

Matt Bowles: On the last two episodes of The Maverick Show, you heard me interviewing [Ric Gazarian](#), the host of the [Counting Countries Podcast](#). And on this episode of The Maverick Show, the tables are turned, and you're going to hear Ric Gazarian interviewing me. Now, this interview originally aired on his podcast, *Counting Countries*, and you're going to be able to hear it today on The Maverick Show. And if you like this conversation, you enjoy Ric's interview style, check out his show. As soon as this episode is over, you can just type in *Counting Countries*. Whatever platform you're listening to this show, you will be able to find his show as well.

And he interviews some of the most widely traveled people on the planet. That is his travel niche. It's either people that have already been to every country in the world or people that are in the process of traveling to every country in the world. So, as you can imagine, that makes for some very interesting conversations. So, I would encourage you to check out the [Counting Countries Podcast](#). Also, if you want to meet these types of people in person. Rick also hosts the [Extraordinary Travel Festival](#), which only happens once every two years, and it is happening this year, November 15 to 17th, 2024, in Bangkok, Thailand.

And I am going to be a keynote speaker at the event, which means I can give you a special discount if you would like to meet me there and attend the festival. So, to get that, just go to themaverickshow.com/etf, that stands for *Extraordinary Travel Festival*, and then enter the code **Maverick** at checkout, and you will get a special discount just for being a Maverick Show listener. And then you'll be able to hang out in person with me and Ric on a whole bunch of other very interesting travelers, including some who have been interviewed on The Maverick Show already.

So, without further ado, please enjoy Ric Gazarian interviewing me on the [Counting Countries Podcast](#).

Ric Gazarian: Matt, a big welcome to Counting Countries. I'm excited to be speaking with you today. Take a moment, introduce us.

Matt Bowles: Ric, so good to be here my friend, Global Gaz. As you know, I'm a big fan. I've been listening to your show for many years. So super, super excited to be on the podcast. Let's see. In terms of introduction, I guess it depends how far back you want me to go. I guess the really short version would be that I worked in a regular office job. It was actually in the nonprofit advocacy space all the way up until age 30. I changed jobs. I unexpectedly got fired from my job.

And at that moment, I decided to pivot. I decided to start a location independent business, go the entrepreneurial route so that I would have the freedom of mobility. And then in 2013, I sold all my stuff, and I left Los Angeles, and I began traveling the world.

And since 2013, I have been a full time itinerant digital nomad, running my business from all over the world with no base.

Ric Gazarian: Matt, what was that moment like? You're 2013, you're in LA, you're putting those Ads on craigslist or wherever it might be, and you're getting rid of all your worldly possessions. Is it unbridled excitement? Enthusiasm? Is there a mix of fear of the unknown? Bring me back to that time period.

Matt Bowles: Well, to be honest, I wasn't planning to travel the world full time for over a decade at that moment. So, what would happen at that moment, if you wanted me to actually bring you back? I had been living in LA for about seven years, and I had been in a relationship for the last three of those years. And my

relationship partner and I had been living together in Los Angeles, and she was doing her PhD in Egyptian history. So, she was Egyptian American, her parents are both from Egypt.

And she had grown up in LA and she was doing her PhD. And so, one day she comes home and she's like, yeah, so I got to go to Cairo for a year to do my dissertation research. And I was like, cool, I'm location independent. I can work from anywhere. I'll go to Cairo. Let's do that. And so, we were getting rid of all of our stuff. I sold my car, got rid of all that stuff. But the plan was, let's go to Egypt for a year and then we'll sort of see what happens, right? It wasn't like, now I'm going to embark on traveling full time for ten years.

So, she and I ended up going to Egypt for that year, and then we ended up traveling the world together, actually as a couple for the next two years after that, while she was writing her dissertation and all that stuff. And then she and I eventually broke up around 2016, and I continued on after that.

Ric Gazarian: That's a pretty big break from the reality that you were familiar with. You had a real job at one point. You went to university. Here you are, closing up shop, getting rid of everything, albeit for this pretty cool adventure with your partner. But nonetheless, I mean this is a giant life change. Was it just full of optimism or any second thoughts or fear of making this giant break of leaving the U.S. and going off to Egypt?

Matt Bowles: I think it was exciting and optimism. One of the pieces of our conversation, we said, okay, we're going to go to Egypt for this year. And then I was like, well, you know, if we're going to get rid of all our stuff, we don't need to be in LA for the summer before that. We might as well get rid of all our stuff three months early and then we could just go live somewhere else for three months on the way to Egypt.

So, then we just sort of pulled out a map. We're like, where would we want to live if we could go anywhere in the world for three months? And we were like, how about Buenos Aires, Argentina? And so, we're like, yeah, let's go there because Buenos Aires is on the way to Egypt from Los Angeles. Of course. We went to Ba for three months, which was absolutely amazing. I mean, it was incredible.

And so, then we went to Cairo and that ended up being about nine months in Cairo. And then, you know, at that point we were just like, well, we don't need to go back to LA. You've got your dissertation research done. You've got a year plus to write this thing. I can work from anywhere. Why don't we just pull out a world map, pick the top five or six places that we'd most love to live in the entire world and then just go rent an Airbnb for like two months in each place and live there. And so we were like Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, South Africa, Barcelona. But we just went to all of these places.

But it was amazing. I would say it was filled with excitement and optimism about being able to go and have new and different experiences and being able to leverage my location independence in a different way, Ric. Which is also something that's important because I had been location independent since 2007.

So, I founded my business in 2007, and I was fully remote. I was just based in Los Angeles by choice because I loved the city, I was in a relationship there, but I had no business purpose in LA. I could live anywhere. And so, this was now finally an opportunity for me to exercise my location independence in a different way and go experience more of the world.

Ric Gazarian: Wow. And I'm curious to hear this top five or six list and I'll circle back to that in a little bit. But let's jump into our time machine. I want to go back to Matt as a kid, as a teenager, growing up with your

family, what was that upbringing like? But more specifically in regard to travel, was travel part of your life, growing up with your family?

Matt Bowles: It was not a big part of my life. It's certainly not international travel. I can tell you. I moved around the United States growing up. So in that sense, travel and not just vacation travel, but the relocation aspect of travel, meaning living in different places where you leave your friends and you leave things that are familiar to you, and you end up in a new place where you don't know anyone and things are not familiar, and you have to make new friends and learn about what's cool about this new place that you just landed in, even though you missed some things about the old place that you were in.

That was a part of my childhood. And it was just because my dad got jobs with different companies and was working in different places. But all of that was in the United States. But I think it's significant because growing up, I never lived anywhere for longer than seven years, ever in my entire life. And so, I think that actually played a significant role, perhaps in, now that I think back and trace my nomadic roots, that might have played a significant role.

However, with regard to international travel, before I studied abroad in college, I have probably been out of the country, well, not including Canada, because I went to high school in Buffalo. So, you just go over the border to Niagara Falls. Right. But other than Canada, I had probably only been out of the country maybe three times. Once we went on a family vacation to the Caribbean Island of Anguilla, and that would have been in the nineties. And then I went to Cancun for my senior year of high school, spring break.

And then I got to go to London because one of the companies that my dad's worked for was a sponsor of the Wimbledon tennis tournament. And he would go every year, and he would usually take my mom, and one year he took my sister, and one year he took me. And so, I got to go and see London also. So those were probably my three experiences other than Canada. I went up to Toronto a bunch growing up, you know, and then, and so that was very minimal. And then it wasn't until I got to college, and I decided to study abroad, for a year, that I really got outside the country.

Ric Gazarian: Let's take a step back. All these frequent moves as a kid, the same idea, packing up, throwing it in the moving truck, jumping in a plane or a car with your family and setting up shop in a new house, a new school, new friends. Is this something you reveled in? That you excelled in, that you dreaded that you would have to reset everything in your life and do it all over again?

Matt Bowles: I think it was a complex set of emotions as a kid. I think it was usually not something that I was excited about, because as a kid, it means you have to leave all of your friends. It means you have to leave all of the things that you're familiar with and the people that you know, and you're going into the unknown. And I think as a kid, that's hard. But I also think that as a kid, the process of going through that and doing that and getting the confidence that, oh, I can make new friends in this place, and there's nice people everywhere, and there is cool and interesting things to learn and do everywhere that are different from the place that I used to be, and I would never have had these experiences or met these people had I stayed there my whole life. Right?

And I think you start to get those types of realizations. And so, I think as a kid, although initially, I think I probably wasn't excited as soon as I heard we had to leave everything and go somewhere else. But I would say, looking back, it really probably built up a lot of confidence to be able to go new places and be assured

that there will be nice and fun and interesting people here, and there will be cool and interesting things to do here.

Ric Gazarian: You have ten years plus of independent, nomadic lifestyle and drawing that parallel to a kid, whether some actual lessons that you can point to, or skill sets that you developed as a kid that you might not even realized at that point what you've now utilized in this awesome life that you've created at this point.

Matt Bowles: I think, just the complete and total confidence that I could go to any country in the world, including a place I've never been, and I don't know very much about their culture. And I can be assured of meeting kind, thoughtful human beings that would be there to help me if I needed them and would be interested in spending time with me and getting to know me and things of that nature. Right?

So, I think just having a level of confidence in humanity and the people, because I think when you're a kid, you're like, oh, I have these friends here, and they know me, and they like me. What if I go to this new place and kids don't like me? What if they're different there? And so, I think going into the unknown, there's sort of that level of apprehension. And I think at this point, especially with all of the travels that I've now done, which have just continued to reaffirm that in terms of, I can go anywhere, and I can find wonderful people, and I can have incredible experiences, and I can learn new things. And so, for me, that's now a really exciting thing and something that I'm quite confident in.

Ric Gazarian: I would imagine you have a long history of success, of moving to new locales and re-engineering your life over and over. Take me back to college then, this sounds like it might have been a pivotal experience. Where did you go to school? And then tell me about the semester or year abroad.

Matt Bowles: It was actually not something that I was planning on at the very beginning of college. I went to John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. And the first year of college was, like, the best year of my life. You know, I'm away from home, I'm independent, I'm on my own, and I'm like, this is amazing. And at that point, to be honest with you, I was probably thinking I would never skip a year of college to go do something like that. I don't want to miss any of this. This is amazing.

And then I think I started thinking more about it or learning more about it, or, like, the study abroad thing kind of kept being presented in a certain way, and I was just like, yeah, you know what? Maybe that would be an interesting thing to do, and maybe I should take the opportunity to do that. And my advisor encouraged me to do it as well. I was like, yeah, okay, why don't I do that?

And so, I ended up going to study at Trinity College in Dublin for a year, which was significant for me in a giant litany of ways. I mean, first of all, I'm Irish American, but my family's been in the U.S. four generations. That Irish sort of history and politics and culture and all of that was really quite removed from my upbringing. There's kind of, like a vague notion that, yeah, you're sort of culturally Irish, but there wasn't a lot of clarity on what that meant in terms of politically and things of that nature, in terms of Irish history and stuff like that.

And so, for me, it was really powerful to go to Ireland for that year. And I had also been studying. I was majoring in sociology. My advisor in undergrad was Native American. He was Lakota, and I had taken his native nations class and all that kind of stuff. And so, I had really been studying a lot about race and ethnic relations in the United States in terms of the African American history and the black liberation struggle in the U.S. And then I had studied about native nations and, you know, the different indigenous struggles in

the United States in particular, my advisor was saying, listen, you're going to Ireland, man. He's like, Ireland was the first British colony where a lot of these colonial techniques were developed and stuff like that.

And so, he and I ended up doing some comparative work on the British colonial techniques over the Irish compared with the European colonial techniques over native nations, and kind of doing some comparative studies on that and stuff. So, it really provided an important framework for me, I think, to culturally reconnect with Ireland in that way, and particularly to reconnect with the history of the decolonial politics in Ireland, and then to have that as sort of like a solidarity framework to understand a lot of the rest of the world, right?

Because if you go to places like West Belfast in particular, which are still under British occupation, right, the northeastern six counties of Ireland are still under British occupation, and you go to the occupied territories, what you will find particularly there is solidarity with decolonial struggles all over the world, right? You will see more Palestinian flags in west Belfast than you will see probably in any other place in the world, because they have these decolonial solidarity connections with all of these different liberation struggles around the world. And so that was really informative and instructive and important for me to be there during that year.

The other thing that happened, the year that I was there, I was there in 1997 to 98. That was my junior year of college. And that was the year that the Good Friday peace accords were negotiated and signed in Ireland. And so, I was actually in Belfast the day that they were signed. And I followed that entire peace process, that entire negotiation, very closely, the entire year. And that then led me to eventually go and pursue a master's degree in international peace and conflict resolution.

Ric Gazarian: A busy time, a rewarding time. Besides all this great knowledge that you developed and learned while spending time in Ireland regarding colonizers and those who are colonized, was there a more intimate or personalized experience as well? In other words, were you tracing down your family roots or going to that village from your great grandparents and finding a fifth cousin?

Matt Bowles: I did not do that, actually. So, it was more like I was sort of connecting with Ireland, and I was connecting with Irish people, and I was studying Irish history, and I was learning that kind of stuff. So, my Irish relatives would be. I mean, that would be like a super, super distant and removed thing. So, I have not actually, to this day, done all the tests and tracked down the people and followed up on that. So, I have not yet done that. But I would say that just being there and traveling around the country, my roommate was also Irish American, and he and I would take a train ride from Dublin to some other place in Ireland and spend the weekend in some other city pretty much every weekend, you know.

And we saw pretty much the whole island of Ireland by doing that, because for people that don't know, I mean, the island of Ireland, the entire country is about the size of South Carolina, so it's very easy to get around and see all the different parts of it. Yeah, it was a really significant experience just to learn about, you know, all the different aspects of the music and Irish dancing and all the different cultural aspects of it as well, and the Irish food and the Guinness and, you know, that kind of stuff, as well as the political history and some of the divergences that have occurred politically in the Irish diaspora, in different places, in different segments of the Irish American community, which are less aligned with those politics I was describing in Belfast, but then other parts of the Irish diaspora that are aligned with those politics and stuff, and just sort of getting a wider lens and a wider framework on Irish culture, both in Ireland and in the diaspora around the world.

Ric Gazarian: Matt, you mentioned you had real limited travel growing up as a kid. You know, Mexico, Canada, the Wimbledon. Now here you have an extended period of time living abroad, and of course, you're having this deep dive into the political structure of these different countries and their histories and their cultures. But beyond that, was this also a giant wake up call to you that international travel is amazing? What were your thoughts there?

Matt Bowles: A 100%, yes. And in addition to living in Ireland, the other thing that my roommate and I did was since we were there for the year, we get the month off for the winter break, and we decided to take that and buy a hop on, hop off Euro rail pass and just take the train through Europe for the entire month. And that was just completely game changing. I mean, we went through Italy and Germany, and we got as far east as Budapest and Prague, and then came back and went to Amsterdam and Paris and just went all over Europe. And it was an absolute game changer for sure.

Ric Gazarian: In what aspect? I'm imagining a 21-year-old Matt Bowles enjoying the social scene. But beyond that, what was kind of the game changer, eye opener aspect of getting the western highlights of civilization?

Matt Bowles: So, I think there was a lot of things at that age. I mean, the first thing, of course, I told you what year it was in December 1997. Obviously, in December 1997, there were no such thing as smartphones. So, you're going through a bunch of countries that you don't speak the language. So, one day you're in Italy and people are speaking Italian. Then you're in Germany and they're speaking German. Then you're in France and they're speaking French, and you're going through all these different places, and you're getting off of the train and you don't speak the language, which, by the way, is different, obviously, from Ireland and is different from going to London or something like that.

It's culturally different, and there's a different accent, but they speak the language, right? So going to countries where they don't speak the language, language was, I think, really a deeper level of cultural immersion at the time in terms of just interfacing with places where you're like, wow, this is really different. And now you have to start resorting to other ways of communicating with people because you don't have Google translate on your phone. You also don't have Google Maps and stuff.

So, you have to rely on a physical map and ask people how to get from here to there, and then they show you. So, like, I think traveling in that era under those circumstances and then realizing that you can connect with people across languages, communicating with them in different ways. The intent of people to want to help you, even though you're in their country and you don't speak their language, but they go out of their way to help you anyways and sort of building up the confidence that you can, I think, catapult yourself into someplace that is way outside of your comfort zone and way outside of things that you're familiar with, and you can navigate it and you can figure it out.

And when you do that, it's oftentimes a much, I think, deeper and richer feeling that you were able to do that. And then you were able to make a connection with these local people, despite additional, if you want to call them, barriers to those connections. But yet you were still able to make those connections, and a lot of those connections that are made that way, I think, felt even more meaningful to me.

Ric Gazarian: Matt, it sounds like your twenties. You had a real job. You were getting your masters. I'm going to guess some travels. Give me some of the highlights of your life during your twenties after you graduated from university.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. So, there's another travel experience that I should mention to you before we talk about that, which was that after I did the year in Ireland and before I did my master's degree. So, I finished my junior year in Ireland, and then I said, you know what? I was here. And I followed this whole peace process and everything else. I found another semester program, which was a peace and conflict resolution semester program, and it focused on the Israel Palestine conflict.

And that was one semester long. And it was based in Washington, DC, but it included a trip to Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Egypt. And that was in 1998. And so, I decided that after Ireland and after I did this European Euro rail trip, instead of going back to college for my full senior year, I would first do this semester program and then just go back for the last four months of college and graduate. And so, I did.

And so I went to Washington, DC. And the idea was that you had to do an internship in DC for two days a week and then go to three full days of seminar classes where you would learn about the Israel Palestine conflict. And so, I interned with the NAACP, which is, for folks that don't know, one of the most probably iconic African American civil rights organizations been around for over a century now. And then I went to the seminars, and then the final probably three weeks of our program or so, three weeks to a month was spent in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Egypt. And that trip was absolutely game changing.

Ric Gazarian: Knowing you, Matt, we've had a number of conversations offline before this one I'm imagining this was a pivotal point in your life. Tell me, kind of the takeaways, the headlines from this really fascinating experience of three weeks in one of the most fascinating corners of the globe.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. I mean, obviously, it's a very different experience going there than it is going to Europe, right? So, this is my first time ever going out of either Europe or North America, first time going to a totally different region of the world. And it was really significant, of course, because when I went into that program, I did not know a huge amount about the politics of that region. And so, I was there to learn. And I was very fortunate that the professor in our class, who was an Israeli Jew who had grown up in Israel, she was encouraging us to not try to remain objective or neutral, but rather to engage the conflict.

And then the idea of the trip was to go around to these places and listen to all the different conflicts, actors and all the different people whose lives have been affected by the conflict, listen to them tell their story and share their experience and their narrative, put a human face on the conflict, and then, by all means, take a stand for a just solution. And I really appreciated that perspective, because it was based on humanizing the conflict, and it was also based on seeing things for yourself.

So, we actually went to a settlement, for example, in the West Bank and listened to settlers give their narrative, basically, about how they wanted to ethnically cleanse all the Arabs and just take it over. And so, we actually listened to human beings, like, espouse that narrative. And then we went to the Gaza Strip, and we went to the Shati refugee camp, for example, is one of the places that we went to in Gaza.

And we listened to the refugees tell their story, and we also got to see what one of the most densely populated areas on earth actually looks like. And we got to understand how these people were displaced from their homes in the first place, right through what's called the Nakba in 1948, when the Israeli colonial processes killed or dispossessed about 750,000 Palestinians. And you have these refugee camps in Gaza, and then you go through the West Bank, and then you see the matrix of control and how the whole apartheid apparatus is set up with these settlers only bypass roads.

And you just sort of see how all of this works, and you see what apartheid looks like, and you see what military occupation looks like, and you see what it's like to live in a refugee camp, and then you hear these stories. And so, I think being able to engage in that manner just allowed me to have a perspective that I would not otherwise have been able to easily acquire, because in the United States, there's a very particular narrative that is pushed which intentionally obfuscates a lot of these dynamics. Right.

In going there in person, seeing that, talking with people, engaging with folks, and seeing it firsthand was incredibly powerful in shaping my perspective, not just on that, but on a broader sort of political worldview. But it was important also to have the connections that I did going into that. So, I told you that I had studied the European colonial processes over native nations, and I had studied the European colonial processes over the Irish. Right. And so then going to Palestine and understanding, okay, I understand settler colonialism. It's pretty clear what's going on here in terms of understanding the settler colonial dynamics that we're at play there, right.

So, it was important to come in, I think, for me, with that political context, and then for me to be able to engage on a personal level, to be able to see with my own eyes and to be able to have that political context. And so that was really formidable in terms of shaping my understanding of that. And then that led me to get involved and to start doing activism on that issue. And so, when I was in grad school, that was the year 2000, which was when the second Palestinian intifada broke out. And so, we were trying to organize and do solidarity work around that. I helped to co found an organization to stop us aid to Israel, and we were doing a lot of popular education work around that and around why American taxpayers need to be aware of what's going on, because all of these human rights abuses are being funded with our tax dollars, right?

And so, we started doing popular education and organizing work around that while I was in grad school. And then that work ultimately led to the question that you just asked me, which was, what was my career like? What was my work life like? And so, what actually happened was I had been doing a lot of that Palestine solidarity work just in a volunteer capacity, while I was doing my master's degree in international peace and conflict resolution. And as you can imagine, I was very immersed in the Arab community, and I was very immersed in the Muslim community in the context of doing that Palestine solidarity work.

And then I was in DC during the September 11 attacks. So, my master's degree, I finished it in 2001. I was in DC. That's where I was doing my master's degree when the September 11 attacks happened. And so, as you know, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, there was a really aggressive campaign of racial targeting against Arabs and Muslims and South Asians in the United States. Since I was so immersed in those communities already in this other context, when this stuff started happening, I ended up getting hired to do advocacy work around those post 911 civil liberty abuses, right?

To try to push back against the government overreach, whether it was stuff like the surveillance and the USA Patriot act and the stripping of those types of civil liberties or the racial targeting of Arabs and Muslims, all of that kind of stuff. And so, I spent a lot of my career doing that kind of work. And so, the travel was domestic. I was traveling around to all of these different key congressional districts in the United States to try to build these different coalitions, to try to see what we could do to defend these vulnerable communities, and to push back against the authoritarian lurch that was happening in terms of the concentration of state power and the abuse of civil liberties in these different ways.

And they were affecting a lot of different communities in different ways. And so, we started to build these coalitions and so forth. And that took me to all different places. Ric, it's kind of interesting, because when

we say travel and we think about different cultural experiences, a lot of times we think about internationally. But that job actually took me to places like Alaska and places like Montana and places like Idaho and places that I had never been before and had really different cultural dynamics.

And part of the job, you know, what I was trying to do with these political organizing things was actually to understand which different types of groups, right, whether they were like cultural groups or political interests or different stuff, would potentially be able to come together and organize around this, which might otherwise seem to be disparate or very different types of groups. And so that actually got me pretty immersed in sort of studying and trying to understand. I was in rural Nevada and all these different types of places that I never would have gone. And I got to go there in the context of doing this work and have interactions with people and just learn stuff. Like, I can remember I was in Elko, Nevada, Ric, and I learned that the largest, I believe this is still true. I believe the largest immigrant community in the United States from the Basque country is in Elko, Nevada.

And I was just like, what? I had no idea that was the case, but I learned that by going there. Right. And so that also taught me a lesson that I think I take with me today is that as we learn all of these things from international travels, we, when we are, let's say, back in our home country, we can really pay a lot closer attention to the diversity of dynamics, particularly with respect to the immigrant communities and their experiences and why they are in different places in our country, where they are and what their stories are all about and what their diaspora experience is all about.

And you can sort of have an international travel experience domestically if you choose to pay attention to those things.

Ric Gazarian: Great point. The United States is incredibly diverse, as we all know, different languages, religions, ethnic groups. Yeah. And in a way, you can kind of accomplish your international travels by going throughout the U.S., as you pointed out, with the Basque community. I thought you were going to say the biggest ball of wax or string. And you did surprise me with the Basque community. So good trivia,

Matt, you've had some real instrumental, impactful experiences the year abroad during university, your time visiting the Middle east and then your career. I mean, as you're saying, you're visiting all sorts of different corners of the U.S. and meeting different peoples and cultures, which propelled you through your twenties and really opened up your eyes.

And I think also your level of acceptance and your comfort level in conjunction as a kid, being comfortable moving from city to city with your family. But let's make a big pivot here at some point you left that industry, so to speak, the activism, and you pivoted to real estate. Tell me about that.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, so I ended up changing jobs at age 30. I moved out to LA. And then about six months after I got there, they're like, yeah, it's not working out. And I basically got let go from my job six months after moving to LA. And I'm like, this is crazy because I had been in DC for about seven years, right? As I told you, I did my master's degree there, did the activist work, worked there professionally in that space, and then there I am in LA. I've been there for six months. I got fired from my job six months out there, and then I'm like, what the heck am I going to do now?

And it was really, it was one of those kinds of dramatic things where it's like, yeah, you need to be out of the office by five and you need to turn in your phone because that's a company phone and all that stuff. So, I can literally remember leaving the office that day, getting into my car in the parking lot, driving, first of all,

to the phone store because I literally didn't have a phone. So, I, like, I had to drive to the Verizon store to buy a phone so that I could call my mother to tell her that I got fired, right? Like, so on that drive with no phone, I started thinking to myself, and I'm like, what am I going to do now? And I said, well, I could apply for another job somewhere else, you know, whatever. And I was like, you know what? I think that I am going to try to chart a completely different path.

I am going to try to see if I can start my own business and if I can just create more autonomy in my life. Because if I created my own business, I could never get fired again. So, I think I'm going to try that. Then after I got the phone and I called my mother and I told her I got fired, I was like, okay, what is my first step to doing this? And then I was like, well, there's one major problem, which is I have no idea how to start a business. I was like, but I feel like I could learn how to start a business. And so, what I did is I literally drove from the phone store to the bookstore, and I drove to Barnes and Noble at the Grove, if anybody knows LA. And I went in, and I went to the business section.

I started reading books on how to start a business. And I went to Barnes and Noble every day, and I sat there in the business section, reading books on how to start a business. I didn't buy the books, Ric. I didn't have a job. So, I just sat there reading books every day. And this was in 2007. And the first thing that I would do when I went to the bookstore each day is I would look on the new business bookshelf to see what new business books had come out. And one day I walked in 2007 to this bookstore, and I looked on the new business bookshelf, and it was a brand-new book there.

That day had just come out, and it was by some 29-year-old kid that nobody had ever heard of named Timothy Ferriss. The book was called *The 4-Hour Workweek*. I picked it up and I read the back, and I said, this is the book I'm reading today. I read that book, and that is where the light switch came on about building a location independent business to create the freedom of mobility, which is a currency just as valuable, if not more valuable, than money, in facilitating your ability to design your lifestyle and travel the world. And so, I was like, that is what I'm doing. And so, for a little bit of back context on this, one of the things that I had been doing while I was working at my regular job is I had been investing in real estate. And so, I had bought a house in DC, and what I did is I bought a house to live in, and I rented out three of the bedrooms, about a four-bedroom house. I rented out three bedrooms, friends of mine. So, I had three streams of income. And then that house, in the first year that I owned it, appreciated in value more than my entire annual salary. And I was like, oh, that's interesting. So, I was like, let me see what I can do with that.

Then I just started reading all this stuff about real estate, investing in rental properties and stuff like that. And I ended up using the equity from that to then start buying rental properties, properties in different real estate markets. And my friends started asking me, "Hey, I see you're doing this rental property investing. Can you show us what you're doing and help us to buy some rental properties, too?" And I was like, "Sure, I'll show you what I'm doing, and I'm just buying with these rental properties. And you can buy rental properties here in the same place just like me".

And what I noticed was that the real estate brokers who were helping us to buy these properties were getting paid a commission. But we weren't paying for it. So, I was like, huh? And that's because in the United States, the seller has historically paid 100% of the real estate commission. The buyer pays nothing. So, I was like, well, that's cool. These people are helping us. They're adding value and they're getting compensated for it, but we're not the ones. We don't have to pay them anything. That's amazing.

So, when I was trying to think about what business I could create, I was like, well, I already have friends that are asking me to help them buy rental properties. If I could just get a real estate broker brokerage license and start a real estate brokerage, I could literally just continue helping my friends buy rental properties, continue charging them nothing. And all of a sudden, I could have revenue. I could make money through this business model. And I was like, this is perfect because I don't like selling stuff, and I particularly don't like selling stuff to my friends. But if I can just continue helping, helping them as I'm doing now, and all of a sudden, I can start making money without charging them anything. That's the most amazing business model I've ever heard of.

And so, I continued to read these books on how to build a business. And stuff. And then I realized something else, Ric, which was that I didn't have most of the skills required to build a business. And so, I was like, well, I know I am good at certain things, but I'm really not good at these other things. But I knew people who were. And so, I reached out to two other people who are friends of mine and had complementary skill sets, and I invited them to start this business with me, you know, leave their jobs that they were obviously doing very well at and to come start this business.

And so, we ended up launching that business. I ended up getting them to leave their jobs. And we launched that business in 2007, and we are still today together running it and helping people from all over the world, whether they're in the U.S. or they're digital nomads or whatever, to buy and own cash flowing rental properties in the best U.S. markets. And so, we've been doing that for 17 years now.

Ric Gazarian: Really impressive. Think about that. Started a business, zero seven over 15 years in business. The thing that got my attention, actually, is your success with your partners. We've all heard nightmare stories, but you guys have a great relationship. I can assume 15 years plus keeping this all together. And also, I mean, life comes down to moments or serendipitous. You know, I can imagine what happens if you somehow miss the Tim Ferriss book, The 4-Hour Workweek, or let's say your timing was bad in Washington DC. And that house you bought actually depreciated in value versus increasing.

So, it's all these little things in life coming together, adding up and charting an entirely, totally different direction in your life. Give a quick shout out to the name of your real estate business so people can take a peek.

Matt Bowles: Sure. Yeah, it's Maverick Investor Group. And if you want to check it out, you can just go to maverickinvestorgroup.com. And the idea, just to clarify what the business model is, the niche specialty that we have is to help people buy what we call Turnkey Rental Properties. A perfect solution for people who want to have an independent lifestyle. As you are so excellent, you again were able to have this incredible success, wish you more success in the future and with the Maverick Investor Group.

Ric Gazarian: Let's go back to Egypt because to me that was another big transformation in your life. You hadn't done relatively that much international travel, but here you are making a pretty big commitment to living in Cairo, a city I love. Other people have some mixed emotions. It's too hectic, it's too in your favorite, what were your impressions as a long-term resident of Cairo?

Matt Bowles: Yeah, so that was my third time going to Egypt. So, my first time was the one I told you about in 98 when I went there briefly as part of that trip that went to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, we also went to Cairo. And so that was my very first time seeing it. And you are right man, because that was not

only my first time seeing Cairo, but that was also my first time seeing what I'm just going to say a city like Cairo, right, meaning a city that there's no traffic lights to cross the street and there's no stop in traffic.

And so, the only way to get to the other side of the street is to walk in front of four lanes of oncoming traffic and believe that they are going to not run you over. And so, the first time you do something like that, it is really different. But subsequently, when you're in another city where those dynamics are the case, it becomes, you know, oh, I've seen this before. So, I think a lot of people, if it's their first time in Cairo or they haven't been to Delhi or like, you know, other places where there are certain types of dynamics that can be perceived as a little more intense or hectic or chaotic than we're used to.

But I think when you become a resident of those places, what initially can appear like, wow, this is so chaotic. Like there's no traffic rules. There's like motorcycles ride on the sidewalk, like the cars don't stop for traffic lights. This seems really chaotic. What you start to realize when you live there is that there is a remarkable amount of order to the chaos, meaning that the people that live there understand exactly how to navigate that chaos and how to flow with that chaos. And so, I think the more time you spend in a place like Cairo and the deeper you're able to immerse with it, that if you can get in sync with that flow, all of a sudden you can start moving with the rhythm of the city, as opposed to perceiving the rhythm of the city as something that's just super chaotic.

You can kind of get in that rhythm, and then all of a sudden you realize, oh, there is actually quite a level of order to this chaos. I just have to learn how to participate in it. And so, I think that's one thing that you sort of figure out once you become a resident.

Ric Gazarian: Matt, what's an example or an anecdote of you picking up on the rhythms of the city that might not be noticeable to the ten-day visitor to Egypt versus your longer experience in the country?

Matt Bowles: I mean, I think it can just be as simple as something like having the confidence that, yeah, every single day I'm going to cross this road and has four lanes of incoming traffic, and they're never going to stop. There is never going to be a break in the traffic, and I just have to walk in front of four lanes of traffic every single day. But I am now confident after having done that 10 times, 20 times, 40 times, that I'm going to be able to do that. And they're not going to hit me. Right.

And it can just be like building up that confidence about, yeah, I can move in the city. I'm not going to be paralyzed because I'm terrified to walk in front of four lanes of traffic. I'm going to be able to do that. It can also be things like when you develop a level of confidence in a particular place, you start to learn certain things. Right. So, like when I hear some people that have spent maybe a short time in a place like Cairo, whether it's Cairo or another place, and they might say something like, oh, the, the taxi driver, you know, tried to rip me off or like this happened, or, you know, something like that. Right.

Well, if I live in my place and then I go, let's say, regularly to some other place. Okay, let's say I'm regularly going to some other part of the city for particular reason, you start to understand exactly how much, for example, that cab ride should actually cost. And I'm talking about cabs that don't have meters, folks. Right. If it has a meter, that's a whole different thing. I mean, that's, you know, I'm talking about cabs that don't have meters, right.

So, once you understand that, you know how much it costs, and you also start to speak enough of the language that you can communicate in the Egyptian dialect of Arabic, then what happens is you get in the cab and you don't negotiate, at least is what I would do, right. I ended up not negotiating. How much is it

going to be before I get in the cab? I would just get in the cab, and then they would take me there, and then I would just give them the amount of money that I knew it was supposed to be. And then they knew that I knew that that's how much it was supposed to be. And then I would say a couple words to them in Arabic and thank them.

And then it wasn't a situation where there was even, even much of an opportunity to have those types of experiences. Because, you know, this is how much it costs to go from here to here. And I don't even need to ask how much it is? I just gave him the money because I know how much it is, right. And then you start, this is how the locals do it, right? They know. And so, then you start just sort of like getting into that groove and you're like, oh, okay, I'm not getting ripped off by cab drivers anymore. Oh, okay, I can cross the street. That's not a problem. Oh, okay, I can do this, I can do that. And then maybe you just start building your confidence about how to live in a city.

Ric Gazarian: Lessons one, two, three of how to navigate Egypt. You and I were having some previous conversations kind of contrasting the communities. My community is chasing 193 going to every country in the world. You're more firmly associated with the digital nomad community. I'm going to make some generalizations, some stereotypes, you know. Both of these communities are quite diverse. When I think of digital nomads, there's obviously a lot of benefits compared to my community. And one of those benefits is kind of the slow travel, setting up shop, building up community, building up routines.

And we were having, again, another offhand conversation, I'll call it the falafel routine in Cairo. And talk to me why these routines are meaningful and how that adds to the experience of living or traveling somewhere.

Matt Bowles: One of the things I've been able to do or have chosen to do and why I choose to stay in these places for longer is because I want to feel like a resident. I want to feel like a person that lives in that city, not just someone who is transiting through that city. And so, for me, a lot of times that means finding my favorite coffee shop in the morning and going there every single day to get my coffee, finding my favorite *ful wa ta'ameya*, they call it in Egypt, right? Falafel, they call it somewhere else, right?

Vendor for lunch and going there and seeing them day after day. Or finding my favorite Shisha in the evening and going there regularly and seeing them in the evening. And when you go to a place and there is a recurrence of patronage and they know you and they know what your order is going to be and they see you there and they get in your order ready and bring it to you and stuff like that, it just gives me, anyways, a different level of connection with place. It also gives me a different level of connection with the people that are there, right.

And these are also not just people that I've hired to take me on a tour or guide me around because I have built, like, great connections with people that I've done that with. There are some places where I have a guide and they're going to take me around on a specific excursion and I've had a great connection with those people and remain in touch with them and stuff like that. But this is different. I mean, these are like a regular person that works at a coffee shop and you're there as a customer and you're just having nice conversation with them and you smile at them every day and they smile when they see you come in and you make their day a little bit brighter and they're excited to see you when you come in.

And that dynamic for me is just one of the most lovely and rich parts of being a resident somewhere, right? Like, I like to have a medium term apartment in a residential area and go shop at the grocery store and have

the conversations with people that are working at the grocery store as I'm buying my groceries and seeing what the different dynamics are like in the grocery store and what different products they have and what things look like and, you know, all of the things that maybe if you were just coming through as a shorter term traveler, you might miss. Right?

And so, for me, that's a lot of the depth of travel in terms of connection with both place and with the residents of that place.

Ric Gazarian: I agree. Digital nomads have more swings at the bat for those type of experiences. I'm in Almaty for five days. And I do end up going to the same shawarma place. And by the third visit, they do recognize me, they do know my order, but I'm gone and moving on to the next location after my fifth visit.

My relationships or experiences aren't quite as deep as what you are able to attain from staying in one location for two weeks, four weeks or eight weeks. So, a big benefit there from my perspective, because I revel in those experiences as well. Digital nomads, the stereotype, of course, there's many different iterations of digital nomads, but when I think of digital nomads, I'm thinking of a bunch of guys in a co working space or coffee shop and Bali, Chiang Mai or Medellin.

One thing that you're doing, which I really appreciate it, and maybe I came up with this new name. I'm calling you a frontier digital nomad because you have set up shop in what I believe are not places that digital nomads typically call their home. And we'll do a couple examples of Acra, Nairobi, Lagos, Luanda. Tell me why your comfort zone is, let's say, a bit more atypical than the digital nomad. You feel comfortable setting up shop in some of these frontier countries.

Matt Bowles: I'm interested in seeing a lot of the world, and I appreciate a lot of different things about a lot of different parts of the world, which is one of the reasons that I'm nomadic. I think the nomenclature of digital nomad, when people use that term, can mean a lot of different things. There's plenty of Americans, for example, or Canadians or Australians or whomever that have moved to Bali and they live in Bali. Some of those people might identify as digital nomads, but there's not a lot of nomading going on. They're just an American that moved to Bali. Right?

So, I think it just depends upon how different people define it, and I'm not personally super invested in that term in terms of self-identity and don't have an investment in policing the use of that term or anything else. But I think just in terms of me personally and lifestyle choices and decisions, I am deeply passionate about a lot of different parts of the world. And if you look at, like, where have I spent time over the last decade plus of being an itinerant nomad with no base? It's probably pretty evenly divided. I've probably spent cumulatively about two and a half years in Africa, about two and a half years in Asia, about two and a half years in Europe, and about two and a half years in the Americas, right.

So, I'd say it's pretty evenly divided. And sometimes people ask me, oh, if you were going to settle down somewhere, what's your favorite place? Where would you pick to settle down? And kind of the answer is sort of like the reason that I'm not doing that is because I love all of these places. When I haven't been to Asia in a long time, I'll be like, oh, man, I really miss Asia. And then I go to Asia and then it's amazing, right? Like I'm super excited to come to Bangkok for ETF because I haven't been to Bangkok in a really long time and I know that as soon as I get there, I'm going to be like, oh, man, I love this. This is incredible. I have missed this. But then once I stay in Asia for a while, then I'll be like, man, I miss South America and then I'll go somewhere in South America, and I'll be there. I'm like, this is amazing. I've missed this. And then I'll be

there for like a while and I'll be like, man, I miss Africa and then I'll go somewhere on the continent and then, so this is kind of like why I'm a nomad, I think because I appreciate very deeply the amazingness of all these different cultures.

And so, I think just, you know, with respect to those places you mentioned on the continent, man, those are some really magical places. I mean, I've been to, I mean, Kenya is incredible. I mean, first of all, it's like the entrepreneur tech hub of Saharan Africa, probably, I would say certainly one of them. So, you have all of those elements, but then you just have these amazing cultural dynamics in Nairobi. I mean, it's really interesting. Are like, oh, you know, have you done all this other stuff in Kenya, and you've gone out to Mombasa and the coast and gone to all this different stuff.

And I'm like, other than going to the Maasai Mara, I've literally, I've been to Kenya twice. I spent like two months there. I've literally spent all my time in Nairobi. I'm just so enamored with the city and the vibe and the nightlife and the culture and it's just so incredible. And there's so much interesting stuff in Nairobi. Like, last time I was there, I went to a Bollywood stage performance. It was like a tribute to Bollywood, and it was a musical stage performance. And I was super excited to see this because for folks that don't know, there is a substantial Indian immigrant community in Nairobi.

So, I was actually expecting that this stage show would be almost entirely, if not entirely, Indian immigrant performers, like Kenyan Indian folks from Kenya that would be doing the performance. And when I got there, it was actually a majority black performers, majority black Kenyan performers. And the Kenyan Indians that were performing were probably less than 50%, which I thought was just amazing because it just went to show the extent to which the Indian culture has impacted Nairobi and the extent to which you get this incredible multicultural group coming together to do a tribute to Bollywood.

And it was like Bollywood through the years, you know? And they'd go through these different, like, iconic Bollywood song numbers and have an image from the film projected in the back of the stage, and then you'd have all these dancers doing the Bollywood moves and doing the dance numbers and stuff. And it was just amazing, you know, and you can just go so deep into the cultural richness of Nairobi, and it's just. I mean, it's really one of my favorite cities. So, I just been back there multiple times.

Ghana is incredible. I have been there multiple times as well, to the music festivals. And I'll tell you this, too, what initially inspired me to do West Africa was very much based on the music and the Afrobeats, which I initially connected with in East Africa. So, I was. In. The first time I went to Nairobi was, like, 2018. I was there for a month, and I had a Ugandan friend of mine who was living in Kampala, and she was like, dude, if you're in Nairobi, like, you have to come to Kampala for sure and just come stay at my place. Like, I'll take you out. I'll take you around, like, for sure. You know, you have to come. I was like, done.

And so, I went, and I stayed with her, and it was unbelievable. I mean, I was only in Uganda for maybe like, four, five days, maybe four nights, something like that, but it was unbelievable. And I'm there, of course, with my local Ugandan friend. So, she's taking me into Matatu, and we're doing all the local transportation, and she's taking me out to all of these clubs where I was, for sure, the only non- in the club. And we're out till six in the morning, and I'm just, like, hearing all of these afro beats, this incredible music, shazaming all these songs, and I'm looking up at these artists. I'm like, man, most of these artists are from Nigeria.

And so, of course, then, you know, I mean, Lagos, Nigeria, as you know, is really, like, the music artistic film hub of Sub-Saharan Africa. And so, I'm like, man, I've got to go to Lagos. And so, I mean, that just went, like,

way up on my list that I really wanted to go there. And of course, I wanted to stay for at least a month. And so, I hit up some friends of mine, one of whom is a Kenyan digital nomad. Shout out to Agnes Nyamwange. And I hit her up. And she had never been to West Africa, right? So, she was born and raised in Kenya, went to college in Uganda, and she and I had been traveling together, seeing each other different places around the world, but she'd never been to West Africa.

So, I was like, would you want to go to West Africa and go three months, month in Lagos, month in Accra, month in Dakar, in Senegal? She's like, yeah, let's do that. So we went, and it was amazing. And then subsequently, I've been back to Ghana, and I've been back to Senegal multiple times. Well, I spent about three months in Dakar. And, I mean, these cities are magical, man. You know, I was in Accra about, what was it, about a year and a half ago for Dettys December, which is the end of the year Afrobeat music festival time period where the whole African diaspora from around the world descends on Ghana. And you get this super rich, diverse group of folks from the African diaspora that are all there, and you have all of these music festivals and all of these things going on. I mean, it was amazing, man.

I mean, the more I spend time on the continent, the more I experience, the deeper I fall in love with it. But also, the more I learn about other places that I then want to go visit and spend time in those places. And then, of course, also the more people I meet, and then I keep wanting to go back to the places that I've already been, which is why I've been back to Kenya multiple times, I've been back to Tanzania multiple times, been back to Senegal multiple times, and I've been back to South Africa multiple times. It's amazing, man. It has a super special place in my heart. But I think the longer-term stays are what allow me to really, as we talked about, have that deeper connection with the place and with the people there.

Ric Gazarian: I want to go back to Lagos. Giant global city, 20 million, I think another city. I think that takes a bit of a learning curve to get used to, and that's probably an understatement, but you and I, again, on an offline conversation, we contrasted our experiences in the country. I believe you stayed a month straight in Lagos.

Matt Bowles: Yup.

Ric Gazarian: And did you leave the city. Did you travel a lot?

Matt Bowles: Nope. Stayed the whole time in Lagos.

Ric Gazarian: Okay, so here's the contrast. I spent half the time in the country as you did. So, I was there for two weeks. I was in Dakar, and I visited probably seven different cities. In other words, I'm changing hotels on average every two nights. You are staying in the same city, maybe the same apartment for the whole time.

Matt Bowles: Yup.

Ric Gazarian: So, this is a pretty distinct contrast. Same country, totally different experiences. I want you to break down your experience a little bit also on a mechanical basis. In other words, how do you set up shop there? How do you make sure you have an apartment? How do you make sure it's set up to be your home office and there's stuff nearby? So, walk me through the mechanics of housing. Your strategy, how do you pull that off usually?

Matt Bowles: Well, it can depend on the place. In the case of my month long stay in Lagos, I rented an Airbnb for a month from a local Nigerian. And as I mentioned, I was there with a couple of friends of mine.

We had multiple rooms on the same Airbnb. So, we basically rented a house. And with regard to the Wi-Fi situation, it's actually interesting because in, as it turns out, in Lagos, at least at the time that I was there, you could buy these 4G SIM cards and get like a huge amount of data on them and it would be like faster and more consistent than a lot of the Wi-Fi connections.

And so, a lot of the hack there was just to tether through the 4G SIM card in your phone and get on the Wi-Fi that way because it was more consistent, it was faster than trying to find a Wi-Fi network and connect to it, even including in the Airbnb and stuff like that. So, we ended up just using that effectively. And I was able to like record podcasts on 4g data tether and like that kind of stuff. And it ended up working out pretty well. But you learn some of that stuff, right? You know, getting that set up to your point and figuring things out was important.

And then you figure other stuff out, like where is the best food, where do I shop, where do I do all this kind of stuff? And part of that is the experience of figuring that out for me is part of the experience of being there. And you come up and you run into challenges, especially places like Lagos that don't necessarily happen in other places. I'll give you an example. One of my first days in Lagos, I went to a coffee shop, and I'm working there from the coffee shop. And I ordered my coffee, and I probably ordered a snack or something with it, you know, and order another coffee. And then I'm ready to go. And I go up to the counter to pay my bill and I give them my credit card and he runs my credit card. And the credit card doesn't work because for some reason, right, American credit card companies, you know, oh, Nigeria, you know, scam alert, you know, or whatever. And I probably hadn't, like, specifically called the credit card company to tell them I'm going to Nigeria.

And I hadn't done that because I just nomad around to all these different countries and I don't call my credit card company every month to tell them. And so, they were declining my card. Then I was like, oh, man, I don't have any cash on me, but I have my ATM card. Can you just tell me where the ATM machine is? And I'll just go to the ATM, and I'll take out some cash and I'll pay you in cash. And the guy was like, yeah, no problem. He goes, I'll actually just walk you over there. I'll just show you where it is. I was like, that's very nice of you. Thank you.

So, the waiter from the coffee shop walks me over to the ATM, and there's two ATM machines next to each other, right? So, I walk up to the ATM machine, and I put in my card and I'm typing in my number, and I put the money that I want to get out and the ATM machine declines my ATM card. So now I'm standing there, and my credit card doesn't work. And also, my ATM card doesn't work. And so, I'm standing there, I'm like, oh, man, what am I going to do? And then this local Nigerian guy comes up to the ATM machine next to me because there's two next to each other. And he starts putting his stuff in the one next to me. And I'm standing there, and the waiter is standing next to me, right?

And so, the guy's like, what's up, man? He's like, is that your ATM card is not working? I was like, no, man, it's not working. And he sees the waiter standing there and he's like, oh, you got a bill you need to pay? Yeah, I got a bill I need to pay. And he says to the waiter, he's like, how much is it? And then the waiter tells him. And then he takes cash out of his pocket. He got his cash out of the ATM machine, and then he pays the waiter for my bill. And then gives the waiter a tip on top of that and then starts walking back to his car to drive away. I was like, bro, thank you. How do I get you back for that? And he says, don't worry about it, man. Welcome to Nigeria. And he just drove away.

And so that was my welcome to Nigeria, was all of these things wrapped in one? It was like, okay, here's some stuff that's not going to work. It's not going to function properly. You maybe wind up in an uncomfortable situation as a result. And then here is the unbelievable kindness of strangers once again coming through to welcome me and make me feel loved on, like, my first day or two in Nigeria.

Ric Gazarian: That's a great welcome and gives you a lot of confidence. Give me a great tip or piece of advice for supercharging your relationships and networks when you get to a new city. One of the benefits, of course, of the digital nomad, the slower travel, building more relationships. Contrast it again with someone chasing 193. You're moving sometimes or often more quickly from place to place. You don't have that luxury, but you're there for a month or six weeks or eight weeks. How do you supercharge a network? So, you're keeping busy and learning about great experiences, meeting locals, learning about the local culture.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. So, I think there's probably a couple of different ways to approach that, depending on what your goals are, what you're interested in, what types of folks you're trying to connect with, or what types of experiences you're trying to have and navigating that, particularly in a place like Lagos, which doesn't have the level of online tourist information. I'm calling it tourist information in quotes. I'm doing air quotes because even if it did, the 'tourist information' that might be online isn't necessarily what I'm looking for. Right. So, for example, I told you that one of the reasons that I went there and one of the reasons that I invited my Kenyan friend Agnes to go is because we both are super passionate about the music, the Afrobeats and that kind of stuff.

And we really wanted to see the local nightlife in Lagos and just kind of experience that. So that was one of our priorities for traveling there. And what we found was that when we asked people, where do you recommend that we go to, let's say a nightclub? What nightclub do you recommend that we go to? So, when I ask this question to people, local people, they would, in genuinely trying to be helpful and give me the answer that they think I am looking for. They would look at me and they would, in their mind, probably think, okay, other people that look like you would go to this place.

So, they would recommend to me, you should go to this place. Because the question I was, I was asking the wrong question. Right. Then, where do you recommend that I should go to a nightclub? And they, in genuinely being interested in helping me, would be like, you should go to this nightclub. And then I would go there, and it was. And I realized it was absolutely not what I was looking for. Right. It was some, like, bougie bottled service thing with whatever white expats were in Lagos were there. And I was like, this is really the opposite of what I'm looking for.

And so, then I started asking a different question, right? So, Agnes and I would start asking the Uber drivers, right, when we're riding around the city in the Uber, we would ask them, where do you go out to a nightclub when you go out in Lagos? And they would be like, well, I certainly don't go around here. And we're like, fantastic. Can you drive us to a club that you would go to? And when you start doing that, all of a sudden, we immediately got into exactly what we were looking for. Right. So that's one way to do it, depending on what you're looking for in terms of how to find it.

Now, the other thing I will say that ended up being really incredible is that we were renting an Airbnb from a local Nigerian, and we had a great communication connection with the Airbnb host. And they offered also to take us out. Not just out, but out with their friends. And so, by probably week three of living in Lagos, we were rolling twelve deep with local Nigerians. And the thing was, when you roll with local folks like that, the

thing about Lagos is you got to get to the right place at exactly the right time. Somebody might recommend a club to you, but if you don't go there at the right hours, and, I mean, this club is like midnight to one. It bangs if you get there too early or if you get there too late, it might be virtually empty. So, you got to know exactly when to hit, exactly which spots.

And so, three weeks into this, we had this whole group of local folks that were, like, taking us out, and they knew exactly where to go, exactly when to get there. We sort of were able to integrate into that through our connection with our Airbnb host, who was a local Nigerian. Right. So that's another way to do it as well.

Ric Gazarian: Great stories. Love the Uber tip. Great advice from them. Do you think you're missing out, Matt? As noted, I contrasted my trip in Nigeria versus yours. I saw, technically, more of the country, more diverse, more different experiences. You're in one place, your home body. Are you missing out on your travel digital nomad independent life strategy?

Matt Bowles: I mean, I think it's always a balance, and I think I adjust my balance as well. Right. I'll give you an example.

In 2022, I spent about seven consecutive months on the continent, and I was adjusting the pace of my travel in terms of, like, the stuff that I was doing. So, I told you Kenya is, like, of my favorite countries. But other than going to Masai Mara once, I've never been outside of Nairobi. And I have all these friends telling me about all these other amazing places in Kenya. I've never been to the coast. So many amazing places in Kenya. I've never been there. I just stayed in Nairobi the whole time. It's not good. I don't want to go there. I hope eventually to get there, and I will certainly go back to Kenya again because it's amazing and I love it, and I certainly would like to see more of it. I just haven't yet seen more of it.

Now, when I was there in 2022, I went to Kenya for a month, followed by Tanzania for a month, and I went through Rwanda briefly in between there. But I was Kenya for a month, in Tanzania for a month. And I think I did. Maybe I did Tanzania first, but when I was in Tanzania, I ended up doing so much stuff, and I was moving around at a fast pace. Right?

So, for example, I went through Rwanda sort of quickly coming into Tanzania, and then when I got to Tanzania, I did a six-night hike to summit Mount Kilimanjaro. So that was like a week. And then I wanted to go and do the Ngorongoro crater and do a safari in the Serengeti, because I wasn't initially going to do that, but I was there with some digital nomad friends, and I was like, I've already had done a safari in Masai Mara. And they're like, yeah, but this, you get to see the Ngorongoro crater. We're going to do a hot air balloon. You're going to float over to Serengeti. It's a different experience. And I was like, all right, I'll do it.

So, for me, I'm doing Kilimanjaro. I'm doing the Serengeti, I'm doing this, and then I did Rwanda. I was kind of moving quickly through Rwanda. And so, then I was like, I have been moving around at such a fast pace. When I get to Nairobi, I literally don't want to move around for an entire month. I just want to live in Nairobi. I need a break from that fast travel pace. And so, for me, it varies. So, in some cases, in that most recent experience in Tanzania, and I've been to Tanzania before, I've been to Dar Salam, and Zanzibar and that kind of stuff.

So, this was my second time in Tanzania, and I had been moving around at such a faster pace that was like, okay, I'm going to slow down now. And in my Kenya month, even though I have friends that are going out to do all this epic stuff all around the country, I'm going to not go with them this month because I did go with

them last month and maybe I'll go with them again next month. And so, I think it all has to do for me with balancing the fact that travel is my life.

Living in these different places around the world is my life. It's not a vacation from my life, it is my life. And so, if it is your life, then you just simply need to balance how much do I want to be moving around at that pace and how much do I just want to live in my apartment and work during the day and, you know, see my friends in the evening for a drink or something and just live that lifestyle. And when you do that, you're doing it in some really epic and amazing country, but you're doing that instead of moving around. And I think for me, it's just, just a balance.

Ric Gazarian: Pick your favorite or best, traditional or typical digital nomad hub.

Matt Bowles: I don't know what you mean by traditional or typical. Exactly. That might be, I guess, subjective. And I guess it also depends on what you're looking for if you want to be surrounded. I think a lot of the time when people use that language, they want to be surrounded by other people who travel and who maybe are in the entrepreneur space in some capacity so that they can learn from other entrepreneurs and also engage with other travelers.

And so, if that's what we're talking about, I'm actually going to pick Nairobi because there's a lot of African digital nomads that are there, first of all, that travel around the continent. There are also a lot of entrepreneurs. It's also a tech hub is also like, if you're into any of that stuff, I would say if I wanted to be surrounded by entrepreneurs and that kind of stuff, I would say I'm going to pick and put people onto Nairobi.

Ric Gazarian: Matt, earlier you referenced recording for a podcast, so that might be a good segue to talk about The Maverick Show. And I was late to the party. As I mentioned to you, I just found out about your podcast a couple of months, and as you all also know, I've been binging through your library of different episodes. I think you're about to hit 300 episodes to provide some contrast. I'm at around 130, so you have a very deep library. It's a great podcast that's ranked in the top 1%. What's the theme or objective of your podcast with your guest? What's the deal?

Matt Bowles: So, it's called [The Maverick Show](#) with Matt Bowles, and the subtitle is Adventures in Remote Entrepreneurship and World Travel. And so, I am trying to interview the most interesting people that I can find that have thoughtful reflections, interesting experiences, and value to share. You have been one of the most recent guests on The Maverick Show, and of course, we have a lot of mutual friends, obviously, that have been on both my show and on your show. So, I think we have some overlap.

For me, I just started traveling the world because I wanted to live in different places around the world. I didn't have any intention of being a travel content creator of any kind. I just was running my business, and I wanted to live my life in different places around the world. I had no intention of documenting it at all. And to this day, I don't consider myself any kind of travel influencer. And until very recently, I didn't consider myself a travel content creator, although I've had enough people tell me now, dude, you host a podcast, and you interview travelers. That's travel content creation. I was like, oh, is it okay?

But basically, what happened is I just started finding myself in conversations with people all around the world, and we'd just be in these unbelievable places around the world, and I'd be having conversations with people, and I'll be like, what? And sometimes it would be traveling stories and travel experiences that people were telling me these stories, that I was just like, I want to record this. I want other people to be

able to hear this. And in other cases, it was people telling me how they created this lifestyle for themselves and how they built their remote business, oftentimes in a space that is not in any way traditionally a virtual category.

2016 I did a twelve month program called [Remote Year](#), which is a company that organizes twelve month long itineraries for remote professionals, and they facilitate your accommodations and your coworking space access and your flights so that you can live in a different city every month for twelve months and, you know, goes across four continents, and you travel with the same community for the entire year and you don't know anybody to begin with, right. But obviously, you become very close over the course of the year, and you go and have all these epic experiences together and do side trips and have all these amazing travel experiences.

And over the course of that year, you meet all these people, and you learn about them. The very first maverick show episode that I ever recorded ended up being number five in the publication schedule, but it was the first one I ever recorded was with Jen Magee, who was on my remote year program. And she was the founder and owner of an architectural design company. And her clients, like 400 to 500 clients like Barnes and Noble, and Sharper Image. And she won an award for designing the duty-free shops at JFK airport in New York City and all this kind of stuff. So, it's that caliber of a business that she owns and runs. And yet here she is on my program as a fully itinerant nomad, traveling the world full time with no base. And I'm like, what? How are you doing that?

And so, I was like, I want to understand how you built that and how you're running that and how you're living this lifestyle with that particular business. How about we get a bottle of wine, we go to the workspace after hours, we open the bottle of wine, and we just record a conversation, and you explain this? And so, she's like, sure. And so that was literally my first Maverick Show episode, my first Maverick Show interview episode #5. But then, you know, I told you about my first time in Nairobi in 2018. I was there, and I was meeting other travelers who were there. And I met this woman named Durajae Seeley, and she is African American from the U.S. And I said, oh, what do you do? And her business, she runs a live events business where all of the live events are in the United States, in different cities around the U.S.

And her customers, she gets over 100,000 paying customers, individual people that pay money to attend her live events per year. 100,000 paying customers a year attend live events in different places around the United States. She runs this business, and there she is sitting with me in Nairobi. We spent a month together in Nairobi, Kenya. And here she is running this live events business that's all of her customers and all of her events are in the United States. And I'm like, what? How are you doing that?

And so, I'm like, how about we record a podcast, and we'll talk about that, and we'll do it over a bottle of wine? And she's like, cool. And so, we did. So, it's a combination, I would say, of some discussion about remote entrepreneurship and how to build these location independent businesses and how to design these lifestyles. And then some is the travel centric stuff and where people have been and what experiences they've had and what types of thoughtful reflections they have as well about the power dynamics that shape our world and the experiences of people on different passports traveling through the world, or different identity dynamics and different experiences of different people moving through the world and that kind of stuff.

And so, it goes into all of those places. But I appreciate very much your kind words about the podcast, and if anybody is interested in checking it out, wherever you are listening to this podcast, you can just type in The Maverick Show with Mat Bowles and you can find it there and check it out.

Ric Gazarian: We'll also have a link in [the show notes](#). One thing that we also share in common, as we discovered, is we are both. What's the word I want to use? Overwhelmed with excitement in our side hustle, our podcast that you and I get to speak to some of the most interesting people in the world. And the platform just simply serves as a great catalyst to these amazing conversations.

Matt Bowles: 100%. Absolutely. It is amazing. We get to speak to the most interesting people every single week and draw out their experiences and their stories and then also their reflections on it, because I think we aim to interview thoughtful people as well that have thoughtful reflections on their own travels. And so, yeah, I think that both of our podcasts are super rich in that way, and I, as you know, have been binging through yours as well.

Ric Gazarian: Thank you, Matt. And speaking of great travel conversations, we have the [Extraordinary Travel Festival](#) November 15 in Bangkok, Thailand. I'm excited that you will be joining the group as a speaker and sharing your wisdom and knowledge of ten plus years of digital, independent, nomadic life with an extra dollop of these frontier locations that you've also spent time in. So, I think that's quite fascinating. So, we're excited to welcome, welcome you to Bangkok. What are your thoughts? You said you've been to Thailand before, but it's been a while. What's going on? Are you excited about this trip in November?

Matt Bowles: Super excited, first and foremost, to hang out with you in person. You have promised me, Ric, that you're going to take me out for the best caipirinha in Bangkok. So, I am looking forward to that, my friend, and connecting with you in person. Because as much as you and I have been virtually connecting, we have interviewed each other for podcasts. We have been texting each other on a very regular basis and connecting.

And I feel deeply connected with you at this point. You and I have never actually met in person, and so I am super excited for that. I am exceptionally excited to meet all of the amazing people in your community. I have interviewed on The Maverick Show a few of the other speakers that will be at the extraordinary travel fest, but I have not met the super majority of them, not just the speakers, but also the attendees who will be there. And I am super excited to meet everyone and connect with everyone and hang out with your community, man. And then, of course, it's always magical and wonderful to be in Thailand. So, I'm excited to be back in Thailand as well.

Ric Gazarian: And you keyed on one of the main rationales. I think we all go to these events, and that's the tribe, that's the community. And most people love interacting and socializing with other individuals. It makes it even better when you have a common passion. And of course, that passion for all of us is travel. And it's a great network and a great community. Instead of having these virtual relationships, you get to bring them into the real world and build up those bonds. Break bread. Have a drink, have a caipirinha, as you mentioned.

Matt, I want to thank you so much for joining me today, sharing your story, and I'm excited again to welcome you to Bangkok. Before we sign off, how do people stay in touch with you, Matt?

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I would love to connect with anybody that is interested in reaching out. I'm on [Instagram](#), my handle is at *mattbowlesmaverick*. So that's just at M-A-T-T-B-O-W-L-E-S-M-A-V-E-R-I-C-K. You can just follow me there, shoot me a direct message, say 'Hello'. Let me know if you heard me on the podcast. If you're coming to the event, definitely ping me. Let me know you're going to be there. We'd love to link up in person and would love to hear from folks before the event, so please do reach out.

And then, as I said, the podcast. Just wherever you're listening to this, just type in The Maverick Show with Matt Bowles and you can listen to it anywhere you get your podcast. And I would love your feedback on the show, to be honest. So, if you are able to listen to an episode, feel free to dm me on Instagram at *mattbowlesmaverick* and let me know what you think.

Ric Gazarian: Matt, thanks again. Really psyched. Looking forward to seeing you in person in November.

Matt Bowles: An honor to be invited to your event, my friend. Looking forward to it as well. See everybody there.

All right, I hope you enjoyed that episode. As usual, everything we have discussed will be in [the show notes](#), so you can just go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](#). Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode and there you will find direct links to everything mentioned in this episode. And if you enjoyed Ric's interview style, definitely check out his podcast, [CountingCountries](#). Wherever you are listening to this podcast right now, just type in Counting Countries and there you will find Ric's show where he interviews some of the most widely traveled people on the planet. And you can find some very interesting discussions about interesting places. And if you enjoy his show, please leave him a rating and review. He works very hard on the show and that really helps it out a lot.

Also, I am going to be a keynote speaker at Ric's conference, the *Extraordinary Travel Festival*. This only happens once every two years and it is happening in November 15 to 17th, 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand. So, if you can get there, you can meet me, you can meet Ric, you can meet some other Maverick Show guests, and you can meet a lot of very interesting world travelers, and you can get a special discount just for being a Maverick Show listener. So just go to [themavericshow.com/etf](#). That stands for extraordinary travel fest and then enter the code **Maverick** when you buy your ticket for your special discount. And then DM me on Instagram to let me know that you're coming so we can make plans to link up in person. You can dm me at [mattbowlesmaverick](#). You can also follow the podcast at [maverickshowpod](#) and dm me there as well. And I look forward to seeing you in Bangkok.

And with that, good night, everybody.