

**Matt Bowles:** My guest today is Dr. Nabila Ismail. She is a pharmacist, Marketing professional, travel influencer, and the author of [The Brown Girls Guide to Solo Traveling the World](#). She has been featured in Forbes, Travel and Leisure, BBC, and Business Insider, and has nearly 250,000 followers on social media. She is also the founder of the [Dose of Travel](#) club, a safe, inclusive, diverse community that hosts trips, and events around the world and has nearly 5,000 members. Originally from New York state, she has now been to over 65 countries. Nabila, welcome to the show.

**Nabila Ismail:** Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

**Matt Bowles:** I am super excited to have you here. I think we know like 50-something people in common, all sorts of wonderful humans that we both have in our ecosystem. And so, I'm really excited that we were able to put this interview together but let's just start off by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording 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. And where are you today?

**Nabila Ismail:** I'm at home visiting my parents in Houston, Texas, where it is very warm, which is a good thing coming from New York.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, let's just start off with your background. And before we even talk about your story and where you grew up, can you share a little bit about your parents' story? Where did they grow up exactly in Pakistan, what their life was like, and what their experience was like immigrating to the United States?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, my dad's from Hyderabad and my mom is from Karachi, Pakistan. So, they're both cities in Pakistan and my dad moved to the U.S. when he was 13. And then my mom moved to the U S when she got married, which was at 18. So, they've been in the U.S. for quite a while now. So, they've spent more time in the U.S., mainly New York, than they have in their mother country.

So, we were all born in the U.S. and we frequented quite a bit, but their life was obviously very different. I think they spent most of their childhood in another country and left when they were quite young. So, my dad probably had a very unique experience moving to, at like middle school age, which is really interesting to completely change countries, languages and culture and lifestyle.

And then I can't even imagine what it was like for my mother to A) get married at 18, B) move to a completely foreign land without anyone else from her family so she's the only one in the U.S.

**Matt Bowles:** So, can you talk then a little bit about where you were born? Where did you grow up? And share a little bit about your experience navigating that Pakistani American identity dynamic coming from an immigrant home?

**Nabila Ismail:** Totally. So, we grew up in upstate New York, near Albany, the capital of New York. And, I spent my whole entire life there. It was, I would say, not as diverse as it is maybe now, but growing up there, especially me being the eldest daughter, I think I had like a very interesting time growing up because my dad spoke English quite well.

My mother was adjusting the same way that I was growing up and adjusting. It was a really unique experience, but for the most part, I think I identified more with my American culture or personality, more so than my Pakistani just because I was going to school in the U.S. and I was probably the only Pakistani person in all of my classes, literally from kindergarten to like twelfth grade. So, I think I only started to embrace it a little bit more later on or actually appreciate it. Whereas when I was growing up, I think I was trying to separate myself from it because nobody else looked like me. Nobody else understood it. And so, it didn't come so easily to balance the two, it was kind of isolating one for the other.

**Matt Bowles:** And can you talk also a little bit about your Muslim identity and growing up Muslim, particularly in such a homogenous area in the post 911 era of the United States and how that was for you?

**Nabila Ismail:** I don't know, maybe this will surprise people, maybe not, but I obviously definitely got bullied for it. And when the 911 attacks happened and I was in the third grade and I remember people saying like, "Oh, it was probably your dad", like little kids at that age. I definitely remember being kind of a target and being embarrassed of my heritage, but also my religion at that time, I think, because I didn't know any better. And I was young, obviously you want to fit in with the kids and you're getting bullied for like something. So, you're going to run the other way and not embrace it. And so, I found it to be restrictive and negative. Like, that's how I perceived it until I started traveling, honestly, and saw how the rest of the world tolerates and accepts Muslims and Islam.

And then also more so recently, I feel like I've been really inspired about faith and spirituality and seeing the positive parts to it. But when you're like a young kid, I feel like you just want to fit in and do whatever everyone else is doing, whether it is even anything that identifies with you and you actually even enjoy it. But you just want to fit in and like, be as normal and as relatable as possible, and anything that deviates from that you're like, "No". When the same thing goes for like if you were I feel like they use this analogy a lot. But if you were a drama kid in high school I feel like you're prone to being like made fun of even though there's obviously nothing wrong with that and we should celebrate the arts and all that but similar feeling it was like you were an outsider

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I definitely want to talk about your travel journey and the impact that that has had on you. And I think I want to start all the way back. Can you share a little bit about your experience going back to Pakistan as a kid? And how that impacted you as you grew up?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, you know, I probably went to Pakistan maybe like nine or ten times before I turned 18. And I probably don't remember like the first few times, but I do remember the long travel times that we would go to like the flights were insane. And when we were young, sitting on a plane was fun for like the first five hours because you've got to watch unlimited movies and eat a bunch of food. That was the best. But then after like the five-hour mark, you get antsy and you want to run up and down the aisles and you're like, "No, I don't want to be here anymore". I'm like, "I don't want to go to Pakistan. I want to go back to school". So, I feel like it was an interesting experience to travel for that long as a kid. But going there, I think I had a hard time because of how different it was. I remember getting sick all the time and so complaining to my parents.

And because Pakistan is so far and we don't go as often, I would be out of school for like 30, 40 days, which was cool in a way. But again, made me an outsider in the same way that I was talking about. They're like, where'd you go for like 30 days? And it helped me become adaptable and experience new cultures at a young age. But it was a new culture to me, even though it is my own, because I was born in the U.S.. But I feel like it was more so like an escape and like not something I really identified with because everyone treated us differently there as well, because we were Pakistani Americans who lived in America, and nobody from my family had been to the U.S. at that point. So, I felt like an alien there, too.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I know you also got to do some exchange student stuff in Europe when you were a teenager, which obviously would be a very different

experience than going to Pakistan. Can you share a little bit about that experience and what impact that had?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, that was really fun. I remember when I was in ninth grade, I had a French student come live with me for two weeks. And so that was having like a built-in best year pen pal for two weeks. We had the opportunity to go live with them in France outside of Paris for two weeks as well. It was about 25 students from the school that went, and we got to go to school with them.

We got to live with the family, have like, food like they would have. It was a really neat experience. And I'm so lucky that my parents allowed me to do that. I think that also was just taking me outside of my comfort zone. And I realized that one of the skills that I have is adaptability. I'm so curious and I love going abroad and like seeing how people live their life, what they watched on TV, what they eat.

And just honestly, my favorite part is meeting people. hearing about their life, their stories, how things are done differently, or how things are experienced or enjoyed. It made me more comfortable to do it again, obviously. And that's why I've done it so many times more, but I think it's also made me able to like to relate to a lot of different people, even though we may or may not have anything in common, but we can always find something to talk about and share a moment together, which I just really love.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I know that another thing you and I have in common is Buffalo, New York, because I went to middle school in New York and high school in Buffalo. And then I would come home for the summers from college back to Buffalo. So that city has a major place in my life and my journey. And I know you as well went to Buffalo for college. And I'm curious in general how Buffalo was, but I'm also curious in the context of what you were saying about like how homogenous Albany was.

Because when I lived in Buffalo, I actually had a whole bunch of Desi friends and there's quite a community there. So, I'm curious in that transition, how it was for you just in general, going away from home to college, which is an amazing experience, but also if you were, you know, more deeply immersed in Desi culture and what impact that had on you during your college years.

**Nabila Ismail:** I think it's wild that you also have a connection to Buffalo, New York, because I feel like it is such a random place. But I did spend seven years there, and I did move out of my house to go for the seven years. So, I was not

obviously surprised that I traveled at this point a little bit, and I did find it to be way more diverse.

The University at Buffalo is very diverse, like, we have a huge international population, which I think at the time it might have outweighed attendees from like the U.S. I think there are more international students than people like Americans, which was crazy. It was quite diverse because people were coming from all over the state and around.

But also, I think Buffalo also has a very cool community. I remember just exploring a lot of different cuisines there and having a lot of different friends while I was at school. So, I actually liked Buffalo, but maybe at the time I didn't as much, I think looking back now I'm like, okay, it wasn't that bad.

But I won't lie, the first couple of years, the winters were really bad, and I was still dreaming of going to school in New York City. So, I mean, Buffalo's no New York City, but it was still cool.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, let's talk a little bit about your career trajectory and what you were doing in college and grad school and all of that. And I'm curious how that ultimately led you to end up in Zimbabwe.

**Nabila Ismail:** So, I went to UB mainly because they had a really great pharmacy program and still do. I think my career was definitely influenced by my Desi parents. I feel like if you're they or listening, this might filter, relate that you have to be like a doctor or engineer.

That was kind of the way that my parents had put us growing up that we had to go down one of those paths. So alas, I ended up in pharmacy because I don't do well with blood. So that's why I went to UB and during my time there, I started traveling. So, in my first year of school, I went and became an Au Pair.

I spent my summer abroad in Madrid, Spain, and that really opened up travel as a vehicle and lifestyle really then. And I just kept doing it then I found more opportunities to travel abroad without having a lot of money because obviously full-time students and college in the US is not cheap. So, I would find gigs jobs volunteer opportunities and when I reached pharmacy school at that point your last year of pharmacy school is mainly clinical, where you still pay a lot of tuition. But you have to go work for free to get your hours to qualify for graduation. I thought to myself, if I have to work for free, I'm going to find the coolest places to do that, that will still get me my hours and I'll get to learn and become a better pharmacist. And so, one of my professors was Zimbabwean and

we were able to put together a rotation on global health, HIV, AIDS, and infectious diseases.

So that's kind of how I weaved in Zimbabwe and got a scholarship to go do the six weeks there. And it was really, really incredible. Not only did I get exposure to experiences that I wouldn't have had, but I think it made me more of like a culturally aware and competent provider. So yeah, that's how Zimbabwe happened.

**Matt Bowles:** So, I have not yet been to Zimbabwe, although I have spent probably about two and a half years on the continent. And Zimbabwe is really high on my list. I know a number of people from Zimbabwe and people that have spent time there. And so, it's super high on my list for people that have never been though, like me. Can you share a little bit about what it was like there and maybe make any recommendations for people that are interested in traveling there to experience it?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah. I mean, it has been, oh my God, six years already, but it's been a while, but I remember I was the only student from the U.S. there at the time and I had an apartment with a bunch of other med students. So, it was really cool to live on campus. For me, that experience was really interesting to navigate because at the time, and I actually have not kept up with the economical political situation of Zimbabwe, but at the time they were going through a hard time and the currency situation was all over the place.

It kind of reminds me of now COVID, when COVID first got announced and everyone was going to the grocery store, everything was empty. It was that kind of situation where the currency was all over the place. And so, I had to navigate that for the first time by myself there. But I had such an amazing experience because I still say this.

To this day, I think Zimbabweans are the kindest, most hospitable people there are. I had such a wonderful experience because of the locals I met, whether it was the faculty at the school or the healthcare providers I was working with at the hospital where I was volunteering at. But also, just from like day to day, there was a security guard on campus that would guard the house and what not.

I feel like having that experience with locals really just helped me experience what the country was going through. It was like a devastating time. I definitely recommend if you go to Zimbabwe, you have to go to Victoria Falls. Like that's a given. The capital Harare is also very fun. There's a lot of culture and good

food there. So, I think most people go for Victoria Falls and I would agree it's a special place.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I love also that the connection originally came from Buffalo. I find that when I'm traveling around the world, as you mentioned, there's not a ton of people that are from Buffalo, but then when you find these Buffalo connections, they're really amazing.

I was about, let's see, December 2023, I was in Accra in Ghana and one of the many things that I was doing there is I was attending a black tie gala in the week leading up to New Year's. And this was a gala that I had planned to attend for at least, I don't know, six or eight months in advance. And it was this really interesting initiative because it was a Ghanaian NFT Project.

And so, you had to buy an NFT, a Ghanaian artist did these NFTs, and you buy one and it gets you admission to this black-tie gala in Accra in December. And I was like, done, I'm going, I get two NFTs, right? Because I'm not going solo, I'm definitely going to bring a plus one.

And then later that year, a number of my other friends were like, "Yo! What are you up to in December?". I was like, "Oh, I'm going to this black-tie gala". And they were like, "can we come too"? I was like, "of course, you can just buy this NFT. It's your ticket, you come". So, a whole crew of us ended up going to this gala and I got there, and I knew who the main person was that was running this event because I had bought the NFT and I'm in the community and all that kind of stuff.

And I went up to him and I started talking to him. He was born and raised in Accra and all this kind of stuff. You know, local Ghanaian guy. I said, how did this come about? Like, tell me the backstory and he goes: "So, I went over to the United States to go to college at the University of Buffalo". And I'm like, "What?". And he's like, "Yeah".

And then his best friend from the University of Buffalo, who was like this white dude that went to Sweet Home High School, which we played basketball, was there. And he's like, yeah, "This is my best friend from UB". And we have been best friends ever since. And then we started this trying to educate people about cryptocurrency and investing. We did this NFT project. And now here we are at this event. And so, I'm there with like this whole crew from UB, in Accra, Ghana. And we're like talking about the Buffalo Bills and like all of this kind of stuff. And I'm in West Africa. I'm like, what's even happening in my life right now? So, it's really lovely how a lot of those different random pieces of our

lives kind of tend to overlap. And when you find ones that are a little bit more obscure, like Buffalo, New York, all of a sudden it can make for an even deeper connection I find.

**Nabila Ismail:** No, totally. Actually, you telling that story reminds me. It literally, when I was in Zimbabwe at Victoria Falls, I was there alone and I saw a group of guys, one guy was wearing a UB shirt.

And I was just, I think like staring probably. And then I was like, oh, let me, like they noticed. And I was like, “Oh, do you mind taking a photo for me? Cause alone”. And then I started trying to, I was like, “Wait, do you guys go to UB?”. They're like, “Yeah, we did. We're doing Peace Corps”. I told them, “I'm a current UB student”. And we ended up hanging out the rest of the day and I was like, how does this happen? But I love it when that happens because it's like an instant connection right away.

**Matt Bowles:** Totally. Absolutely. Well, I want to also talk a little bit Nabila about your path and your career pivots and transitions along the way. So, can you share a little bit about that trajectory, becoming a pharmacist and then what happened? After that,

**Nabila Ismail:** It's all kind of unfolded in an unexpected way, but I did graduate with my PharmD in 2019 right before COVID. And I moved from New York to L.A. because I knew I was going to be a pharmacist and you can't really practice abroad. So, I was like, I'm going to shift all the way to the other side of the country because that's the only adventure I could really have.

And so, I packed up my stuff and I drove my car out to L.A., and I was like, I'm going to be a in L.A. I was a pharmacist for 10 months, the traditional pharmacist at CBS during COVID, which was a really interesting time to be a new practitioner. And then I really knew that I was going to find another way to utilize my degree that would be maybe more creative, but also provide bigger impact from the top rather than on an individual level.

Although I loved patient care, I ended up working at a health tech company doing content marketing, which I truly think was my dream job. And I still really. Think about that job and think, wow, like straight out of a manifestation. I was there for two years at a startup that provides healthcare access by giving discount cards for people who don't have insurance or might get a better price through a discount card.



And that was really when I started to lean into my creativity, see remote work as a possibility because I was working online, and just fell in love with marketing and felt like I now have the credentials as a marketer. And then I would, say, yeah, 2022 came around and I was getting antsy and really excited that the world was opening up.

And I promised myself that I would travel the world because I went to school for seven years and then we had COVID and I was working a really demanding job. So then on my 28th birthday, I quit my job and I took a year off to travel. And that was when I really explored new options for income but flexing my skills and just trying different things.

So, I became a freelance writer. I wrote for Forbes, which I still don't know how this happened to this day because I still make a lot of spelling mistakes and writing sometimes feels really hard for me. But and that's when my social media following started to grow. And then one thing after another, I started a travel club, which yeah, here we are.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk a little bit about the transition that you made and how you navigated the social, cultural and family pressure, as well as just the regular societal pressure and fear of transitions that most of us would have making that leap? Can you share a little bit about just sort of the mindset and the self-talk and you know, what went into that transition for anybody that might be at those crossroads or thinking about it now?

**Nabila Ismail:** I think the hardest transition was obviously the one where I chose to leave my full-time job because that's like a safety net and in a time where everyone keeps talking about the economy falling apart. That one was really scary, but I think because it was technically my second pivot I never thought that I could utilize my PharmD degree which is very clinical and very niche I would say or what we thought was very niche and you couldn't do much outside of the traditional role.

Once I made the first transition, it's kind of just like opened up the doors to allow me to think differently. I'm like, wow, okay. Like I was really great at that job. I really enjoyed it, and I never would have thought I could have done it. And so, it gave me confidence to leave the job after, because I thought I could find other ways to make money and I would succeed, but it was really hard.

I didn't tell my parents until after I did it because I would probably be convinced not to quit and once I told them their immediate response was like get the job back like resend your resignation. I was like, "Oh my god, those two weeks at

that job were so painful” because every day I was like did I make a mistake and then my friends and colleagues would be like, “How do you feel?”.

And I'm like, “Oh my god, I feel like when I tell them I made a mistake, like I'm stressed out”. But the moment I left on my trip to Bali, I just felt like everything aligned into place. I was like, this is where I'm supposed to be. It's okay. I can always get another job. I am highly educated. I prepared for this.

I know I took a risk, but I think I'm still pretty risk averse. I had some money coming in from my freelance work, which allowed me to justify what I was doing. And I think that was also my leverage to telling my parents was like, “Hey, I'm doing this on the side. I have potential. I have saved up. I have a plan.”.

If I can't do a whole year of travel with what I've saved, then like I come back, which you can do that. I just told myself what's the worst that could happen. And that's what brought me here. Now that's been almost two years since that decision.

**Matt Bowles:** And so, two years after the decision, how does your family feel about it now?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, I feel like they would still prefer me to have a more stable career. That they also understand a little bit the whole idea of being an entrepreneur and running like a travel company and the social media part really doesn't click with them. But also they see it as unstable, which I agree, but I think they're happy that I found something that works for me and that I enjoy and they know that I have the degree.

So, if I want to, I can use it. And I still find ways to leverage it because I studied pharmacy for so long and I am still really passionate about healthcare, and I find ways to weave it into what I'm doing now. I don't like When it seems or when people say I left healthcare for travel, I just feel like I'm doing both. And I think you see the travel more, but healthcare is always involved. Yeah. They think I travel too much. So that's that, they just miss me I think.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk about some of the ways that you have integrated public health into your travels and share some examples?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah. So, I think one way was just utilizing what I was doing at the company I worked at GoodRX before. So, I started freelancing writing in the healthcare space and you can write from anywhere. So, I started writing

about anxiety, mental health, different medications for different publications. So, I wrote for Forbes for a little bit, then I wrote for GoodRX. I wrote for a Pharmacy Times, and different publications there.

And then, I'm also just curious about healthcare systems abroad because like I mentioned I did go to Zimbabwe and that's what kind of led me the curiosity to know like how healthcare in a different country is. How do people navigate that? What is insurance like? What are the costs like? So, whenever I travel, I pop into a pharmacy usually and chat with the pharmacist just to see how things are there. What is the education system like? Do you go to school for seven years to get your degree like I did? All of that.

But it's also sometimes just purely led by my experiences and who I run into. For example, when I quit my job and went to Indonesia, Bali specifically, I got really sick and caught hemorrhagic dengue fever and was hospitalized for two weeks. Which was when I started to think maybe this was not a good idea to quitting my job because maybe this was a sign that I shouldn't have done that because the first month into my year-long journey and I'm hospitalized for two weeks out of the first month.

That was scary and I was like, "oh shoot, this is gonna cost me a lot. This is putting a damper on my mood." But I talked about it, I posted a TikTok, and lo and behold, social media is wild. It went viral, and it landed me an opportunity with a NGO that focuses on mosquito borne illnesses, and I became an ambassador for them.

So, a year later, I went back to Bali on a mission to eradicate mosquito borne illnesses and working with this really cool NGO based out of Australia. So, I could have never predicted that, but that got me really interested in tropical disease and global health a little bit more. So that's one example that I think is really cool.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask you about your entrepreneurial journey. At this point, you have built a six-figure fully remote career. And I'm wondering, reflecting back on the way that you did that, if you can share some of your biggest lessons and keys to success in doing that, that you might impart on entrepreneurs that maybe are at the earlier stage of their journey.

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, I think the biggest thing is social media makes it seem so romanticized and so easy and it can happen overnight. And it's not like that, or at least was not like that for me. And I feel like I fell into that trap too, but I had

been on social media for like years. I have been creating content for like seven, eight, even more than that, years.

And so, I've been posting, I've been learning, I have been editing, I have been taking photos for that long. And this isn't something I did overnight. And I think that's the hardest part. But also, I probably work more than I used to before, but I love it. So, I think that's one thing, but it's not for the week.

And I still struggle with this. I actually just talked about it today. The entrepreneur life truly chose me, but when I choose that for myself, I have no idea because it's not as easy as it looks like on social media. And that's just one thing I want to put out there, but it is also so rewarding to build something that you enjoy, and you like, and to see an idea of yours come to life.

So just know that, that it's not like the easier option. And I think right now there's a trend of leaving your nine to five to become an entrepreneur. Cause that is the life, but it's okay if you don't want to do that. It doesn't have to be for everyone. So, I think that's the words I want to share about entrepreneurship and building your own thing.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I do want to ask you for some specific tips on building a social media following. You now have something like a quarter million followers on your social media platforms. And I'm wondering, thinking back about how you did that, if you can share any key pillars or leverage points that were really impactful in helping you to do that.

**Nabila Ismail:** I think the biggest thing is consistency. Like I go back to, I don't know when my first post probably was, but I think it was like 2012 and I had kept at it until now, obviously. So that's like 12 years, which is actually insane, but I didn't go viral. I didn't hit a hundred thousand followers until literally last year in 2023.

And so, the power of consistency and just trying to be 1 percent better is so important because you really don't know when that'll happen, when it'll click, when people will start to see you. But when it does it is so beautiful and knowing that you like kept at it for so long so consistency but also being authentic.

I never imagined that I would be talking about my identity as much as I do on social media especially since I shared with you that it really wasn't a huge part of me at a younger age. I did not appreciate my Pakistani culture or heritage, but because I traveled, I found parts of me that I probably didn't appreciate or

embrace, and I started talking about maybe the more vulnerable things, and it still goes beyond my mind to know that I'm talking about these things to strangers.

But I think that's what made me different and what set me apart was I was talking about more vulnerable topics instead of maybe what everyone else is talking about. I'm always kind of told that like my content is a little bit different than other travel creators because it has more of a personal touch to me.

And that's why I have a very niche audience, but it works for me. So, I would say be true to yourself and stick within a niche but don't limit yourself. I started with travel and that's what created my path. But then I started to unfold parts of me, like my identity into that. And now I'm just like branching out. Yeah. Consistency and authenticity.

**Matt Bowles:** I would agree. I think that is a very unique part of your content because I obviously follow a lot of people in the travel space and different things. And there's a huge segment of the travel influencer space where it's just people that are posting very manicured, images of themselves in front of beautiful scenery. And the superficiality of a lot of that is pretty apparent. And so, I think the, like you said, the vulnerability and the depth and the authenticity, and then the specific cultural issues that you're speaking to, because I look at your comments and other people are like, "Yes, me too!". You know? Oh my gosh.

And they're commenting and they're engaging with you in a real way. And its sort of inspiring your audience to be vulnerable about their stuff and to be able to connect with you. And I think that's also how you've built such a vibrant and committed community that really relates to you and connects with you and has allowed all of that.

So, I think that's an amazing tip in terms of the baseline for building any type of community is to have those really authentic connections with other people. So they can see how authentic you are and connect with you on that level. So, I think you've done an amazing job with that.

**Nabila Ismail:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**Matt Bowles:** I also want to talk to you about some of your travel experiences. One of my favorite regions, and I think the place I want to start is East Africa. The first time I went to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania was in 2018. I was just recently back in Kenya for another month and Tanzania for another month, and

I just love that region. I'm curious if you can share a little bit about your experience in East Africa, what that was like for you.

**Nabila Ismail:** Actually, Uganda was the first place I went to in East Africa or Africa in general. So even before Zimbabwe, I had gone for research purposes on a grant that I had won, and I just fell in love with that region again because of the hospitality people. But the difference in culture, I think it was very vibrant and just the people made that experience really wonderful.

But then last year I spent a month in Kenya, and I had the best time ever. I got an apartment in Nairobi and spent the weekdays there, like a digital nomad, trying to really integrate into the life, but the music scene, the culture, the Indian population is so big there. And I love seeing how it is integrated into the Kenyan way of life.

They eat the same food we do, but it's Kenyan food to them, I love that there is that there. And then on the coast, the Arab influence is amazing. And Kenya is so diverse. I think most people go there for safari, but the Kenyan coast, I feel like a lot of people are sleeping on it.

**Matt Bowles:** A hundred percent. Yeah. The Desi community in Kenya is massive and it was really interesting to me, like what you're saying about the integration into the overall culture in Nairobi, I went to a Bollywood Tribute show, a stage performance. And the idea was what they were doing is they were going sort of Bollywood through the years.

And so, in the back of the stage, they would project an image and it would be like an iconic image of like a really famous Bollywood star from one of the iconic Bollywood films of a particular era. And then they would go chronologically sort of up to the newer era. And with each era, they would do, uh, a Bollywood dance to a Bollywood number from that particular movie.

And so, all the way up to like Shah Rukh Khan and like all of these more recent folks. And so, it was absolutely incredible. But one of the things that I wasn't expecting, I was expecting like all of the dancers, to be Desi. And as it turned out, probably at least half of the dancers were Black Kenyan folks.

I mean, they were just crushing the Bollywood moves, it was amazing. And so, the extent to which that portion of the culture has been integrated in Kenya, like you're saying, it's absolutely amazing.

**Nabila Ismail:** It is. It was really fun. Yeah. I was surprised by that, but I love that region. I'm always craving to go back, to be honest.

**Matt Bowles:** And it's really interesting too, because Desi food is like my favorite in the whole world. And so, when I'm in a place that has incredible Desi food, I seek that out. And the former British colonies in East Africa are one, although Uganda is a little bit different cause that has the whole crazy historical thing where Idi Amin kicked out all of the South Asians. And so, you have a little bit of a different dynamic in Uganda, as you know, than you do in Kenya. But I found similar to Kenya when I went to West Africa to the former British colonies, like Ghana and Nigeria, I have had some of the best Desi food that I've ever had in Accra and cities like that. I mean, it is just amazing.

And so, I love these different sorts of layers and cultural nuances and after you spend time in one place and then you go to another place and then you see the immigrant experience in this place and how it's integrated with the culture. And it's one of my most favorite things to do when traveling.

**Nabila Ismail:** I love that. I can't wait to go to Nigeria and Ghana. They're both on my list.

**Matt Bowles:** For sure. Well, I also want to ask you a little bit about your experience going back to Pakistan as an adult. And you sort of have mentioned a couple points in this conversation about the evolution of your Pakistani American identity. And I'm curious, as you've reconnected with Pakistan as an independent adult, can you share a little bit about what that experience has been like and how that has impacted you?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah. So, my recent trip was, it's not so recent anymore, I guess it's been a whole year already, but that trip was my first trip as an adult. So, first time in 10 years, first time my grandparents or anyone from my mom's side of the family. But it was also the first time that I willingly wanted to go to Pakistan and chose to go without my parents.

I've never gone without my parents, and they've been like the sole reason why I have to go there, like dragging me along. But I figured along the way I had traveled to so many countries by that point and I was appreciating so many other people's cultures, which is great. But I started to feel envious of their culture and I was like, wait, I have a vibrant, beautiful culture that I just neglected.

And it led me to wanting to go to Pakistan on my own terms. And so. I spent the first three months, I would say, with my mom's family. So going back, obviously, because it had been 10 years. And I spent that with them; spending some time during Ramadan, just getting to know my cousins who weren't there when I went the last time.

So, meeting them for the first time, talking to my aunt. And it was also the first time I really had conversations with them because when I went when I was younger, I really didn't have anything in common to talk to them about. But also, my Urdu was something that I wasn't willing to utilize because it was so bad and I was embarrassed and I'd rather speak English because I was a brat like that.

And so, they would always just speak to my parents and then my parents would translate and speak to us. So when I went I had to use my Urdu that I hadn't really utilized in a very long time and try to get to know my grandparents and my aunts and uncles. And so that was a really fun experience because everything kind of felt new because I went back with like a new perspective.

And then I got to explore other parts of the country, which gave me a different experience because no one else in my family has really explored Pakistan the way that I have, including my parents were born and raised there. So, I saw the North which is just stunning and beautiful. I got to interact with people.

I got to travel the country solo which allowed me to kind of leave any preconceived thoughts or notions that I had about the country to experience for the first time. So, I really went in with like, "Okay, I'm just going to see it for the first time". I don't want to hear that it might be dangerous. I don't want to hear this, that it might be this or that.

So, I just had the most amazing time that I'm just craving to go back and it was really inspired me to want to explore more Muslim countries, spend more time in them, practice my Urdu a little bit more, learn more about the country itself, and even ask my parents about how their life was growing up. So, I feel like I've totally changed my perspective and it's also allowed me to kind of talk about it a little bit more and inspire other people to appreciate it too, which is really fulfilling and something I never thought was possible to experience or have the joy to talk about.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. So, I also want to ask you about your recommendations for folks who want to visit Pakistan. Myself, first and foremost, I have not yet been to Pakistan. I was going to go in 2020. Like that was the year I had a trip. I



was going to go for a month. I was going to post up probably in Lahore and then travel around and see more stuff.

I've been to Punjab, but only on the Indian side. And so, I've been like literally to the border there, right? It is one of the absolute tippy-top highest places on my list that I most want to go. So, for me and others who are listening, who would like to visit Pakistan, what would you recommend and put people on to?

**Nabila Ismail:** Oh my God, that's a loaded question because there's so much to see. But I would say you have to absolutely go to the north. You'll get Baltistan, like Hunza, the mountains are stunning. You can't go and skip that. So just make sure you don't go in the winter because you'll have a really hard time accessing any of the mountains, like the roads will all be closed.

Cherry blossom season is really beautiful, that's where I went. So, if you're not going to go see the cherry blossoms in like Japan, maybe go to Pakistan, because that would be really nice. I would say don't skip the south of Pakistan. It might not be as quintessentially or Instagram ably beautiful, but the food is the best in Karachi, in my opinion.

So, you have to indulge in Pakistani food. And you already told me you like dizzy food. So, you'll have the best time ever. So, I would say Karachi for the best food Lahore, because Lahore has amazing architecture and the food's also different and really good there too. In the north, the food and culture are completely different, but the landscape there is truly breathtaking.

**Matt Bowles:** I am so excited. It's just moved up. It was already high on my list. It's just, you've just moved it up even higher, Nabila. So, I am super now motivated to actually plan and book that trip because it has been a long time coming and I'm super excited for it. I want to ask you now about your book, *The Brown Girl's Guide to Solo Traveling the World*. Can you share a little bit about why you wrote it? And what people can expect from the book?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, I mean, one of the biggest reasons I wrote the book was because that is the question that I get. It was like, how did you start traveling solo, alone, as a Desi girl? Like, people would chime in saying, I'm Desi, but I don't have the courage to travel solo, or I don't think my parents would let me.

And I kept getting questions like, how did you do it monetarily? Like financially, how did you save for it? How did you find the opportunities? How did you fit it in as a college student? How did you find jobs abroad? So, I really just wanted a full guide of everything I've learned in the last 11 years of solo

traveling because I can post it on social media, but on Instagram, things get lost and you can't just like pin and save things so easily. So, for someone who wanted a comprehensive guide that you can refer back to, that's what I wanted. Like a hand guide to anything related to solo traveling, from how to finance it, to safety tips, and how to find opportunities abroad.

I wrote it for the community because that's what they wanted, so I really wanted to give them something that could help them do the same thing if that's what they desired.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask you about the Dose of Travel Club that you founded. Can you share a little bit about the origin story of that, why you founded it, and then who it serves and what it offers?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah. Again, this is all social media. I feel like my community, and on my biggest thing for social media and why I love it and utilize it is because of the community. And that's another thing that if you're trying to create like a platform, I think the days where you post content and don't engage with your community is like over.

I think nurturing your audience and really understanding them and being there for them is where we're headed now. And creating like a very unique space for them. But I engage with everyone who comments on my post and the comments I got a lot of times were like, "Oh my God, you're the first like Pakistani person I've seen on my 'for you' page that's like traveling". Or "I haven't seen a lot of brown people who travel", or "I want to travel too". And so, I hopped on a TikTok trend a while back and I just asked where the other people of color, brown girls, were traveling because still the way that I travel as a solo traveler, like half the time backpacking, I've maybe met a handful of them doing the same thing.

That TikTok went viral, and people are like, "Oh, I'm here. I'm here. I'm going to travel, but I don't have anyone to go with". That was where I first got the idea that I would create a trip for people who follow me because for whatever reason, maybe I look like them or maybe they feel inspired or share the same story.

And I planned a trip to Bali and that is how that happened. It sold out rather quickly. And I had 20 strangers wanting to come to Bali with me. And then I did it again, and then I did it again, and it's kind of just took off by itself and other people saw the value and need in it. And so that's what I've been leaning into.

**Matt Bowles:** So which trips have already happened in addition to the Bali trip?

**Nabila Ismail:** So, I've gone to Bali, we did Cape Town, South Africa, we did Madeira, Portugal, two trips to Greece, we did an Iraq trip last year, which was really cool. And I have a Costa Rica trip happening next month. And then an Iceland trip. So yeah, we've been to a couple of different places.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk about the Iraq trip and how that was, where you went and then what it was like?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah. So, I had gone to Iraq myself in 2022 and shared my experience, which is what I think piqued some people's interest to come when I launched the trip. We went everywhere. It was like a 10-day trip. So, we started in Baghdad and then we went to Babylon, we went to Karbala, we went to the marshes of Iraq, then we went north to Mosul, and we ended in Erbil. We got to see Federal Iraq, but then we also got to see Iraqi Kurdistan, which was really beautiful and experience. A little bit of everything, we got to taste the food, we got to meet a lot of locals, which is something that was really important to me.

I feel like we had such an amazing time, or I know we had such an amazing time. Everyone loved that trip. And I think going to a place that has been regarded as like dangerous or unsafe, especially growing up, I think a lot of people were really excited to see it for what it is for themselves rather than what the media has to say.

And I think going to the religious site of Karbala was also a very eye-opening experience for a lot of people to learn about the different sectors of Islam. Yeah, we had such a well-rounded experience there that I'm excited to host another one of those trips.

**Matt Bowles:** And then can you talk a little bit about upcoming trips and if people want to get more information, possibly join a trip, who is it for and how can they learn more information about it?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah, the community was built for South Asians in mind, but it's open to everyone, men and women. Sometimes we do women only trips. It's like a travel club. There's also a free Facebook group. So, if you are looking to travel with people or you want advice, you can join the free Facebook group. So, if you don't want to travel with us, we don't take offense to that.

But if you don't want to plan your own trip and you want to go somewhere and you're looking for cool people, you can come with us. We have a trip coming to

Costa Rica that's sold out, sorry, that's next month. But then we have a women's only trip to Peru. We've got Iceland coming up, that's almost also sold out.

We have another Bali trip that we've launched for October and I'm working on some more a little bit behind, but if you check out our Instagram, do us a travel club. You can see all of the trips we've got going on there. You can join our free Facebook group. You can get on my email list, or you can just head to the website. If you're ready to book, everything is up there. But yeah, we welcome everyone, and we've had people coming from all over Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Dubai. So, it's not just limited to Americans, although I am based in the U. S.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, one of the things that I have appreciated most about your content, which really was the reason that we initially ended up connecting, in fact, is the extent to which you have chosen to use your platform to advocate against the genocide that's currently happening in Palestine. Can you share a little bit about why that was so important to you to use your platform to advocate on that issue?

**Nabila Ismail:** Honestly speaking, to me, it's really a no brainer. It is something I am so important to me that if you have a platform, it's important to utilize it, to represent people who might not have a platform.

But I think if we're talking about it, even just as a travel perspective, it plays such a huge part in my life. The reason why I travel and enjoy traveling is because of the cultural exchanges and learning about people and realizing that we're not as different as we might be up again. And knowing that I spent so much time in the Middle East and seeing how the impact of what has happened by Western influences and culture.

I haven't been to Palestine myself, but I know a lot about it, especially growing up, especially as a Muslim woman. And it is something that I have been educated on for a long time. And since I felt like I knew what was going on and got a good grasp on it, to me, I just had to speak up on it for my friends, for people I know, for the children, for the women. So, it's honestly, it's just a no brainer.

**Matt Bowles:** And what has the feedback and impact been like for you since you've started speaking up about it so regularly?

**Nabila Ismail:** Both good and bad. I thank my community because they identify as people of color and maybe have known me for a while. I tend to

always use my platform to speak up about things that I care about whether they directly relate.

I've never really been shy to talk about those things, but I think for the most part, my community is on board, and they support and engage with it. And they also use their platform to do the same. But I think on one end, I think I've had a harder time as a creator. Landing brand deals or working with brands.

I have lost out on income and I feel like I have been told that for a lot of reasons. And obviously the impact of using your voice for something that is so like not even blindly being like shunned down, like all of the platforms are shadow banning. I've been shadow-banned so many times I've been reported, I've been blocked. I've like literally lost access to my account. I've lost monetization ability in the beginning, and my content is being hidden quite a bit. So, I don't really care about the negative at all, but I'm really happy to know that my community is also on the same page. But it is crazy how not everyone feels the same way, even six, seven months into this.

There are still so many people who come on saying that it's not a genocide, that they support the Zionist, and that is absolutely insane to me. But if the media, like traditional media, isn't doing it, I think the creators and people, storytellers on social media are really caring and the journalists in Palestine are caring and for them. I feel like I have to share their work and their story.

**Matt Bowles:** I think that's one of the most unique things about this particular genocide, and that it is the first genocide in the world that has been live streamed in real-time by the people that are being exterminated. And there's being pushed out to the entire world on social media and independent content creators can amplify those voices and can share those voices. And I think that is one of the reasons that we're seeing what we're seeing now globally, in terms of the extent of the Palestinian solidarity on streets in every country and city across the world. I mean, it's really an amazing thing.

It's really, really incredibly important to continue to do it. And the other thing is that it allows people like you and I, to find each other, right? I'm looking for who else besides me is also regularly committed to this and posting about this and dedicated to this and doing things about this. And then I am reaching out to them and making those connections on those shared values and those shared priorities. And it's been a really important way for people to find each other as well. I think.

**Nabila Ismail:** 100% I think that has been. Yeah, the power in community. I think other people are also, if there's someone supporting it, I think we're all hyping each other up and supporting it. And if something negative happens to someone who is pro-Palestine, I think we all try our best to amplify them. So, I think there is like that beautiful power and community that's come out of this.

**Matt Bowles:** So, for people that are listening right now, and they are concerned about the issue, and they might feel that they don't really know what to do about it. Maybe they aren't really sure how they can take action to try to support a permanent ceasefire and a free Palestine and all of those things. Do you have any calls to action or tips or suggestions on what people can do?

**Nabila Ismail:** I think it's really important for people to form their own opinions. And the best way to do that is by looking at the journalists and people from on the ground. I think there's a lot of biased media out there and it's really easy to get confused and get stressed out on knowing what's true and what's not.

But going to the source and finding and supporting and listening to the people of Palestine and what they're asking of us is super important. But some so many different resources and platforms and organizations have really jumped in on the cause to advise on different protests, boycott movements, and following those and being able to contact your representatives.

People like that who are really able to make change. But I think Jewish Voice for Peace is one of them. There are so many different grassroots companies and organizations that you should follow, but the easiest way is by boycotting. I think that has been an easy way for people to support going to protests and calling your representatives for a ceasefire.

**Matt Bowles:** I agree. I think that's really important. And particularly people that live in countries that are supplying weapons for the genocide, those people, which would be first and foremost American citizens, because they're supplying the majority of the weapons. But also, citizens of other countries like Germany or the UK or others. We have a completely disproportionate amount of influence and also, responsibility to try to pressure our elected representatives to change that policy. There can be a lot of people all over the world that have moral objections to what's going on, but the level of influence that we have in the countries that are actually backing, arming and funding the genocide is completely disproportionate and therefore we have more influence and therefore responsibility than other people around the world to make sure that we are exerting every kind of political pressure we can on our elected representatives.

So, I want to make an especially powerful plea. For people that live in the United States or other countries that are backing this genocide that we really need to stand up now and raise our voices in all of the different ways that we possibly can.

**Nabila Ismail:** 100%.

**Matt Bowles:** Nabila, I also want to ask you a couple reflective questions before we wrap this up and move into the lightning round. When you think back about all of the travel that you have done over the years, what impact do you think all of that has had on you as a person?

**Nabila Ismail:** I still think I'm still reflecting from all of the different travel experiences I've had, but I think it's made me, I think, just a global citizen. I know that sounds cheesy, but I feel like all of the different influences and experiences I've had, I've really made an impact in one way or another personally, and professionally.

I think it's given me a lot more confidence and the ability to dream bigger, but it's also given me a lot of empathy and emotional intelligence and a desire to learn more about the world and things that maybe I shied away from. Like politics, more social impact work, by seeing those places and having an experience there. I feel touched and called to the community, and so it gives me more of an interest and curiosity to learn about how I can make an impact.

But I think it's just made me more of like an excited, curious, confident person to navigate the world. And it's just made me really hungry for life and to explore more and learn more, be more, and do more, which I don't think I had that motivation or ambition before.

**Matt Bowles:** Nabila, what tips do you have for BIPOC women, maybe Desi women, maybe even Muslim women in particular, who are at the earlier stage of their travel journey and listening to this and interested in considering traveling the world solo? What advice do you have?

**Nabila Ismail:** I would say be just prepared enough to go, but don't think too much about it. I think there's a lot more fear outside and people telling you to be afraid because it's something that they haven't done. And I feel like if you listen to the fear, it'll hold you back. But if you don't have fear yourself, don't allow someone else's fear to cloud your journey, which I wish I had learned a lot earlier because I realized that it wasn't my fear that was holding me back. It was other people's fear.

**Matt Bowles:** Nabila, after all of this travel that you have done, that we've been discussing, why are you still so passionate about continuing to travel? What does travel mean to you today?

**Nabila Ismail:** Honestly, to me, it's kind of become a lifestyle now. I can't imagine a life without travel. It has been something that I do so easily, but I don't even think about it anymore. I'm the type of girl that just books a one-way flight and doesn't even have a hotel to stay at. I just don't panic about that.

But I panic about other weird things, like if it was public speaking or doing this podcast right now. But for me, going to a foreign country that I have no idea anything about and I have no idea where I'm going to sleep, is not a problem. That's just how I roll. So, to me, it has now become just a way of life.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Well, I think that's a great place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Nabila, are you ready to move into the lightning round?

**Nabila Ismail:** Uh oh. Yeah, I guess. Let's do it.

**Matt Bowles:** Let's do it.

All right. What is one book, maybe that has significantly impacted you over the years, you would most recommend that people should read?

**Nabila Ismail:** I loved reading *The Four Agreements*. I feel like it really helped me with my spiritual journey.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Who is one person currently alive today, that you've never met, that you'd most love to have dinner with, just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation?

**Nabila Ismail:** I'm going to have to say Steven Bartlett because I've been obsessed with him as an entrepreneur and reading his book and learning from him. Yeah, he's been kind of the one person I've been diving into a lot.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Nabila?

**Nabila Ismail:** Tell 18-year-old Nabila to trust the process. It's all going to be okay.



**Matt Bowles:** All right. Of all the places that you have now traveled to, what are three of your favorite destinations, you'd most recommend other people should definitely check out?

**Nabila Ismail:** Okay, easy. Lebanon, South Africa, and Pakistan.

**Matt Bowles:** Love that. And then what are your Top Three Bucket List Destinations, places you have not yet been but are currently the highest on your list you'd most love to see?

**Nabila Ismail:** Japan, Norway, and Iran.

**Matt Bowles:** Amazing. Nabila, I want you to let folks know at this point how they can find you. How can they follow you on social media? How they can buy your book, learn more about the Dose of Travel club, and your upcoming trips? How do you want people to come into your world?

**Nabila Ismail:** Yeah. Come say, “Hey”, on Instagram [@doseoftravel](https://www.instagram.com/doseoftravel). And then you can also, if you want to join a trip with us, Dose of Travel Club on Instagram, or if you just want access to everything, the website is probably the easiest. So, it's [www.doseoftravel.co](http://www.doseoftravel.co), and that's also where you'll find my book.

**Matt Bowles:** All right.

We're going to link all of that up in the show notes. So, you can just go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com). Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode, there you're going to find direct links to everything we have discussed on this episode and all of the ways to find and follow Nabila. Nabila, this was amazing. Thank you so much for coming to the show.

**Nabila Ismail:** Thank you for having me. I had a lot of fun.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Good night, everybody.