

**Matt Bowles:** My guest today is Akua Sencherey. She is a Ghanaian-American digital nomad working as a product marketer at Andela. She has traveled to over 60 countries on six continents to explore culture, history and technology. The stories she tells are in the realm of remote work, tech solo traveling the world as a black woman, and bringing the culture and heritage of Ghana to the forefront. Her current focus is understanding the context of tech in Africa and how that ecosystem is evolving. Akua, welcome to the show.

**Akua Sencherey:** Hello. Thank you. I'm very excited to be here.

**Matt Bowles:** I am so excited to have you here. Let's just start off by setting the scene, though, and talking about where we are recording this from today. Unfortunately, we are not in person. I am actually in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, on the east coast of the United States today. And where are you?

**Akua Sencherey:** Beautiful. I am in not the mountains, but the valleys next to some volcanoes in Mexico City, so not too far from you.

**Matt Bowles:** One of my all-time favorite cities. I was just there a few months ago. I try to go through whenever I can. Can you maybe start and just share about what you love about maybe the country of Mexico, but also Mexico City in particular?

**Akua Sencherey:** Yes, I love Mexican people, they are a lot of fun. They're very nice and hospitable. I love how jovial they are and how they crack jokes all the time. Just completely different than what I believe the media in the U. S. paints of our neighbors. And what I love about CDMX, as it's nicknamed, is the architecture. I'm staying in La Condesa, and so I just walk out of my apartment towards Amsterdam Street, towards Parque Mexico. And I just see a bunch of trees and I see a bunch of Spanish architecture, some French influence, a lot of color on the walls, which is great. It's not just new pallets and a bunch of dogs everywhere. It's a great scene.

**Matt Bowles:** It is such an incredible city. The food scene is incredible. It's just such a vibrant place. So yeah, I recommend it to everybody that has not gone to CDMX before. Definitely make it a point to get to Mexico City. It's super easy, especially for Americans to just take a flight there. You can even go for a short trip, but highly recommended.

Akua, I think I want to start this going all the way back. And before we even talk about your background and upbringing, I'm wondering if you can talk a

little bit about your parent's story, where they're from in Ghana, and then what their experience was like in Ghana and then coming to the United States.

**Akua Sencherey:** Yeah, that's a great place to start. Both of my parents are from Ghana. They're also both from a city called Kumasi, which is a pretty large city in the Ashanti region of Ghana. And growing up in Ghana, they grew up in the late 50s, 60s and 70s. So, it was a time of hope and anticipation. The country was liberated from the British colonial rule in 57.

They were coming up in a time when, for most countries around the world that were liberated from the British government, you have that sense of freedom, but then it's great. How do we govern ourselves? So, my parents were in that tumultuous time of the country where military coups were happening, right?

Kwame Nkrumah, the first President, was actually overthrown by a military coup, and that time shortly after was a very tough time economically for the country. It was a bit frightening for people as they were roaming about and trying to feel safe amongst the military, and amongst police who were in the city trying to assert themselves. So, I was actually speaking with my mom, and she told me that she would go to the grocery store and some days there wouldn't be food. She would go to the grocery store and some days there'd be extra-long lines and people would just be waiting and it was just a really tough time. But on the flip side, what I know about my parents as well is they had a lot of fun. They grew up with a lot of siblings on both sides, and they just made fun with the people that they lived with. My mom lived in a really large complex with almost 20 plus people in one household and she told me that the first color TV that they had was in one room of that massive building and everyone would crowd around to watch TV.

She also talked about a blind uncle that she had, a great uncle, who would tell stories because he had traveled outside of Ghana. Would tell stories about Cinderella and Bambi and things that in America or in the West you hear all the time, and you see or whatever, but for them, it was so novel. And so, she knew those stories by the time she came to the U.S. My dad's family was the same growing up in Kumasi and just having a good time. And they have a really close-knit family on my dad's side, so they go way back. The family members lived really close together as well. So constantly speak with cousins and stepbrothers and always play. So that's what I remember about my parents' childhood, as they've told me, and their coming to America was more of an opportunity to play as most people I think today as well. Just trying to get out of that situation, primarily my father, and coming to opportunity for university, really coming to the U. S. first to live with a host family and to study chemistry.

That was his first foray into the U. S. and his first opportunity out. So, for him, it was Hey, let's get a new start. Let's see what life's like in this country. And it wasn't easy coming to the U. S. and being someone with a thick accent from Africa. They spoke English, being from Ghana, colonized by the British, but it was not easy just to integrate into American society. So, when my mother came over as well, that's when they began to start. a family and look towards the future.

**Matt Bowles:** And can you talk about where you were born, where you grew up? And when you think back as you were coming up, how did you navigate that Ghanaian American identity dynamic growing up in an immigrant home?

**Akua Sencherey:** So, I grew up in Texas, but I was born in Detroit. So I like to think about how my life would have been if I had actually grown up in Detroit. We left whenever I was like two. We moved to Tennessee, a small town outside of Nashville called Franklin. I also like to think about who I would have been if I would have grown up in Tennessee. Probably would have gone to a same state university, played college sports. But growing up in Texas, we were at the time in this small town outside of Houston, it felt like we were the only African family in the neighborhood. And so, the idea of what it meant to be African was not really clear to me. I grew up in a household where we were eating the foods, my parents were speaking to us in the language they tried to teach it to us to the best of their ability. We were connected with our relatives from afar, but to be honest, I didn't understand what my African identity was growing up.

It was a very white place that I grew up in. And so I very much wanted to assimilate. And I think they were happy with us assimilating too. They didn't want us to have trouble. And that, I think, was just their best way of helping us become productive citizens. And it wasn't until maybe college where I came into that identity of being African. That was mainly sparked by seeing and finally interacting with other people who were first-generation American from West Africa. Most of those friends were Nigerian. I started to meet a lot more Ghanaians. So that made me go, "Oh, I'm not actually weird. I'm not unique, but I'm me. And I can be my brand of me. It's not weird, you know what I mean, that I'm like this."

**Matt Bowles:** What did you find growing up in terms of the dynamics of Blackness in the United States and, how your first-generation African experience was within that larger milieu of Blackness in the United States?

**Akua Sencherey:** So, Blackness at the age of like 10, what I understood about it was that it was the other. This is before the academic terms and all the racial

structures. You understand that, but just understood I was different. I was the only one. I understood little about Africa, even though my parents literally are African. So, there's this memory I have of my parents telling us, "Hey, we're going to Ghana for the first time." I think I was maybe seven. And I was like, "no, I don't want to go. I don't want to go to Ghana." My mom was like, "why don't you want to go to Ghana?" I'm like, "I don't know." I was afraid. I was afraid of Africa. There was no concept of Africa for me, really the continent, what it looks like, and everything. So, I think there was a just misunderstanding of my identity at that time, because there weren't many people that looked like me because there weren't other African families. I would say the best connection I had to my blackness, interestingly, was through other immigrant first-generation people. I had a Cambodian American friend, I had a Venezuelan American, a Colombian American friend. These people actually helped me realize what that experience is in America and in a very white place. But the idea of Blackness, again, whenever I was young, I could not understand and wrap my head around it.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk about that first trip to back to Ghana and what it was like initially for you going to Ghana with your parents and visiting your relatives and experiencing Ghana in that context?

**Akua Sencherey:** Yes, like I said, I was very afraid at first, but they could not get me to leave once I went there because all my family is there. Most of my parents' siblings were there. That's what we did, we went, and we visited our village. We have still this massive house that we stay in while we're there, and it has all the things we wanted, right? My parents are very smart, as most parents are when they travel with their kids. You bring the snacks, you bring all the things that make you comfortable at home, you bring them with you." So, they brought them there. "But even outside of that, it was just a lot of fun. I just really finally got to feel what a lot of my friends and neighbors in Texas felt, which was, "Hey, we're just going to go hang out at grandma's house", or "Hey, we're just going to go to my uncle's house". I never had that as a kid. People would have to travel pretty far to come and see us. So, to finally be able to be in a place and be like, "Okay, we're just going to go to your aunt's house. We're going to go see your cousin". It was so much fun. My mom just continues to remind me how much fun we had as kids and how they could not get us back in the house, every day.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask, as you were growing up, about the role that sports played in your life. I know that both soccer, football, as it's called in the rest of the world, and track and field also have played a big part in your life. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Akua Sencherey:** Sports were a huge part of my life. It was a lot of, I would say, how I've learned discipline, how I've learned responsibility. It took up a lot of our time. It's why I still stay fit for most of my adulthood is because of that foundation. But I grew up playing soccer mainly because my dad loved soccer and my older brother played it. So naturally I stumbled into it and turned out I was pretty good. I was scoring a lot of goals as a young kid. And as I grew up, I tried different positions on the field, but I was a force. It was definitely very good. And my dad was very involved in that part of my life, taking us to games and tournaments during the weekend. Even going back to Ghana, we would like to play soccer in the street with our cousins. It was very much part competition, but also just part of what we would do for fun. And it got to a point for sure in the U.S. and growing up and into high school where it was a real opportunity for me to actually take it further than just club or school. So, I was hoping actually to get a soccer scholarship somewhere, but I was pretty burned out from soccer by my senior year of high school.

And at the time, I was actually getting pretty good at track and field, which was not a sport I did growing up. People think of track and field as just running, but there is a field aspect to it, field events. And funny enough, I threw the discus and the hammer in high school, just because I was strong enough to do it. And it looked like fun. No joke. Saw some people playing in the mud in seventh grade and said, "Man, I'm over here running, and my lungs hurting, and these people are playing in the mud". That is literally the moment I decided to do Discus and Hammer. And so, did it in eighth grade, did pretty good, got into high school and just really excelled and ended up getting a scholarship. Not a full ride, but like a pretty decent amount and a scholarship to the University of Texas at Austin to do Discus and Hammer. So, I was like, "Yeah, why not?" I know I've been a soccer player and I've played volleyball and all these other sports all my life. But like, this seems like a cool opportunity. Why not take it?

**Matt Bowles:** Can you also talk about your interest in world travel? And when you think back, how did your interest in traveling the world initially start to develop?

**Akua Sencherey:** I was really lucky as a kid, again, with traveling with my family to Ghana and also to see family in London growing up, that I had a context of what traveling outside of the country was. I had a passport at a young age, so it wasn't too foreign to me. But the idea of traveling to Europe outside of England, traveling to other places, didn't become real until I lived in New York City, and I had my first job and was on my own fully independent right outside of college, but like for real for real independent, and just saw that tickets were cheap to get to the other side of the world.

And the other side of the world was like literally a few hours overnight and you're somewhere else. And so, I ended up planning a trip with some friends to Spain. That was my first full-on international trip without my parents paying, with my own cash. And it was amazing. It felt so freeing. And Spain was a place where I was learning Spanish in New York at the time. So, I knew Spanish, and I could practice it while I was there. And it just felt electrifying to be in a new place and to be able to explore culture and history and just to see so many new things. The travel bug hit me like no other from that point on. And I literally told myself I want to live abroad. I don't just want to keep traveling. I want to live abroad. I think that's where my real travel journey began.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk a little bit about your career trajectory and what you did professionally up until your transitional moment where you decided to quit your job.

**Akua Sencherey:** What's interesting is that trip to Spain, like I said, was when the first travel bug hit me. I was working the same job at the time. I kept having these goals to keep traveling abroad, like, oh, three trips a year would be my goal, different continents, etc. It got to the point where I was so intrigued by not just travel, but intrigued by the opportunity to live and to be in a new place where I could speak a new language and connect with the people. That I remember this specifically, I was in a conference room with co-workers at my job in New York. Great job, was paid great, had a great life, had a great community, and could not complain at that time in my life when I look back. Sitting in this conference room and I just had a thought in my head that if I literally did nothing else in my life, my life could keep going in this trajectory and I think I would be fine. I'd be content, but that thought scared me. I was like, "I don't think I want to keep doing this". I don't want to keep going in this direction. And it was a moment of power where I realized I could change the course of my life. And so, at that moment, when I had that thought and I had that realization of the power I had, I said, let me see what that change could be. Let me understand a bit more about where this is taking me. So, where it ended up taking me was, I was in a Spanish class at the time in New York City, and there was this girl who was in the class as well. She was in a completely different industry, a completely different job, and she was telling me about this Summer Immersion Program she was going to do.

And the minute she said it, it was as if someone opened a door and all the light poured in. And I was like, wait, that is what I'm literally going to do next. I told her that in the class like I literally said it out loud, the class looked at me and was like, what are you talking about? I was like, I'm going to do what she just said she's doing, I'm doing it too. Like, okay. so, I went home, researched it,

signed up, and the program's called Maximo Nivel, and it's essentially a Spanish immersion program. So, I ended up signing up for this two and a half months in Peru, living with the host family, and doing an internship. I kept that a secret from my company. It was literally a few months away. So, I kept it a secret. And then when it was time, I told my coworkers, I told my boss, obviously, “Hey, I'm resigning because of this reason. I just really feel like right now I need to travel the world and just explore what's out there”. And the way that she understood, and she was like, “You know what, I totally get it. We're sad to miss you but go and do this thing”. It also made me feel so validated. Again, this power that I have to choose the path of my life or to change the course of my life. And the fact that everyone else is agreeing and saying, “Cool, yeah, go do it”. It's like, oh, this is what I'm meant to do.

**Matt Bowles:** And you landed in Cusco, Peru. I have been to Cusco twice. It is an amazing place, but for people that have never been to Cusco, can you talk about what it is like and what you were doing there? And by the way, I have been to the Chocolate Museum.

**Akua Sencherey:** Oh, amazing.

**Matt Bowles:** Yes. So, tell people that know nothing of the Chocolate Museum, they know nothing of Cusco, what is it like and what were you up to, and what was your time like there?

**Akua Sencherey:** Yes. Two and a half months. So about 10 weeks in Cusco, Peru. Cusco is in the Sacred Valley of Peru. It's a very high altitude. It's up there with the mountains, with all the sacred ruins of the Inca people, and it's also up there with all of the coca trees and leaves, and there's a lot going on in Cusco. It's one of the places if you go to Peru, must visit to understand country, to understand the culture.

So, while I was there, I did three main things. I interned at a chocolate museum called the Choco Museo, I think they still exist. And I essentially had to learn how to give tours in Spanish about chocolate, how it's made, where it comes from around the world, what the different types of chocolate that you can make are, how to mold it. And I literally also made chocolate in the back. I, like, created, literally made chocolate molds, got to create chocolate in, like, the back factory. So much fun. The people that work there are hilarious. Like, literally, they were laughing all day long. I had no idea what they were saying the first few weeks. When my Spanish finally caught up to me, I was like, “Oh, now I know what they're saying. This is hilarious”. So, such a fun time working with

them in the chocolate factory. And, of course, I got to taste and eat chocolate all day.

The second thing I did was the immersion program, right? I was with a lot of other people, mainly Americans who would come and do this time there who were doing different things, different internships. But we all were just learning Spanish. So, I had a private tutor, Spanish classes, we would do cooking classes, we would do dance classes. All ways to immerse yourself in the culture and the language. And of course you're in the country, so you're doing that anyway, but it was a very more academic way of doing so.

Third thing I was literally living regular life. Like my host mom was amazing, her name was Ana Maria. She was amazing. Every night she would make me dinner. And she would sit with me, she wouldn't eat for some reason with me, but she would sit with me and talk to me, and I would have to struggle through my terrible Spanish for the first month or so. And then when my Spanish finally clicked, I could finally like gossip with her and talk with her, but it was amazing. I also had a host sister for a while who's actually from Ecuador and it was just an amazing, again, another experience where I'm on my own. In a weird context, trying to figure out life, but very much a specific purpose of learning Spanish, learning the culture. I got to travel around and be a part of a lot of different cultural experiences. A huge festival, I forget the name of it, but it's in Puerto Tambo in Peru. A huge street festival and got to travel around the Sacred Valley, do Machu Picchu, all the good stuff. Such an amazing experience.

**Matt Bowles:** When you think back about that experience, what impact did it have on you at that time? And how did it shape the trajectory of your life from there?

**Akua Sencherey:** It was so impactful. I think the biggest thing was truly feeling empowered by that immersion and how important immersion is for language. Because I was not confident in my Spanish until I was forced to sit in front of a woman who was speaking to me at her kitchen table and like waiting for my response. Or I was on the way to an event with friends but needed to get on the bus and had to figure out how to pay for the thing. Just, your kind of forced for that immersion. It was also just growing up a feeling of needing to mature and maturing. I just felt myself really having to make decisions for myself, being in tough situations where I was my only support system. And really just thinking through, "Hey, how do I handle this situation by myself? How do I handle it in another language, in another culture, another context?". It was also just a time that felt really free. I felt like I had made this scary decision to quit my job

again. Everything was fine in New York. Everything was great, quit it all and did this thing that again felt so scary, but when I was there, it felt free, and it felt so right.

So, it was just a moment where I understood in myself how to feel that gut feeling of like, no, this is right. This is truly right and really listened and hear my inner voice again with coaching me through different circumstances and situations, but also just my inner voice telling me like, no, this is actually where you're supposed to be right now and enjoy it.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, you eventually started working for [Remote Year](#), and I want to ask you about that. We did not overlap. I was a customer of Remote Year, and I started my Remote Year program in 2016. And I ended in August of 2017, which was right before you came on as a staff person.

And for folks that don't know, [Remote Year](#) is a company that facilitates basically a turnkey digital nomad experience where you can sign up. At the time I did it, it was only 12-month itineraries that were available, and you travel the world for an entire year. You live in a different city each month, ours went across four continents. And you travel with the same community of remote professionals. So, you're with the same group of people for the entire year, and [Remote Year](#), the company takes care of your accommodations, your co-working space, access, and all the places, all your flights between the locations. They have local staff, people on the ground, and then they have program leaders that travel with the group for the entire time.

And so, I did that trip, and it ended in 2017. I tell people to this day, that was the best year of my life. I mean, it was unbelievable. But also, in addition to the people that happened to be on my trip, I have met so many people through the Remote Year network, people that are alumni from other trips, people that are staff or were staff for particular periods of time, and then they introduced me to other people. For example, you and I were introduced by our mutual friend, [Sean Tierney](#), who Maverick Show listeners know because he's been on the podcast multiple times. And Sean hit me up immediately. It's like, you gotta meet Akua. You two for sure need to talk. I was like, definitely. And so of course, we did. And here you are on the podcast.

It created such an extraordinary network, and I've met so many amazing people through there. But I'm curious if you can talk about how you initially connected

with Remote Year and what your experience was like and how that experience impacted you.

**Akua Sencherey:** Yeah, I also just love that you've done it because we can probably talk a lot about those early years of [Remote Year](#). You're definitely an OG in that time period that you did the program, and the fact that someone is willing to take 12 months at that time. This is not post-COVID where everyone knows remote work is. No, this is still where remote work was, “Oh, what? You can take your laptop and leave your desk”. Anyway, I just love that you also did it, so we can have a lot to talk about there. But after Peru, I said, “Hey, how can I continue to work and travel? Like, this is my lane right now. I just knew it was my lane. How can I do this? Where do I do this? Stat”. And the next step was just scouring the internet at that point, trying to figure out different next steps.

I saw [Remote Year](#) because a colleague from my job in New York, his sister worked for Remote Year at the time. And I looked at her resume and looked at Remote Year. And I was like, “Whoa”. And then looked at the job openings. And I was like, “This is exactly where I need to be”. So, I literally looked at it and I did all that stuff. And I was like, “Okay, tomorrow I'm going to apply for this job”. That night I could not sleep. Because in my mind, I was like, “No, if I miss the opportunity to get this job because I didn't apply in time, like, I'm going to be pissed”. So, I literally got up in the middle of the night. What I did, I didn't just apply to the job. I sent a bunch of messages to people who were connected to the company. I think I sent to three different people who knew people who were at the company already and was like, “Hey, can you give me contact with this person? I have to work there. Like, here's my background, blah, blah, blah”. So I ended up talking to, I think two people, and they were like, “Yes, we totally recommend you apply here”. So I applied, and I think I was a shoe-in because of my Peru experience. I think without my Peru experience, I may not have fully understood a lot of where they were coming from and the whole lifestyle. And again, that experience of living abroad is just very, even if for two months, is very, I don't know. You just get it when you've done that. It's just a different way of traveling.

So, I just understood a lot of the questions they were asking me and ways in which to pitch [Remote Year](#). And I got the job, and I was just ecstatic. I was like, “This is insane. Like how I am about to be paid to work and travel and then to tell other people and to teach other people how to work and travel. This makes no sense”. It was awesome.

**Matt Bowles:** That's amazing. Well, I want to ask you about some of your other traveling experiences because you have gone on to have a lot of amazing

experiences and go to a lot of amazing places. I think what I want to start with is building on the theme of your passion for football/soccer and how that has actually related to your travels. Can you talk about that?"

**Akua Sencherey:** "Yes. So, I love soccer again, played it growing up, but it's really just a fun game. I love watching it. If I can still play it, if my knees will allow me, I'll still play it. And I love the narrative and the fun around soccer, the culture around soccer outside of just the pitch and not just about the players and their lives, but the drama, if you will, of soccer. So, I connected with it in a different way as an adult, again, not needing to play it but to just be a part of it in a different way.

So, the first opportunity I had to travel for soccer was in 2015. I was still in New York at the time. The Women's world cup was happening in Canada and again, New York was such a pivotal place because of its proximity to Canada. I was still new to travel, but I was like, "Hey, it's just there. It's just Montreal. It's just across the border. It's just Toronto, just there, right?". So, in my mind, I was like, "This is cool. I could go and watch soccer and travel and not be far from home at the time". So, I went by myself, a friend actually from New York ended up joining me, but it was a very eye-opening view of, I would say, women's sport, women's sport internationally. It's different to see women's sport in the U.S. and in the context of basketball and volleyball and all these sports that, you know, we grow up seeing and we grow up playing and are now really on TV. But in 2015, women's soccer, I think, was still on the come-up. It was still trying to make a name for itself. The U.S. Women went on to win that tournament. I don't think most of the stadiums that I went to were very full. I think I went to a Germany versus France game, and it was not full, but the game was amazing. The style of play, the quality of play, right? These are professional soccer players, and at the peak of their professionalism, and it was just amazing to watch and was so inspiring to watch and just reminded me of my dream of wanting to be at that level, too. So, great experience, kind of dipped my toe in it because went for a bit, got to travel around Ottawa and Montreal, had a great time, and then kind of put it in the back of my head.

Then came closer to 2019, and a friend of mine was like, "Hey, women's soccer, they're playing in France this time. I would love to go to France and also drive around the South of France. Why don't we just go watch?". And I was like, "Say no more, let's go". We're going, we're going to France.

**Matt Bowles:** Hahaha

**Akua Sencherey:** So, me and a good friend who I still travel with today, we went to Paris, we went to Saint Tropez, we went to Cannes, we went to Montpellier, just driving our little Mercedes Benz down the windy roads. But the purpose is we watched a ton of soccer. And again, got to see the U. S. women dominant at the time in 2019 as well, again, go to win the tournament. We didn't end up seeing the, the final in France. We came home to New York and watched it in New York with friends, but it was just amazing again to see it and to see the sport grow. Got a little bigger, bit more fanfare. France felt like a bit more of a bigger stage. Then I said, okay, this is kind of fun. Like, where's it going next? And the next it was Australia and New Zealand. I was like, okay, I've never been in that side of the world. We'll see what happens when 2023 comes around. Matt, 2022 came around and I told myself, this is an opportunity for me to, I wouldn't say change my life again, the way I did in New York, quit my job, but I literally moved out of my apartment in Houston because I figured if I'm going to go all the way to New Zealand and Australia again, for soccer, I can't just go for a week or two the way I did in 2015 and 2019. This thing is big.

And I know, and I always feel FOMO by the time the final comes around. So, I said, no, I'm going to go and I'm going to stay the whole month and I'm going to enjoy soccer and I'm just going to enjoy the place and see what those countries have to offer. So moved out of my apartment, said, "Hey, let's start this little nomad thing again". And it just keeps getting better. And what I mean by that is, again, I believe that women's soccer is interesting to watch. I've always believed it, but what was so amazing about this one is that New Zealand and Australia are countries that have a soccer presence, but it's still growing.

They don't have necessarily all the leagues and all the pitches that you might see in like a Texas or a California or Pennsylvania in the U. S. I go there and everything, everyone's talking soccer. Everyone is supportive. There are billboards everywhere about the teams. I was in Sydney, which is a super walkable city, billboards everywhere. We're behind the Matildas is what they're called, the Australian team. We were behind the Matildas. We love the Matildas. Every city I traveled to, people were rallying around this. I also watched a lot of TV, a lot of news, just to see what they were talking about. They were going crazy for the Matildas. And the Matildas did. Amazing in the tournament, they ended up beating.

France in penalties, which was a nail biter of a game. And I was there at the stadium filming all of this. Cause I was like, I have to document this, but just to see how the game has grown from 2015 watching it little crowds, but still passionate crowds to full stadium of yellow yelling, "Aussie! Aussie! Aussie!".

It was, I literally don't have to go to a men's world cup after having experienced that women's world cup. I love that I got to experience that. And I now have that is what soccer means to me today. I have the story of what it means for me having played it, but now it's like watching it and I'm going to continue to travel and to experience the game growing from a grassroots level, how countries rally around their teams in their countries. And I could talk on and on, so I'll stop there.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I mean, it is really an extraordinary thing. And for Americans, for example, or anybody that doesn't come from a country where it's as huge as it is in a lot of the rest of the world when you travel around the world. It's an amazing way to connect with different cultures through that and through understanding their local football loyalties and going to, even if it's not like a live game or anything like that, even just going to watch it in a pub where they have it on TV or something like that is really an amazing way to plug into local cultures. It was very cool because during the last men's world cup, I happened to be on the continent of Africa, I was in West Africa and I was in Senegal when Morocco made their run and it was so special to be on the continent of Africa. I mean, we were there for the whole thing and I was actually on a [Remote Year](#) program. We were, I was doing a four-month, all Africa [Remote Year](#) program. And so, we were there and of course we were rooting for all the African teams.

**Akua Sencherey:** We were all African. Everyone was African in that World Cup. We were all, we all turned Moroccan.

**Matt Bowles:** It was amazing. But of course, we were rooting for Senegal until they got knocked out. And all this kind of stuff, right? So, we're rooting for all of them and then Morocco made the run, and it was so incredible because we were in Dakar in Senegal and we had found this incredible Lebanese restaurant. And it was like the most unbelievable food, so we just kept going there. And what happened was they had this huge TV screen outdoors, like on the balcony, and you could go out and they would show the games.

And of course, as Morocco did better, the Moroccan immigrant community that lived in Senegal would go to this particular Arab restaurant to watch the Morocco football games. And so, we would all go to this particular restaurant with the Moroccan immigrants that were living in Senegal to root on Morocco during the world cup. And it was the most amazing experience. Of course, the whole continent is rooting for Morocco, but especially the Moroccan immigrant community. Of course, is rooting for Morocco. And so, we were sort of right in the middle of that and it was just such a special experience. And so, I think if

you can plug into that kind of stuff, anywhere around the world, even if it's not a live game, it's just going out to where the fans are and rooting for the team with the fans. It's just such a special travel experience.

**Akua Sencherey:** It is. And if I can say that, I think a lot of the recommendations I give people when they're in a new country is to go and watch a soccer game. It's similar to a recommendation that someone who loves music may give you to watch a concert in like South America. Cause South Americans, they just do it differently, right? They just have a different level of passion for artists and for music and they get into it. And I would say the same about soccer. So, if you're in Colombia, go to the Bombo Nero. I was recently in Abidjan during the Afcon tournament. I didn't have to go necessarily to the stadium to watch the games. Similar to what you just said, there were amazing watch parties around the city where the Cameroonians would go to watch their games, the Nigerians would go to watch their games, the Ivory Coast, right? They would go and watch. So, there is something about being able to celebrate with people in such a moment of sport. And I think soccer really brings cool people together. And I always recommend that people tap into it.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I want to talk about some of your travel experiences on your amazing continent of Africa. I think let's maybe just start with Morocco since we're talking about Morocco. Can you share a little bit about your experience in Morocco?

**Akua Sencherey:** Yes. Morocco is the first African country outside of Ghana that I traveled to and again, I guess my seven-year-old self came back to me, and I was nervous to go there, to be honest. And luckily, I was going with a few other friends who looked just like me, dark-skinned, they are also West African. And when I tell you that the Moroccan people love and understand their brethren on the continent of Africa, I've never felt so welcomed. Yes, I never felt so welcomed before. They were so hospitable. They were like, where are you from? Sometimes we would say United States. Sometimes we would say Africa, depending on what we felt like, right? Whatever identity we felt like throwing. When we said United States, they were like, "Oh, we love Obama. We love the Obama family, right?". They just love to connect. And they're like, welcome to Morocco. Welcome back home. You know, they would say, welcome to Africa. Welcome to your continent. Welcome to your home. Then I would say, Oh, I'm from Ghana. Oh, Kwame Nkrumah. We love Ghana. Well, you know, they were just so nice and the food so amazing.

I did not realize that in the mountains there, they call them the Atlas Mountain range, it snows. We were going there in the spring. It didn't snow, but as we

were driving through in our little tour bus, they'd be like, yep, and you know, this is where they go and they ski during the winter. And I was shocked. I was perplexed. I was like, wait, this is Africa. It snows in Africa. So just another point of, you know, me learning something completely new. We kept going through the desert. We were able to get a camel ride into the desert overnight and then right drive that camel back out to head to our next destination.

So, we did that and I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that our Berber local guide who took us through the desert to our campsite on the camels could speak multiple languages. He could speak seven languages. I actually got to practice my Spanish with him. He kind of chatted back and forth, which was really cool. I didn't know French at the time, but he was speaking in French a bit as they do in Morocco as well. It was a moment where I was like, man, the world is so connected and you just have to be open to connecting with people. You just have to be open to learning a new language. You just have to be open to things not necessarily being like what you expect them to be, and jiving with it and you can connect with anyone. And so I loved feeling that with that Berber guide that we had.

And then as we continued through the country onto Marrakesh, which was our last place again, I was just blown away by the hospitality. I loved it. The Majorelle Gardens is one of the most beautiful places made me realize I need a garden in my life. I need to maybe garden in my life also amazingly inspiring place. You've seen the pictures. I'm sure. The other thing I'll say is we had the most amazing Hamam experience. It was the first time that I've gotten bare naked in front of friends, but it was for the experience. We got scrubbed down completely head to toe by these strangers, had an amazing massage, had an amazing jacuzzi experience. I was like, this is a level of luxury that I think Muslim culture understands and other cultures as well understand, but that I just feel like I need in my life. After having experienced that.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, another place on the continent that I want to ask you about is South Africa. I have spent probably about five to six months in South Africa. Most of it is in Cape town. I have also been to Johannesburg, which absolutely won my heart. It is totally amazing, but I want to ask you for some of your experiences in South Africa and what some of the highlights were of your experience there.

**Akua Sencherey:** South Africa is one of the most beautiful countries I've ever been to. The coastline is immaculate, right? Talking about Cape Town, the wine regions, rolling, beautiful expanse, the nature in terms of the different safaris you can do as well. I just enjoyed a really slow, chill life, just really getting to

know the city a bit more of Cape Town. I experienced some interesting racist things, not towards me, but towards other Africans, which was a little unsettling for me. But that is the reality of South Africa at the moment. They're still trying to grapple with how racism is still very pertinent in their culture. And it was hard for me to experience, but I, luckily, also got to chat more with the people from the Kayelitsha township through, I think this was actually through [Remote Year](#) that we did that. But also on my own, I did a tour with a group that just kind of took me through and explained to me more about why it is the way it is and how people are still bused in and out of townships and how the inequality of the living situation persists today.

And also, how they've just made life, you're in a circumstance and you just have to make do with what you have. And so, they've made kind of their own sense of coffee shops and their own community building places and their own places to enjoy like Rands Cape Town, which is a Sunday vibe. Think Sunday, fun day in any major city. I'm thinking back to Houston because that's where I most recently lived, but just a complete vibe, DJ, music, food, right? You're eating pop and shakalaka. You're just enjoying it. I remember watching a guy dance. His moves were very unique. I had never seen moves like that before. And I wonder now trying to remember back if Amapiano was like, kind of brewing at that time.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. It's always been like this huge sort of Afro-house music coming out of South Africa. It was always very different for me because I've started going to Cape Town and maybe 2015 was the first time I spent a month or so in Cape Town. And the music there was quite different from what you would hear in West Africa or for that matter in East Africa in Kenya and Uganda, I'm like, "Oh, this is like really different". And it was always like Afro house and stuff, and then, Amapiano just exploded and took over the continent, took over the world. I mean, Amapiano music, and if anybody listening is not yet familiar with Amapiano music, we will link up some stuff in the show notes. And you should definitely get on that because it is extraordinary.

And so now, when you go to someplace like the Rands party, which also for me if I am in Cape Town on a Sunday, I will be at the Rands Party in Khayelitsha Township.

**Akua Sencherey:** You're going to Rands Cape Town!

**Matt Bowles:** It will be happening. It is just an incredible vibe. It's an incredible party, and I think you're right in terms of how important it is to be aware of and pay attention to a lot of the different dynamics that are going on in South Africa

as a whole right now. So, there is on the one hand, there's obviously the legacy of white supremacy and apartheid and the neocolonial dynamics and the wealth disparity, all of that kind of stuff, which is very clearly visible and it's very clearly present. And then you have these xenophobia dynamics where there are some folks from the black South African community, who are xenophobic against African immigrants from other countries on the continent to the point of vigilante violence starting to form and starting to happen, and this kind of stuff.

So, there's a lot of very complex struggles there. And I think if you talk to your Uber drivers, for example, who are disproportionately going to be African immigrants from other countries. And just open that conversation and just say, "Hey, where are you from? Oh yeah. How long you been here? How's the experience for you? What, you know", and you let them know that you are interested in listening and supportive of what they have to say. You can really get quite an understanding of a lot of the different dynamics and complexities of what is going on in South Africa right now. And I think that's a really important thing. Especially as travelers, as we travel, there is a lot of that.

And there's a lot of also, I mean, you will get some folks who have certain views about the townships and you're trying to go to Khayelitsha to go to the Rands Party: "Are you sure you want to go to the township? Like, do you really understand where you're asking me to drive you?" There are some drivers that they have certain views about the township, and then there's certain people maybe in the township who have certain views about immigrants and obviously this isn't like the majority or anything, as with any type of place. But you do have these different dynamics that are sort of evolving and emerging and I think it's really important to listen to people's lived experiences and to try to understand, you know, some of these complexities as travelers just to get a better understanding of society and to understand the different dynamics of marginalization that are going on and what different people's experiences are like in different places at different times.

**Akua Sencherey:** Yeah, and I think it opens up, hopefully for people who are interested in history, how did we get here? How did we get here today? And peeling back the curtain of not just the last 50 years of South Africa's history, but peeling back the curtain of before and understanding the context of a lot of African countries and how they were developed and the fact that lines were not evenly drawn around different Kinship groups around different clans, tribes, you were cut down the middle and now you're in one country and the other side's in the other country and you're wondering, I'm confused. Why are we speaking this language here? And literally next door, there's always been conflict between people groups. And when that plays out today, it starts to bring

up, okay, how did we get here? And why are these conflicts and these flares still happening? Why are we prejudiced towards certain African countries or African groups today? And again, still, I think it's interesting. I've heard only some rumblings. I haven't studied the topic specifically, but the idea of a lot of violence happening towards Nigerians in South Africa, a lot of violence happening towards people from Zimbabwe as well.

Yeah, it's so disheartening when you want to really see a place in all of its light and glory when you travel. You just have to realize that you are going to see, and if you're open to it, you're going to see the reality. And I would encourage just as I think you're encouraging people is to engage and try to understand and not just live above it or live around it. Just actually try to understand what's going on from different people's perspectives.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. I think that's really important. And what you'll find there also is a response to that from other Black South Africans who are basically, you know, saying, "Wait a minute, you're telling me that because of these other Black African people happen to have been born on the other side of a border that was created by the colonists in the first place, that therefore they ought to be discriminated against South Africa, like what is even happening?" So, if you actually pay attention to the discourses and you pay attention to what's actually going on and what's happening and stuff, you will really learn a lot. And I think you're right. I mean, reading about history is so important in all of these places that we go and understanding what you're stepping into.

Especially, I tell people this all the time as an American, understanding the history of United States foreign policy. In a lot of these places and understanding how our government, meaning speaking as an American, my government has shaped certain things that I am stepping into is so important, whether we're talking about South and Central America and overthrowing democracies and installing dictatorships and training death squads and all this kind of stuff.

**Akua Sencherey:** It's a playbook.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah, we're talking about all kinds of stuff on the continent of Africa. If we're talking about Southeast Asia and what the United States did there.

**Akua Sencherey:** Middle East, everywhere.

**Matt Bowles:** Middle East, all these places. And sort of that for me also is a particularly important thing for me to understand. Okay, this is the history of what my government did here. And this is what I am now stepping into that historical context is very important, I think, to understand for travelers.

**Akua Sencherey:** Yeah. You know that moment when I don't know if everyone has this moment, I had this moment where you realize that your parents are actually real people and their lives are not just about you. It's kind of like a revelation, a mind-opening of like, Oh yeah, your life is not just about making sure I'm alive. Although you make it about it, but like, it's not really, you're a human and you have your own wants and needs and your own desires and your own, like, volitions.

That was another mind-opening experience. Similar was that moment I realized glasses off the eyes, that yeah, the U. S. has had a lot of interaction in places where questionable, if it was needed or necessary, or helpful. And when I started to, I think I was in Europe, maybe Austria at the time, and was traveling more through Eastern Europe at the time, when I really started to learn more about our involvement in different things. Then I was like, "Wait, are we as great as we keep saying we are?". There's just this moment where I go, wow, like I really now have to reckon with being an American in these spaces where America is not loved. I used to have this perspective that like, if I'm traveling around the world and I'm American, like I am very proud of this, but there are some places where I actually have to not say that I'm American or say that I'm from Ghana because it's a light subject for that place. And I try to be respectful of their perspective of America and just realize the reality of the legacy that we've left. If you really look into the history,

**Matt Bowles:** You know, it's been amazing to me though, also as a traveler in that regard is and been so heartwarming is people around the world, their consistent ability to differentiate people from their government. That has been unbelievable. I've been to places where the United States has been and is currently committing some of the most egregious human rights abuses' I've been to Palestine twice. The United States has historically been and is now currently involved in a genocide against the Palestinian people. And I have been there and the Palestinian people, I've been there twice, to the West Bank twice, in the Gaza Strip twice. And their ability to differentiate me as a human being who happens to have been born in the United States from United States government foreign policy has just been remarkable.

And I could give that example at, in tons of countries all over the world. I remember I was going to Laos in Southeast Asia. Laos in Southeast Asia is the

most bombed country in the world per capita because of what the United States did to it during the U. S. war against Vietnam. It was just absolutely catastrophic havoc that they wrought on that country and the effects are still absolutely apparent and clear today in terms of what's happening in that country right now.

And what is a result of what the United States did to that country. And I read about that in advance and I was aware of that. And as I was going into the country, I was like, wow, the people are first of all, letting me into their country. And second of all, welcoming me with open arms and not holding a historical grudge against me as a human being. Or talk about an extreme example. I've been to Hiroshima in Japan. I've been to the Peace Museum there, which is amazing. And I encourage every single American to travel to Hiroshima in Japan and go to the Peace Museum and understand what the United States did there when they dropped a nuclear bomb on that city.

And still, even there, people welcome me with open arms and they don't have this association where just because this human being was born in this country. That they're able to distinguish that from the government policy, either historical or contemporary government policy. And I have found that so consistently around the world, and that for me has just been so heartwarming about the human beings that inhabit this planet.

**Akua Sencherey:** Yeah, there is empathy there and an understanding that, “hey, if you're here, you must be different. You might be different. Let me try”. And so, they'll ask questions to see where you're at, it's true. It always pains me to see us kind of vilifying a place because I also find that in most places that I've traveled around, all places, honestly, there have always been people that have welcomed me, even in my dark skin, even as a woman, maybe covered up, maybe not, they've welcomed me to their home.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. And I think especially if you let folks know that you are down and that you are interested in listening and learning from them. If you just let them know that in some way, then they are usually very happy to talk. They're very happy to share their story, their perspective, their experience. And if you can just listen and learn from them, that's what I do.

I mean, I just traveled around the world and I just try to listen and I try to learn from them and especially. Groups in every country in the world, there's all kinds of intersectional power dynamics and all sorts of groups that are marginalized or being discriminated against or targeting or in more vulnerable positions. And to try to understand how that works in this place and how that works in that place.

And then listening to those narratives and actually being proactive to seek out and understand how all of that stuff works. I think that's really what it's all about. And when people understand that “Wow. This person is actually interested in my story and my experience”. They are very happy to talk about it.

**Akua Sencherey:** I agree.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. We're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. You will find links to everything we've discussed in this episode in [the show notes](#) You can go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com). Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. And there you will find direct links to everything we have discussed.

And be sure to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Akua Sencherey. Good night, everybody.