

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Dr. Kaisu Koskela. She is an Anthropologist, location-independent academic researcher, and full-time digital nomad. She received her PhD from the University of Helsinki in 2021, and her current research interests focus on digital nomads and the emergence of digital nomad visas. Born and raised in northern Finland near the Arctic Circle, she has lived a more or less nomadic lifestyle for almost 30 years and has been a digital nomad for the past 10 years and has now been to more than 80 countries.

Kaisu, welcome to the show.

Kaisu Koskela: Thank you, Matt. Glad to be here. You make me sound very impressive, actually.

Matt Bowles: You are impressive. I am so excited that we get to have this conversation today. Let's just start off, though, by setting the scene and talking about where we are recording from today. We are not in person. I am actually in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, today. And where are you?

Kaisu Koskela: I am in the nomad capital of Lisbon. I came here for an academic conference last week and decided to stay and hang around and meet a lot of friends who are here for the summer. So, I'm here just for this week, and then I'm heading up to northern Europe for the rest of the summer.

Matt Bowles: Well, we have a lot of friends in common in the nomad world and in Lisbon in particular. You're actually using the microphone tonight of Becky Gillespie, whom Maverick Show listeners know because she's, of course, been on the podcast twice, and so I love those types of connections.

Kaisu Koskela: So, this mic might have been on your show already, to be honest, maybe not the first time.

Matt Bowles: Exactly.

Kaisu Koskela: Yes. And of course, our lovely Rosanna Lopes, who hooked us up for this interview, and recommended me to you, and I've just met her last night for a few drinks at the park.

Matt Bowles: Exactly. Shout out to Rosanna Lopez as well. Such an amazing community there in Lisboa. All right, Kaisu, I want to start this off, I think, to contextualize a little bit and talk about your personal background. Can you share a little bit about your experience growing up in Finland, near the Arctic Circle, for people that have never been to Finland or that region, what was that like for you?

Kaisu Koskela: Well, it's a lovely place to grow up. Safe, beautiful, a lot of nature, a lot of space, which is not the same in a lot of places nowadays anymore. It's an existence, though, that it's a bit of a bubble in its own right. For example, while I grew up there, up in the Arctic Circle, when I left at 18, I moved to London to become a hairdresser.

And on my first day at work, I met a girl from Jamaica who started the same day, I'm going to be a hairdresser. And I never touched afro hair because I had never in my life actually physically met anyone who wasn't white. This is the type of place I grew up in.

Matt Bowles: So, growing up in such a culturally insular environment, how did your interest in ethnic studies and other cultures and eventually world travel, how did that come about when you think back?

Kaisu Koskela: I had always wanted to travel. We traveled with my family, like, not in the global sense, but we had a lot of holidays out of Finland, and it just, for me was obvious that as soon as I would be old enough, I would not live there anymore. And it's just not something I've really thought about ever since

then. It was just obvious that this is how it was going to be. And I wasn't interested in anywhere particular, as interested in anywhere.

And if you come from a place like I did, everywhere is pretty far away. So, I only have to go to Stockholm, and that would be like a different world already. So, I was just interested in seeing the whole world, which is pretty much the same path I'm still on. I still haven't seen all of it, so there's still plenty to go, and I haven't lost that interest in seeing new places.

Matt Bowles: For people that have never been, for example, I've never been to Finland. If I wanted to visit Finland, or for that matter, to experience that region in and around the Arctic Circle, can you share some tips on how best to experience Finland and the Arctic Circle area?

Kaisu Koskela: So, Finland is still a very non-touristic place compared to pretty much anywhere and especially anywhere in Europe. So, I would encourage a lot of people to go there for that reason already that you are not going to be moored over by tourism, you know, the huge groups of people. It's a lot of nature. It's a nature lover's paradise.

We have 188,000 lakes. Wrap your head around 188,000 lakes in this country and not a lot of people. So, there's a lot of space for people to roam. And the further north you go, the less people there are. We have a lot of mosquitoes, which we call the Finnish Air Force, but not that many people. Midnight sun in the summer. That's quite something unique. I know in us North American context, you can get it in, like, tips of Alaska, but let's say that my hometown is about halfway up Finland, and that is about level with north parts of Alaska.

So, there's still another. I could drive another 9 hours and still be in Finland up north, and a lot of empty space, reindeer, beautiful scenery, and fresh nature. You can actually drink straight from the streams up there. That's how clean it is still.

Matt Bowles: Wow. Well, I also want to ask you about how your interest in motorcycle riding began. I want to ask about this all-female international motorcycle club that you are a part of and if you can share what your upcoming holiday road trip is going to be leaving from Finland?

Kaisu Koskela: Yes, I'm going to spend my whole summer holiday on the motorcycle. So, I belong to an international female motorcycle club we call the Women's International Motorcycle Association. We have about 45 member countries now, and every year one of the countries organizes a meetup. And this year is Romania's turn.

So, me and some of my motor sisters from Finland are going to drive down. I think there are about 20 people from our club leaving this year, and I drive a beautiful dark green Triumph Bonneville for those in the know, 900 cc handcrafted brown leather seats. And it matches my eyes. So, all the important things I accounted for, and we're going to cross over to Baltics and then drive through there and get to Romania at some point and drive around there for a week and then head back.

But, yeah, I've been driving for about nine years now. I always liked motorcycles, and I had an inkling that since I travel, I would probably like motorcycle travel. And that's mainly what it is about to me. I don't need to daily commute with the motorcycle, but I love the long trips on the open road when you don't know where you're going to end up on that day and the weather might be against you and whatnot, but hopefully with a group of other cool people and get to explore parts of the countries that you would never see

otherwise. We're going to cross from the eastern part of Poland, for example, which I've done before, too. You never know what kind of road you end up on there, for example. So, I like the adventure part of it.

Matt Bowles: Well, you have had a lot of amazing adventures and travel experiences, and I would love to go through a little bit of your travel journey. Can you start just all the way back again in that sort of cultural insular environment in Finland? Where did your international travels begin when you finally left Finland? Where did that international travel journey start?

Kaisu Koskela: So, I left at 18, and this was 1996, before the Internet and before Google Maps and before everything like that. And I was finishing high school, but I hadn't actually finished yet. And I decided to go on a one-week package holiday to Greece to the Greek island of Rhodos, where all the Finns go with a friend. And we just didn't take the flight back.

That was pretty much as simple as it was. We ended up working in the bar scene and the restaurants and stuff for the summer. And when the summer was ending, I was like, well, I'm not going to Finland. What am I going to do there? I hadn't applied to study anywhere or had no job lined up or anything. So, I went to London and then ended up becoming a hairdresser there. That was the beginning of the very nomadic life that I've been leading.

Matt Bowles: I want to ask you a little bit about your reflections now since you've been a digital nomad for many years, and then you've been, shall we call it an analog nomad for many, many years before that, because it strikes me that there would be a lot of differences between those two lifestyles, but yet you're still traveling around and spending extended periods in different parts of the world.

And I'm wondering, when you think back now to the analog nomad period of your life, I would suspect that living that way would be perhaps more culturally immersive in terms of a way to reside in and experience and be a part of a local culture when you're actually working locally. But I'm wondering about what your experiences actually were during that period of your life compared to the digital nomad thing.

Kaisu Koskela: No, I think you're right, because if you're doing manual work, so to speak, or if you are just working out before the whole digitalization allowed us to start working just on computers and from anywhere, you would definitely, of course, you are part of a local work colleagues environment, and it was different in that sense.

But it also depends because let's say I started in the Greek islands working on the Bar Racine like there was. Okay, I did have Greek colleagues as well, but to be honest, it was quite international scene. So, you can still be in those bubbles, and you are serving international clientele all the time. So, I would be speaking a lot of Finnish and Swedish, to be honest, to my clients, because that's who they were.

So, it doesn't necessarily guarantee it. But yes, absolutely. If you are part of any kind of business that is locally rooted in that society and in that place, yeah, it's going to be a different experience. I think maybe the bigger difference was, though, that we didn't have Internet and connections to home, for example. It was very different to be on the road when you couldn't do video calls, you didn't have WhatsApp, you didn't have any of this, and you also didn't have any of the groups that we now have for our social activities.

So, we can log into Facebook or Discord or Slack or whatever and find that channel where we find other people to hang out with. There was none of that. There were also no booking platforms. There wasn't even Google Maps yet. So, I miss those days. I really do, because I'm more of an adventure traveler. And that

forced you to talk to people and ask advice and meet people in very different ways. That, of course, you can still do that, but users don't because you become lazy, and you'd rather log in and meet people in an easier way. So, I do miss those times.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. I was just reflecting with one of my other podcast guests because my study abroad college year was 1997, 98, and I did in Dublin, Ireland, at Trinity College. And then my roommate and I took the month of the winter break and did the Euro rail through Europe. And this exact same period that you're talking about where, you know, you just get off the train in a country where you don't speak the language and you don't have a phone or Google Maps or Google translate, and you just have to figure out how to communicate with people and use a map and sort of figure out where you're going and what you want to do, like all that kind of stuff.

And it was a super different environment. But I've reflected with a number of podcast guests about how, number one, empowering that is in terms of just your independent ability to sort of navigate the world and figure things out and communicate with people that you don't speak their language. We don't have all of these conveniences that we do now. And that was just such a, I think, rich period to have a different level of immersive experience than we have now.

Kaisu Koskela: Yeah. Coming from where I was coming from, I didn't speak by no means perfect English, for example, or anything like that. And I was quite shy. And we've been withdrawn. I was, let's say I was more Finnish at the time still.

So, I had definitely a fast-learning curve to how to fend for myself, and how to be out there in a big world where I don't know anyone. And it was just really good, I think made me what I am, of course, but also it taught me so much more in such a short time than it would have otherwise if I could have relied on all these people back home and the Internet and everything that we have now?

Matt Bowles: Well, you eventually started traveling outside the continent of Europe, and I want to ask you about some of those experiences. I know that you taught English in Nepal for a while. Can you share a little bit about what that experience was like, where you were and how that was for you?

Kaisu Koskela: After I had done five years of hairdressing career in London, I did decide to go to university, which was never the plan for me, but I realized that the Finnish government, they pay you basically to go to university. So, if you can get accepted to a university, you not only get a free ride, but you also get 80% of your rent paid, and you get a lump sum of money in your account every month.

And you can do this anywhere in the world if you can get accepted to uni. So, I started looking for universities in Europe where I could study in English and where it would be nice and sunny and warm. And I found the University of Malta and started studying there. But then during my summer breaks, I would always. I really just wanted to keep traveling more. So, one of my first summer jobs was to teach English in Nepal. I went with the local NGO. I had two days of Nepali language lessons, and then I was sent to a village by the Indian border in the south and started teaching at a local village school.

But to be honest, I barely had even any kids some days because it was a season to be working out on the fields. So, every time there was good enough weather, the kids from at least six-year-olds would be out on the field. So, I would turn up for school in the morning and, like, there'd be no one there and just have a nap and hope for the summer to turn up. But we had fun, and it was nice to give the kids something else than

working in the fields because that was truly, at that time of the year, their life, and from a very young age, too.

So, I wasn't necessarily hugely good at the job, but it was a very interesting summer to be in a very rural part of Nepal at the time when they were still having a civil war, basically. And some of the groups who were in power would come to the village and then they would hear that, oh, there's a foreigner here. And in fact, my village was paying protection money for me anyway to keep me safe. But they would come and apologize if anything had happened anywhere.

So, if there had been a shooting in another village or anything, like things were happening at the time, they would physically come and, like, see me and apologize because they didn't want to drive away tourism, right? There were cases where this didn't happen for me, but people were going up to the Annapurna circuits and, like, doing climbs and everything still at the time, too. And apparently, if they were robbed of their possessions and usually their cameras and stuff were robbed, then if they came across another group, they wanted to do this again, they would give them a note to say, I have already been robbed, so you can give it to the next people.

And also, they would give them kind of a receipt to say that this has happened so they can claim it from the insurance. So, they were very worried about foreigners not coming into the country, but nothing bad ever happened to me. The people were lovely. The village was lovely. It was a very calm summer.

Matt Bowles: What impact do you think that that experience had on you? That's obviously a very different experience than some of the European ones that you. How did that impact you at the time and perhaps influence your future trajectory and travels?

Kaisu Koskela: I always wanted to travel because I just wanted to see different cultures. So I wasn't, like, shocked in any way. I just knew it was going to be very different anyway. So, I guess it opened up, first of all, I saw the fact that people can live with war, which happens every day nowadays, too.

Life still goes on and people find ways to maneuver around it, because that was something foreign for me, coming from a very peaceful country like Finland, is that wars happen, and then you think, oh, everything just shuts down and stops, and it's not true at all. People, unfortunately, continuously have to still keep living in conflict zones and find ways around it. That was one thing.

And, of course, it was quite bare existence. We didn't have showers or anything like that where I lived. And I think it just opened up my eyes to people having very different lives, like people coming from very different kind of places and valuing maybe different things, too.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask about some of your experiences in Africa. One of my favorite countries is Tanzania. I've been there a couple times. I've spent probably two months in Tanzania in different parts of the country. I actually summoned Mount Kilimanjaro a couple of years ago. But I've hung out in Dar es Salaam and Arusha and Zanzibar and different places around the country. But I wanted to ask about your experience and what you were doing there, particularly in some of the tribes that you were connecting with there.

Kaisu Koskela: So that was another summer during my studies, I also took a job in Tanzania with the local NGO which was basically working on a UN project to try and chart the medicinal use of plants by different tribes. And we stayed and studied and lived with three different tribes during the summer. The Maasai, the

Chaga, and then the Hadzabe, which is one of the last remaining hunter-gatherer tribes, actually left in Africa.

Of course, we would stay, stay in tents at the village most of the time, depending on how welcoming the village in question was to us. But we were a small group. We were only four students. And then we had a couple of anthropologists with us who were heading the expedition. But it was the most interesting summer school I've ever definitely had. And I would say, if you go to Africa as a traveler, you will never get to see any of this.

It's one of the continents that still, to this day, if you go there and you just paint your way through, you will get to see a very different kind of Africa. You get to go on Safaris, of course, and maybe you visit a village of some kind, but these experiences that I had there, for example, are definitely.

I knew at the time already, this was unique, because we were invited by them, and we were doing something good. So, the point was that there were American pharmaceutical companies coming into the region, and they were just walking into these tribes, getting all their knowledge and not giving them any kind of acknowledgment for it or not a penny of money, of course.

So, we were trying to record all that they were doing with different plants from the region and for what illnesses, to give them intellectual property rights, basically, for them. They knew we were there for a good cause.

So, we got very close to the local life, and we got to stay with them. And I went hunting with the Hadzabe with poison arrows that could kill an elephant within a day. And I went digging for little roots with the women from the tribes to try and get something when we couldn't catch any food. And I got to go, for example, to a very holy site with the Maasai warriors, where they sacrificed goats.

And I was offered the kidney and the beating heart of the goats raised from the chest while the blood was pouring into the carcass. Because they didn't consider me like, women aren't allowed at this sacrificial site, but because I'm not circumcised and I didn't wear a certain amount of jewelry, I wasn't considered a real woman by them.

So, I got to go to great places. And, yeah, we sacrificed the goats, and they cracked it open from the chest and handed out this heart to me, which I knew at the time, this is a very privileged moment. I tried to take a little bit of it, but once my, like, teeth just bounced off it, and it was hot and kind of. It wasn't bumping anymore. I know it wasn't, but in my mind, it was, and I just couldn't. Like, my teeth wouldn't even go through it because it was so gummy. I was like, okay, I can't eat this.

And then I thought, oh, my God, they're going to be upset with me. But they just laughed. So, one of the Masai warriors was actually married to one of the British anthropologists. And he told me later, because we got back to the tents and I had some chocolate hidden away, and I just ate all the chocolate because I hadn't eaten anything at the site. I was really hungry, and I had chocolate all over my face. And he was laughing because he says the exact opposite way, because when we go to the sacrifice site and we get blood, we think it's so delicious, so we have it all over our faces, right?

But when he has to go to the UK and go to a birthday party, for example, and he gets off a chocolate cake, he thinks is disgusting. So, he says all he thinks about is just think of blood, think of blood, think of blood

when he eats his chocolate cake. And I was the actual opposite, of course, so I should have thought of chocolate, apparently, when that warm, beautiful heart was offered to me.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to ask you a little bit about how you eventually parlayed all of the experiences and your academic studies into a location-independent career and became a digital nomad. What was the path for carving that out? It's obviously not particularly typical for academics.

Kaisu Koskela: So, I studied digital nomadic while I was writing my PhD, and that was pretty easy because I was getting grants or bursaries where basically it appears in your account, and no one asks you where you are. So, I thought, but rather than take the money that is meant for, let's say you get a grant for one year, in this case, it was from Finland, so it was counted so I could live in Finland comfortably for a year.

But I was like, if I take this money and I go to Nicaragua, surely, I can live actually three years with this money. So, with this logic, I hit the road. And I was just writing from the road because I already had my data and stuff. Academia is funny because I meet so many academics who would love to be location-independent, and they're still nothing. Is because universities, of course, they're physical places, right?

Like, someone has to be there. It's not just an idea. Okay, there are online universities, but most universities are physical places and people have to be there. But apart from that, academia is like the easiest job to do on the road. Literally. I barely need the Internet. I am like, this is ideal nomadic. I open a Word document on my laptop, and I write some words. I don't need any fancy equipment. I don't need a specific place or anything. It's mainly about writing and thinking once you get your data together. So, I think it's ideal for that.

My current employment, I am now employed by a Dutch university, and this wasn't originally a location-independent job per se, but I was employed to study digital nomads. So of course, obviously I should be where nomads are, which in my case is everywhere in the world. So, I designed a genius research plan that allows me to be in a lot of countries while I'm on the clock.

It's been a bit of a sell. In the case of Dutch universities, for example, people are allowed to work from home almost as much as they want, to be honest, and people do a lot, but that just means within the country, the problems come when you leave the country and then the legalities of it and stuff, because you are almost like a government employee. They have to make sure that I work in places where I have a proper ergonomic chair and I don't work overtime, and I have good insurance in place and everything like that.

You can't be a freelancer, so that's kind of where the problems start. But we've managed to find a way, and I think in my case, my employer has been very open to this, but they do want me to do everything by the book, and that has been actually very, very difficult, I must say.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to talk a little bit about your academic research. Can you just start off for a background on what initially drew you to the discipline of anthropology in particular, and ethnic studies and all of that?

Kaisu Koskela: So, Anthropology at the time, as I said, I just finished hairdressing in London, I was like, let's do something else. And I wasn't exactly serious about academia. I just wanted to get this money that the Finnish government was handing out. And I thought, all right, I'll go to Malta. What can I study? Anthropology. I knew it was mostly about cultures and people and whatnot. And I thought, oh, that's kind of interesting. It really wasn't anything deeper than that.

Somewhere along the line in Finland, we have a saying that I lost control of the moped, so to speak, and ended up with a PhD. But that was not the plan at the time. But after having finished, in fact, I studied anthropology and international relations. I have a double bachelor's, so I ended up combining those. One of the obvious things is migration. And migration of people is fascinating because this is something that's happened throughout world history and is increasingly happening and is increasingly in the headlines.

But then also us as nomads and people who like to travel, we are migrating between places all the time. So, it was fascinating from the personal perspective of having been a migrant and being a migrant at the time and also as a phenomenon, how it affects the societies that are the host societies, the societies where people live. From now on discussion on nomadism, and how it's affecting the locations that we go to, for example, there are so many interesting aspects to it. So that's how I ended up doing a master's degree in migration ethnic studies at Amsterdam University. And then, then even after that, continued to the PhD in a similar field studying migrants and migration.

Matt Bowles: So, within that broader study of migration, can you talk about why you find digital nomads particularly unique, interesting, and important to study? And what are some of the research questions about digital nomads that you have explored?

Kaisu Koskela: I would say I'm probably the first person whom a university directly wanted to hire to study digital nomadism. People are very surprised to hear, first of all, that there is academic research in the field, but there is actually a lot of it already. But I had never seen any institution advertised for a position in this, which is what position I'm holding now.

So, at my university, they were approaching it a little bit more from the legal point of view of people moving across borders, and they wanted to hire someone to study digital nomad visas and then they wanted to study adoption of them by nomads. In the interview already, I presented my research plan, and I said, we're going to study the reasons why digital nomads are actually not using these visas, right? Because that is actually the case.

They are not really in large numbers going out and using the visas. So, my personal interest before I used to study a lot of identities and people groupings, which is fascinating to me, how people are, how there's us and them and where the boundary goes and why is it like that? And I would have liked to study that, but then this came along, and they really wanted to look at these digital nomad visas.

And I'm getting more and more fascinated by this, although also from an auto ethnographic point of view of trying to be an employee of a European institution and at the same time be a full-time nomad and trying to do this 100% legally on paper, on books. It's a fascinating field because clearly, the world is not ready for full-time nomadism yet. There are a lot of legal abysses that you just fall into, and there isn't an actual obvious solution to doing it.

Matt Bowles: So, let's talk about digital nomad visas for people that maybe this is their first time hearing about the term. Can you explain what a digital nomad visa is, and why they have been proliferating lately? And let's start off with just what the lauded benefits are, both for digital nomads and for local communities. What is the proposition and the value you are supposed to be?

Kaisu Koskela: There's a huge, big scale on things that are called digital nomad visas. But let's say during COVID some countries, especially tourism-dependent countries, were like, oops, what do we do? We don't have anyone coming in. We hear about these people who are nomads, and now everyone's working

remotely, by the way, during this time, all of a sudden, so, let's try and attract these people to come to our countries.

So, Barbados, was the first one who came out. And Estonia in the same summer, summer of 2020 we're talking about. And then Croatia quite soon. Now we have basically about 50 of them, 50 countries at least, and new ones are coming out all the time. So, these are visas that are based on the idea, they are different lengths, anywhere from six months to five years in duration, they are visas that are based on the idea that you have a remote job already from another institution that is from outside the country or from an entity outside the country, and you're going to come and live in another country with this visa under this pretense.

The logic is different. So as I said, some of them are more likely looking in addition and new type of tourist in a way that could come for a maximum a year, let's say, not become a tax resident or anything, come and stay in the country for a little bit longer time, quite often in exchange for a big lump sum of money to get this visa in the first place. But then there are other ones that are a lot more like migration visas.

So, we're seeing more and more of these come out, let's say Spain and Portugal being some of the most popular visas so far out of these digital nomad visas. And they are both essential migration visas, where you end up getting a temporary residency first, and if you're in the country long enough, which is five years, you actually get permanent residency and eventually even citizenship, meaning a second passport. So, these have become very popular among remote workers of all types, not necessarily digital nomads.

The reason why I'm saying that digital nomads themselves don't really use them is because all of these, regardless of what they offer, they actually require quite a bit of paperwork. For example, your employer would have to write you a letter stating that you're allowed to work from that country for whatever amount of time and things that are quite difficult to get for a lot of people. And people don't need them because they most often can travel with tourist visas to those countries, too, anyway, but they're not really using them.

But there are other types of groups of people who have started to use this, and, like, they're very good. Now, currently being in Lisbon, I know a lot of people here who not really nomadic anymore, so much like they might travel and go and do every now and then, but they have taken on the digital nomad visa, and they have now moved to Portugal for either a better life or even thinking further ahead into the future to get the permanent residency and therefore being able to travel everywhere in European area in the future.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, it is kind of ironic. You and I have both discussed how we are long-term digital nomads who have been doing this for a decade and we've never used a digital nomad visa and don't really see an opportunity for when it would be relevant to us, because it strikes me that it actually doesn't cater to itinerant human beings. And so, I'm curious about your take on the semantic or the nomenclature of digital nomads and the use of that term when applied in this situation, catering to people that are maybe not going to be itinerant once they get that digital nomad visa.

Kaisu Koskela: Yeah, I feel like in the digital nomad community itself, this has really annoyed people that they call digital nomad visas because clearly, they're not suitable for people who want to change locations every month or two months and do not want to become tax residents and do not want to do this paperwork and can go around with tourism visas. However, I must remind here that in most countries, working even remotely on a tourist visa is not allowed. In fact, it's illegal.

But people kind of gloss over that because that is still the simplest solution we have, which is why these digital nomad visas, in the ideal world, they would be the solution to this problem, that we could then take the visa and then be completely legally in that country, but they do not work. And I think from the country's perspective, they never intended to be the real true digital nomads who are continuously on the move and are not planning to stop in that country to take on these visas.

In fact, they didn't even intend to attract those people because in all honesty, why would they? They have, let's say, places especially that are suffering from over-touristification. They have so many tourists coming in already, and any tourist on a daily basis is going to spend a lot more money than a nomad living in that country for months. We might bring in more money in the long term, but in the short term, if all your hotel beds are already filled up by tourists, why would you need to attract this kind of people?

They are attracting people who do stay longer term, though, and that, I think, is a good trend because there's a whole other, let's say there's like a spectrum of remote working mobilities. It's not just nomads. So, if on the other end, there's people who just take little workations every now and then from their normal life, they go somewhere, they go to Thailand, they work from a co-working space there for a month, and then they go back to their normal lives. And then on the other end spectrum, there are people who have jobs that they can do remotely. Maybe they have their own businesses too, and they can just run them from anywhere.

But they would like to relocate to the Mediterranean, for example. Now they have a visa in Spain that they can apply for based on that idea, and then they actually move there, at which point, to me, they become migrants, they have moved to a country, they become tax residents, they pay for Social Security, they get a permanent apartment, everything like that. So, these are the people, the digital nomad visas are mainly for people who want to relocate to another country.

I think this exception maybe could be said that a lot of the nomad visas from the Caribbean countries, for example, they are a lot shorter and normally are based on the fact that you pay \$2,000 or something, and then you get this visa in your hand and then you stay there for six months or something. So those are a little bit different, but certainly from the European perspective, and also all the new ones coming out in Asia, for example, they all a little bit longer term with more paperwork. And I think they're very good visas for certain types of people.

People are giving them a very hard time for these visas not being good for digital nomads, but they are good for some other people. And we need all sorts of visas. We still need a proper digital nomad visa too. But I don't know when that's going to come. But, like, in the meanwhile, I think this is a good development already because if you think of countries, they're a little bit behind in the idea that they haven't 100% realized yet that your work doesn't have to be in one geographical location, that you can divorce that and you can bring your skills and also your hard earned money and a lot of the time, become a tax resident and a very good tax resident for the country without having to get local employment.

And you also, at the same time, are not a threat to local employment, which is the reason why we have a lot of work visas in general. They are visas that are meant to safeguard the local labor population and the labor market. So, these people are now a threat to that. They can add something to it rather than take anything away from it. So, I feel like every single country should already have a residential visa that is based on remote work being the reason that you come in.

Matt Bowles: So, building on this terminology of 'digital nomad', do you find that in some situations that that terminology is increasingly being ascribed with racial coding or class-based or some type of privileged coding whereby, let's say, white immigrants to, let's just say, Lisbon, where you are right now, from the United States or Canada or Australia might move there.

Maybe they start with this digital nomad visa, they move onto this track and they're trying to get citizenship in the country over the course of seven years or so, and they're living there and they're residents there and they're doing all the long term residency required, that sometimes the term digital nomad is either applied to or maybe sometimes self-identified in terms of those people, in terms of going to a 'digital nomad event' or meetup or something like that, whereas maybe Black immigrants from Angola who are attempting to do the same thing and move there and become citizens and become long term residents and all of that might not have that term applied or ascribed to them or self-identify in that way. I'm curious how you see the semantics of that term 'digital nomad' evolving and what some of the coded or underlying ascriptions are.

Kaisu Koskela: Well, I think this applies to terminology in the field of migration in general, but digital nomad as a term has taken its own whole life. It could mean anything now. And people, especially self, describe themselves as digital nomads when they're not. I have colleagues who say they were digital nomading this morning because they work from a cafe, which has nothing to do with the actual normal.

It just means you worked remotely from another location. That's now your office, right? Especially media has been writing about them in every which way, and so has academia, to be honest, there are a million different definitions, and to me, they're not exactly accurate. I struggle with this sometimes when I'm like, does it really matter who we call digital nomad and who we don't?

But of course, it does when we're talking about policy because you can't make policies for people that you haven't actually defined. So, it does matter in that way. It does have a connotation or some kind of privilege. And there's definitely some entitlement that may be mixed in here, too, similar to how we call some people expats and other migrants. Right. And that's a very racialized division between those two terms.

This is also completely inaccurate. An expat is someone who was sent on an expatriate contract with their company to another country, which doesn't even really happen anymore, very rarely. So, to be honest, the world is almost devoid of expats. But yet people insist on calling themselves that. Migrant itself is a term that a lot of people you do not hear, these digital nomads who are no longer digital nomads, who are here in Lisbon, for example, ever calling themselves migrants. And I actually ask this a lot of time when I'm doing research on the field, I'm like, if they have gotten a nomad visa, for example, I'm saying, oh, well, so are you a migrant now then? And they're like, no, why would I be a migrant now? I'm a digital nomad. And it's like, yeah, but where's the nomadic part? Right?

I don't know if digital nomad itself a racialized term is, though. I think people's imagination takes it to a white male, though. And I did a little test. I was lecturing, actually, at a summer school last month, and I went on a couple of different AIs, and I put digital nomad picture AIs. I wanted to have photos of digital nomads. And every time I put digital nomad, he was a white dude in his early thirties, a lot of the time without his shirt on for some reason, in some interesting places that look kind of tropical but colonial at the same time. And he was working, sitting at a desk or something super casual, a guitar somewhere in the corner.

And then I thought, okay, well, we need variations. So, I put digital nomads, like, give me a group of digital nomads. And there still weren't women, for example. They definitely weren't any color. So, it is out there. We all know that AI is based on what is out there online and what is also out there in people's minds. So, I think the image is there. I think research is a bit to blame for this, too. And I would love to write next after I've done with a lot of this digital nomad visa stuff, I would love to write about people with wicked passports, for example, who traveling because they are not represented in the literature.

It's always referring to, like, the majority of nomads, white and from Western nations and with strong passports. And yes, okay, maybe the majority, but certainly not all. There's so much variation. All of us who actually travel a little bit wider have seen this variation, but at the same time, those researchers haven't seen them. And certainly, the journalist who is just calling up the most famous digital nomad somewhere, has not seen them. So, we're getting a very one-sided view here, I think.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. Everything we have discussed in this episode is going to be linked up in [the show notes](#), along with all of the ways to find, follow, and connect with Kaisu. That is this all-in-one place, just go to themaverickshow.com, go to [the show notes](#) for this episode, and there you will find all of that. And remember to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Dr. Kaisu Koskela. Good night, everybody.