that then makes them nervous. And, it's unfortunate for me because even now, the articles that come out about traveling alone usually fit into two categories. One type of article is some news story about somebody who was kidnapped or murdered overseas, who was usually a white woman. We'll talk about that. The other is a top 10 list. It usually is like top 10 safest places for women to travel alone. And it's just over and over again. This concept is just burned into our brains. It's almost like we're engineered to kind of go like: "Oh, well, I'm reading all these articles that are saying 'Top 10 safest places' and women are getting kidnapped, am I really like at risk?" It's like seeding it into our brains. And I'll be honest, this chapter, I spent a lot of time really working through this because I think that topic of safety is a very nuanced topic. And I want the reader to follow the lines of nuance because I'm not saying in the book: "Oh, traveling by yourself is completely safe, ignore everything." But I'm also not saying that traveling by yourself is dangerous. And what I do is I break down some of the nuances of that and, okay, let's talk about safety. Let's talk about what we mean when we say safety. And let's also talk about when we're confusing real safety and the perception of safety.

And, I mentioned a survey that women were sent once that said "How safe do you feel walking around from place to place?" and how problematic that is to judge a place as safe or not safe based on how you feel and the common advice that women get of trusting their gut. Well, what happens if you've actually been taught wrong your whole life and so your gut is signaling something to you that's actually not true, which happens.

We learn things through our lives. We evolve as people. [So, you know, it was a really important conversation for me to break down. And I think especially for white women, because there's so many directions to go with this, but first of all, there's a lot of racism and classism coded into a safety conversation that I think needs to be recognized and needs to be named.

I think also we tend to really elevate stories of white women being harmed overseas as if it doesn't happen to brown and black women, or perhaps that women who are white are targeted in a stronger

way or something. It creates fear. I mean, there's so many issues with that. And I think taking a minute to talk through it all and help people understand, and see those lines, and see how that's affecting us.

I wish I had that easy answer of go to this place, don't go to this place, but we don't. And, actually, where you travel and how safe you are depends on so much more than just a statistic. You can't, first of all, list a whole country as safe or not safe. Every place is different based on where you are, but then also your own safety experience depends on who you are, all of the things that go into who we are as people, what we look like, who we love, what religion we are, how we dress, how much we've traveled before, how comfortable we are with being alone with ourselves, all of those things mixed together to help us understand, okay, well, how safe am I actually? And it's different for every person.

Matt Bowles: Well, one of the most important things I think you talked about in that chapter was this concept of an intersectional personal risk profile. Can you share a little bit about that?

Beth Santos: The concept of a personal risk profile is if you think about some of the different qualities, and they are really listed out in the book, the qualities that make you "you", each one is going to affect you differently and affect what your risk level is, but really more like what your risk tolerance level is.

How differently do I look? How much do I stand out? How differently do I look from the people that I'm visiting here? How much, as I mentioned, have I traveled before? Am I a little bit more at risk because I just don't know how to travel by myself versus I've done it 50 times. It's all these intersections of our identity.

I'll talk to people too, who will say this place is marketed as very safe, but also I'll give an example, a white English speaking country. Well, if I'm not a white English speaking person, I'm probably not feeling as safe as somebody who this article was probably written for. So, even thinking about it in the context of, well, who are you? And what is your language? What is the language of the place that you're visiting? How do these things interact with each other? And then for every place you go, for every time you go, that profile adjusts a little bit, right? Because you're a changing person and your destination is different, but it gives you some good things to just think about. How much have I traveled? Who am I? Are there laws against me and who I am? All of these things don't necessarily mean one thing or another, but you can kind of add them up to help you understand, okay, what risk level am I going into with this?

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And you also talk about this concept of the perception of familiarity being correlated in our minds with safety. And I thought that was an important concept as well, because you then later go on to talk about self-discovery through solo travel, and that a lot of that is really rooted in intentionally leaving your comfort zone on purpose. Can you share a little bit about that?

Beth Santos: Yeah, definitely. I think travel is not just about how far we go or how many passport stamps we get. I think. At least for me, travel, and I think for many other people, truly traveling is kind of an internal change that happens. It's putting yourself outside of your comfort zone. It's trying something new.

It's challenging the way you see the world. And you're right, Matt, I think those things need to happen. You need to give yourself the permission to be vulnerable in order to really benefit from your travel experience. And I think in this question, familiar is not always safer.

Yeah, I think that sometimes we're afraid to be uncomfortable because we think: "Oh, well, that means that I'm going to be unsafe," right? "If I do something that takes me outside of my comfort zone, it's going to be more dangerous for me." But then I also will counter with sometimes when you're really familiar with something, you become really complacent. And if you think about the place that you're coming from as it relates to the place that you're going, I'll talk to people who live in Boston, and they'll be like: "Oh, I'm afraid to travel by myself." Oh, where are you going? "Well, I'm going to Vermont." Well, you're used to a certain level of having to protect yourself already. But you're not thinking about that because that's the place that you live in. You're familiar with it. But actually, sometimes if you're too familiar, you might just kind of be like: "Oh, well, I'm not at any risk." And then you do become a target.

So, it's not always cut and dry like that. And I think I wouldn't encourage women to say: "Oh, you must be super-duper comfortable all the time." I think there's different levels of comfort that are okay and not okay. You have to decide for yourself. At what point am I getting to a place where this comfort is not okay and I'm truly in danger and I need to get out versus it's allowing me to learn and grow and evolve, which are the things that I want to get out of my travel experience.

Matt Bowles: Well, I think sometimes there can be an overemphasis on the purpose of travel as being entirely about self-development and self-growth and what you get out of it as the traveler. And, I was really, really encouraged to see that you had an entire chapter in here called "How to Travel Better." And basically, that it is not all about you and your personal growth, it's very much about the places that you are and the people that you're impacting by going there. And you break out this concept of how to travel better into three sections. And I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about those. One is, Your economic choices, two is environmental choices, and three is cultural choices. Can you talk a little bit about those, Beth?

Beth Santos: For me, again, this is less of a guide on how to travel alone and more of the messages that you should be getting from the beginning. One of the most important messages I think you should be getting from the beginning, which I do think will make you a better solo traveler, is understanding how to travel. Travel is not a one-sided experience. You are not just going behind a glass pane and watching the world go by. You are inserting yourself into somebody else's world, which means you are also subject to being viewed as you are viewing, right? Other people will react to you. You will interact with people. They might make you uncomfortable. You might make them uncomfortable. It is a two-sided or multi-sided exchange. And I think that's really important.

And I'm telling you before, because when you get there, you're going to realize it and then you're going to be like, "Oh my gosh", and it'll hit you like it did me, which is why I wrote about it—So you can learn about it before. So, the idea of how to travel better is: Let's talk about how when you go somewhere, you are having an impact. Your choices are affecting this place and you have the privilege of being able to leave said place without anything, but it's still going to exist here. The places that you choose to travel to, you are, whether you like it or not, supporting the local government, supporting possibly the federal government of the place, just because you're buying stuff and that place is paying taxes. You are affecting the environment, whether it's through your carbon emissions, whether it's through the plastic water bottle that you use, whether it's just purely because you go there, because the place is already over-touristed as it is.

All of these things are having an impact, and I think that was really important to let those first time, but also every traveler if they haven't gotten that message before, know, because when you start thinking about every single dollar I spend when I'm overseas, and even just my mere presence in a place, is going to then have an impact on that location, and sometimes I won't even realize what it is until it hits

me, or maybe I'll never know, but I know that it's there. These are really important things to think about because it's not just going on vacation and coming back and nothing's changed. You're changing the place just by being present in it.

Matt Bowles: I have to say, one of my favorite parts about the book was the travel anecdotes that you share about your husband, Marvin. So I just want to give a shout out to Marvin. His experiences, as relayed by you, continued to make me smile and laugh throughout the book. You tied them into some really important and interesting travel lessons. I want to ask if you can share just one of them now that I really appreciated, which was the Istanbul barbershop story and what the lesson was that came out of that in terms of why you should not over plan your travel

Beth Santos: Totally. And I have to give a shout out to my husband, Marvin, because first of all, he just let me write whatever. He didn't even care. I said "Do you want to read this?" I asked him multiple times before the book went to print. "Do you want to read this just to double check?" He's like: "I trust you. Write whatever you want. Go for it." He finally reads the book and I know he's reading the book because I keep getting text messages. "Well, that's not what happened. I didn't see it that way. Here's what actually happened." Or like, "Oh yeah, I remember that," you know, and I was just like getting the live commentary of, "Well, no, you weren't there. That was in 2015, not 2014." I was like, "look, you had your chance. It is what it is." And I, of course, try not to talk too much about him in the book because it is a solo women's travel book and there's multiple parts of that phrase that do not apply to him, "solo" and "women." But, some of the lessons that I've learned from him or traveling with him, I think show in stark relief how different it is for a woman traveling alone.

And so, I talk through some of the stories of traveling with him, some of the lessons that I've learned from him, but then also some of his experiences to show really how different he thinks through things versus how I grew up thinking through things. But one of the stories that I love in that book is actually a lesson that I kind of learned along the way.

And I don't think either of us taught it to each other, it just kind of happened. We were traveling to Greece, and we had kind of travel hacked our way through Istanbul to get a layover. So we did the flight to Istanbul and then a flight to Greece and we saved hundreds and hundreds of dollars. We felt so good about our travel hack.

We're going to spend 24 hours in Istanbul and neither of us had ever been there before. So, we're two young newlyweds, we're going to a wedding in Greece, we're like: "You know what? We're going to have fun. We'll go visit Istanbul. We've got 24 hours!" I made this list of all the things I wanted to do, the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, and we have to go to a Turkish bath and do the thing.

And the plane lands on the tarmac and I'm literally all but pulling my list out, and Marvin turns to me and he's like: "By the way, I need to get a haircut." And I just lost it. I was like: "Are you freaking kidding me? You need to get a haircut?!" I was like: "We have 24 hours in this new country. We are never been here before. I have a list all the way down the aisle of things that I want to do. And you didn't even think to get a haircut before coming to this for this thing!?" And he's like: "No, you know, I didn't have time. And I just figure I could just do it while I'm here, and we have this wedding, and I really want to look nice and like, please, oh please, oh, please, can I just like get a haircut? And it's really fast and, you know, don't worry about it." And I was like, "Do you even know where or how to get a haircut here?" Again, we've never been here before. We have no idea what we're walking into.

And so, we drop our stuff off at the hotel and we're walking around downtown Istanbul in the Sultanahmet district, the historic section. And he's like, "Oh, well, I'm going to find a place." So, we're just walking and we go down the main drag and then we turn off to another street and then we're kind of turning off and we're like winding into these roads. And then he sees this older man out of the corner of his eye who's standing outside something that he presumes is a barbershop and he's right. He makes the little scissors motion and the guy, you know, nods and is like, come on in. And so he found it, I don't know, through whatever barbershop Spidey-senses that people who go to barbershops have, he just like knew.

And so, then we go in, and it's this tiny little hole in the wall. There's two barber seats. The guy of course speaks no English at all. He motions for me to sit in one barber shop seat. Marvin sits in the other one. And there's this little old TV off in the corner. And it's showing some show in black and white that I've never seen before. And the walls are plastered with pictures. You know those places where you have pictures and newspaper clippings everywhere of the owner posing with various celebrities? And, of course, none of the celebrities are recognizable to me. They're all just Turkish celebrities. And so, I'm looking around this room and he's sitting down and the guy's cutting his hair and he's doing actually a pretty good job.

And then he pulls out a cotton ball and he lights the cotton ball on fire. He takes a lighter and he just lights it up. So it's like this flaming cotton ball. And then he goes really fast and dabs at my husband's ears. And he's basically singeing off the ear hairs as part of the barbershop experience. And at that point, I just went wild because this whole time I had thought "this is so stupid, and why are we doing this? And I have this whole list of things I want to do." And then I realized in that moment that I have never seen somebody cut hair like that. I have never seen somebody use fire in a haircut, but the way he was going about it, I knew that this is how it's done. This was an everyday experience and it was so cool and so different.

And, I think it taught me such an important lesson, which is funny because Marvin didn't even know how much this affected me until he read it. And he was like, "Oh yeah, I remember that." That was cool. But it really taught me this really important lesson that I wanted to share with readers, which was that we have so many expectations of what our travels are going to be and Instagram doesn't help: "It's going to be this beautiful visit to this gorgeous sunset field with raspberries," you know, all the stuff. But sometimes, actually, the coolest things that happen to us in our travels are the most boring everyday things for somebody else. Because those are the moments that we do see how different other people have lived these lives.

And I just love it. I think some of the most simple parts of travel are the best, like going to the grocery store, and just looking at who are the cartoon characters on the cereal boxes here? What is somebody's everyday life like here? That, to me, is some of the most interesting stuff. And you can learn so much, and you can have such a moving experience without having to splurge on some life changing expedition somewhere.

Matt Bowles: I think that is such an important travel lesson. I really also, Beth, loved some of the language that you used in the book and some of the way that you framed certain things. For example, you talked about: "Embracing the sparkle of your new global identity," which I thought was lovely. But then you go into this really, really important concept and you talked about the juxtaposition and sometimes seemingly conflict with returning from a trip that has changed you and then navigating the now potentially different relationships or the chasm in previous relationships between friends and loved ones who didn't have those same travel experiences that you did and maybe can't relate to

them. And I think that's a really, really important thing for all travelers and that a lot of travelers struggle with. Can you share some of your reflections on handling and reconciling that dynamic?

Beth Santos: Yeah, you may have a life changing experience. you also may not have a life changing experience. And I think rolling with that and being comfortable with however it comes out, not having strong expectations for yourself and having grace with yourself, I think is a really important takeaway here. But I also think that even if you're not planning on it or expecting it, I do think, especially if you go really far away, if you're really outside your comfort zone, or maybe you're away for a long time, I think especially in those situations, you might come home and feel, wow, I feel like a different person. I've seen things that I haven't seen before. I've experienced things I haven't experienced before.

And when somebody asks you, "how was your trip?", just saying "Oh, it was great" doesn't feel like it's really doing justice to how it was, because as you will see, reader who has not yet traveled, or maybe reader who has traveled many times and already knows this, travel is not always just perfect all the time. In fact, if it's perfect all the time, you're probably not challenging yourself enough. So, there's vacations, which are good and important and comfortable, but really having an immersive travel experience, you're going to have some moments of discomfort, and you're going to have times where maybe you expected something and it didn't turn out the way you wanted.

And so it's not always going to be like a perfect, wonderful, great trip. And that's a good thing. That means that you're really stepping outside that comfort zone and challenging yourself. But it also means that you're going to have a really hard time seeing yourself in this new light and then going back to very familiar surroundings.

And, I think a lot of our personality is not just based on who we are on the inside, but the outside forces at play, our family and our friends and the place that we're from and our local culture and our society. And I think that's really illustrated by some little memes that have gone around on Instagram: "This is my personality in English, but this is my personality in Spanish." And it's true. It's like when you have a different language, sometimes even just how funny you are, how comfortable you are, if you're speaking a second language, maybe you feel a little bit less funny because you're just not in your skin as you are with your native tongue. And so, your personality changes.

It's not just about who you are, but it's also about the context of where you are and who you're around and who you're with and what they bring out in you. And so coming home can be really hard. You're sort of like, wow, I was this person overseas and now I'm coming home and I feel different and everybody's sort of expecting me to be that person that left and I'm not.

And that's a really complicated form of re-entry. And for some people it's just like a light dose and you're back to the way things were, and it's fine. For other people, you know, I studied abroad for a year, and when I came back, I felt so different. I really was depressed. I just really could not understand what had happened in me, and I didn't have the language to talk about that with anyone, and nobody asked. Nobody had ever mentioned to me that that would happen. And so I really, really wanted to make sure that that conversation was had. You're going to have these feelings and here's how you might want to think about them and how you might want to prepare for them so that you don't feel like you're the only person going through it because a lot of people go through it.

Matt Bowles: And that's one of the really important things I think you've done by creating the [Wanderful community](#) is that folks who want to start traveling, and having some of these experiences, and then processing some of these experiences, if they're not surrounded by other people that travel

the world and have these experiences, how can they get around a supportive community that understands that and can support them in that? And I think you've done an amazing job, both with the virtual stuff and the in-person stuff for supporting and creating this pathway for women to travel the world and then to be supported on every step of the journey.

Beth Santos: Thank you. I appreciate that. And I think that that's really a key part of what [Wanderful](#) is all about.

What we're doing is we're creating that space for you to connect, to have an emotional support network, to have a community, to have a group of people. So we say we're a community of women who love to travel. We're not just a community of women *that* travel. We are a community of women *who love to do it*, and who want to connect with other women who love to do it, because we want people to talk to and to interact with and to be that person with.

Matt Bowles: Well, another really interesting thing that you talk about in the book is this concept of finding the inherent components of a travel experience wherever you are, can you share a little bit and explain about that?

Beth Santos: Yeah, I think to the point of what travel is, of travel being a mindset, of being something that you exercise and not just about booking a flight. I mean, yes, we all know the definition of the word travel in English. It means that you're like going from one place to another place. But I think really, truly, traveling is about so much more than that. It really is about seeing the world differently. It's about being present in the world, about questioning yourself and being an active learner, about listening to others and about being open to trying new things. And I think sometimes we think of travel as this inaccessible thing because we think of travel as a luxurious two week vacation in Bali. And it doesn't have to be that. You can find elements of travel wherever you go.

And even now, living in Boston, our neighborhood is very heavily Dominican, and my local hairstylist is a Dominican hair salon. And it is so fun to go in there and to just chat with the women, hear their stories, and they're talking all about the DR and it feels to me like you're traveling the way they do my hair, sometimes ways that I wouldn't think of for myself. And so you have to talk about that. It's cool. It's a great way to embrace the spirit of travel. And I think those are things that you can do wherever you are. And it really comes down to opening yourself up to other people, trying new things, getting uncomfortable, finding those moments in whatever place that you're in, embracing diversity and learning something.

Matt Bowles: One of the things that you also talked about in this book that might have been the single most valuable part of the book for me is something that I have been thinking about a lot and you really helped me to crystallize my thoughts on it. And I'm gonna tell you exactly what it is because I was listening to [the audio book](#) and I stopped and then I rewound it, and then I listened to it again, and then I rewound it, and then I started typing out the quote because I wanted to read it here. But this is the part in the book where you begin talking about how you heard this speaker on a stage and she said: "How many ignorant people do you know who are well traveled?" Meaning that the speaker was expecting the response from people to be, "Oh, if you travel a lot and you're well traveled, then you become less ignorant of a person." And you sort of deconstruct that in the book. And you're like, "No, not necessarily true. Travel can also reinforce biases that you have rather than disrupt them."

And that I think is so important because I have talked to a lot of people who have espoused this romantic notion, which really sounds lovely, and I'd love to believe it, that travel makes you a more

tolerant person and a less racist person, and the more that you travel, the more you're exposed to these other cultures, the more tolerant and less racist and thoughtful of a person you become. And it sounds really romantic and lovely, and I really wish that I could believe that. I just haven't really seen the evidence that that works across the board. And so I've been sort of processing that, and I want to read this quote from your book, which for me really, really stood out. And I typed out the whole thing from [the audio book](#) because I thought it was so important. So, let me read this and then I'll let you expand upon it.

You said: "Your trip didn't change you. You changed yourself. And, in fact, some of those parts of you that feel new were probably a part of you this whole time. Just a tiny spark waiting for the right combination of fuel and air to set a fire. Yes, these outside factors were an enormous part. You saw things you didn't even know about before. You had conversations with people that changed the way you looked at issues. You tasted a pan au chocolat for the first time. I totally get it. But, you could have done. All these things and not let them change you one little bit. The act of going abroad does not make you a more wise or worldly person. It is up to you to let those experiences become part of you, to embrace the spirit of challenging and questioning your preconceptions".

That, for me, made the entire book. It really helped me to crystallize some of my thinking on this. Do you want to share or expound on any of that or how you came to that conclusion?

Beth Santos: Well, first of all, I think that was the first time anyone's ever read part of my book back to me, which was really darn fun. And anytime you want to just record the audio book for me, so I can listen to you reading the book, let's do it. That was cool. That was actually super cool.

Yes, I completely agree with you. I so wish it were easy and you could just hop on a plane to an inherently better personality, all you have to do is book a flight and you're going to be a better person for it. And things are just going to happen to you and you're going to become better.

That is the picture that we paint. And I think there's quite a few things that are wrong with that. First of all, don't think that just paying for a Delta flight is going to make you into a morally superior person / When you really break it down, there is so much internal transformation that happens. So first of all, you can't buy your way into becoming a better person. Just signing up for the class doesn't mean that you're actually going to learn how to do woodworking or economics or something like that. You have to do the work. Same with travel. You can't just show up in a place and then be like, Oh, wow, I'm so worldly now.

No, you might actually start. Still be a jerk. You have to work at it. You have to open yourself up. You have to question yourself. You have to question the way that you've seen the world. And if you don't question yourself, you run the risk of further cementing some of the preconceptions that you do have.

Maybe you think, oh, everybody in this place wears red all the time. And then you get off the plane and you're in the airport for five minutes and you see somebody wearing red and you're like "Aha, I was right. I was right this whole time. Okay, now I can leave. I have been vindicated." It can go awry if you just let yourself use these as opportunities to cement the things that you already believed.

Really, you should be looking for the moments that you were wrong and be comfortable putting yourself in a position of being wrong and being vulnerable. And, and I think that it goes into so many other things. I mean, we do so much travel shaming of, oh, I'm so well-traveled, which means I'm such a good person and everyone should listen to me. I get the idea. If you have seen a lot in the world and if

you've put yourself in these positions, I do believe that travel has the ability to make you into a better person. I think travel is a lifelong opportunity to learn and to grow and to be better. But I also think that you can show up to class. and go to sleep and still get an "A" sometimes, if that's what happens, it doesn't mean that you've actually learned anything.

Matt Bowles: Beth, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into the lightning round. You close out your book by talking about a quote from the great Maya Angelou, and I just want to read Maya Angelou's quote and then allow you to share what it means to you. Maya Angelou said, "I long as does every human being to be at home wherever I find myself." So, for you, after all of your travels at this point in your life, why is that quote so important to you and what does it mean to you?

Beth Santos: You know, that quote to me, it's just so much, it's really everything. It's like truly my most favorite quote of all time. And I think it does a few things. It breaks down what home is, that home is not one place. I think it also opens up this concept that a lot of travelers are familiar with, which is, and it's almost a little sad, it's that loving many places at once and realizing that you actually cannot be in multiple places at once. And there will never be a time in your life where you can be happily in two places at the same time and you may love two places equally or many, many more.

And, in realizing that, I also think it allows us to think about home, not as a place, but as a mindset, as an internal feeling. And I think that feeling comes from this level of joy, and comfort to a certain degree, but I think it's always important to get uncomfortable. I think home is the certain level of comfort with yourself, satisfaction with yourself, and gratitude and joy.

I love this idea of being at home wherever you are, getting to a place in your life where you can show up anywhere and just be so confident in yourself and your ability to learn and to adapt and to grow that I'll figure this out. Even if that means you're in a place you've never been to before and traffic is whizzing by and you don't know how to cross the street and you're not sure where your hotel is, you can still have this level of inner peace, of being at home, of being like, "I trust myself and I'm going to figure this out and I'm cool." And that is, for me, the ultimate feeling of just being at ease and in grace with yourself.

Matt Bowles: Well, I think that is an amazing place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Beth, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Beth Santos: Yeah, I'm ready. I'm ready.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it.

All right. So I'm going to ask you some different questions than I did in the last lightning round. Although I want to start with the same one because, in the last interview, I asked you to recommend a book and you recommended the book [Beyond Guilt Trips](#) by Dr. Anu Taranath. As soon as that interview finished, I went and bought it immediately, I read it immediately, and it is now on [my top 10 list of books that I recommend most to digital nomads](#). It was spectacular. So I have been waiting for this interview to ask you to recommend another book so that I can go and buy it and read it if I haven't already.

Beth Santos: Oh my gosh. I am so excited to share this one with you because I also feel like you'll really love it. And it's also a book that is marketed towards women that I feel like you're going to really

love. It's called [Real Self Care by Pooja Lakshman](#) and it is a book about how in our industry of self care (and it truly has become an industry), basically we've been telling women for decades, longer, that the solution to self-care is something that you can buy on Amazon. It's a bubble bath, it's some me time and a glass of wine, yoga, class, something, something that you can buy. And the things that the author talks about are how a lot of the things that are causing women to feel trapped and frustrated are not curable with bubble bath, they're much larger systemic issues of income inequity or inequality at work, inability to get promotions, or the fact that the United States is so far down the list in terms of quality maternal care and child care. And, a lot of these things that are causing so much stress and anxiety for women, and it's rising and rising, are external factors. The argument in the book is you cannot have a bubble bath and solve income inequality. A lot of this has to do with creating boundaries and advocating for yourself and asking for help and making sure that there is equity in the home and not just doing something because it's easier and faster, and I just thought that that is such an important message for so many people right now to be hearing. And I just cannot stop talking about it. I love this book.

Matt Bowles: Well, another thing that you've included in your book that I want to bring into the lightning round here, you have a whole bunch of really high value, how to tactical stuff in the book. And for the lightning round, I want to ask if you can share one of your many [minimalist packing](#) hacks.

Beth Santos: Yes. Oh, there's so many good ones. I think there's a really nice framework that I like to use, which is bring half or use all. And it's anytime that you're planning a trip, we always pack way more than we need. And so, if you always think about "what do I have that I can reuse", really the concept is reuse, or if you're not sure if you're going to use it, just don't bring it because we're going to places you can always buy something, or find a workaround. You don't always need everything in a what if scenario. So, if you think you need something, bring half of it. Half of the thing of shampoo or half of the number of shirts that you think you need. Or make sure that you're using all of what you have. And then you get to come home with a lighter suitcase. Or you have more room for souvenirs and things that you buy overseas.

Matt Bowles: Another set of tactics that you share in the book is trip preparation techniques, particularly for first time solo female travelers that might not be experienced, that might be a little bit apprehensive about taking their first solo trip. Can you share one of those trip preparation hacks?

Beth Santos: So a lot of this starts with baby steps. The very first baby step I think is literally just taking yourself out to eat in a restaurant. I think a lot of women are nervous about doing that. So find a restaurant somewhere in your hometown, take yourself out for a nice dinner, not a cafe, not fast-casual, a real restaurant, order a table for one, and just have dinner with yourself.

Matt Bowles: Alright, Beth, another section of the book that you give a lot of good tactics is around this concept of budget travel because it obviously seems very expensive to travel and you have a whole bunch of ways that it doesn't have to be that expensive. Can you share one of your budget travel hacks?

Beth Santos: Going to the grocery store is my favorite budget travel hack of all time. I think it is a fun way to get to know an area. As much as it is a fun way to eat your way through a regular person's kitchen in the place that you're visiting. So, go to the grocery store, see what's on sale, you're going to learn about the local produce systems, the economic environment, you're going to learn about what's available, what's not available, what people eat for breakfast, what they don't.

And my favorite part of that is buying your souvenirs at the grocery store. Get chocolate from the grocery store, something that's local and different, or get bath salts or some cool snack, a bag of chips. Even the flavors, like the KitKat flavors in Japan, are totally different than here. It seems like a basic thing to give somebody a KitKat, but it's so cool that you can do that. So, I would just go to the grocery store, get a bunch of souvenirs. It's way cheaper and it's such a cool cultural experience.

Matt Bowles: Beth, last question. You have been traveling the world for over 15 years now. At this point in your travel journey, what are your top three bucket list destinations, places you still have not yet been to that are now highest on your list, you'd most love to see?

Beth Santos: I would love to go to Japan, speaking of. Nepal. And I really want to go to the pyramids of Egypt. I've never been. So, Pyramids of Giza.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. Alright, Beth, I want you to let folks know how they can find you, how they can follow you on social media, how they can buy your book, and if they want to join us at the WITS Summit, how they can learn more about that. How do you want people to come into your world?

Beth Santos: So, to find me, first of all, I'm @[MaximumBeth](#) on pretty much all channels. You can also find my website at <https://bethsantos.com>. The [85 Percent podcast](#) is where you can find all the episodes. Of course, you can just go to wherever you get your podcast and find it there. The WITS Summit is <https://witsummit.com>. You can also follow our wonderful creators account on Instagram @[sheswonderful](#). And the URL for Wonderful is <https://sheswonderful.com>. If you want to join our community, that's where you would go. There's a link where you can learn all about our membership and our upcoming trips and our events. We have some really great trips coming up. We have an Antarctica trip that we're planning right now, which is really exciting. And of course there's the book. You can buy this book anywhere. [You can find it on Amazon](#). Barnes and Noble has it. Target, Walmart has it. Bookshop is a great website where you can support independent booksellers. Or a lot of independent bookstores have the book if you just go into, and even if they don't have it, ask for it because we want to see it in more bookstores. So get it out there. Ask for it at your local Hudson News anytime you're at the airport. And that's it.

Matt Bowles: We are going to link all of that up in one place in the show notes. Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. There you will see links to everything we've discussed in this interview, including how you can [join me and Beth in person in Utah for the WITS Summit and get an \\$80 discount](#) just for being a listener of The Maverick Show. We're going to link all of that up and, of course, link to [the book](#) as well. Beth, I think you are amazing. Thank you so much for coming back on the show.

Beth Santos: Thanks for being here. I cannot wait to see you in person in Utah soon

Matt Bowles: Yes, let's hang out in person in Utah. Good night, everybody.