

INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Sibiu Szymanowska. If you have not yet listened to part one, I highly recommend you go back into that first. Cause it provides some really important context for this episode. If you already heard part one, then please enjoy the conclusion of my interview with Sibiu Szymanowska.

Matt Bowles: I also want to talk to you a little bit Sibiu about your digital nomad journey, you're travelling experiences and your brand [Go Global with Sibiu](#). Can you share a little bit about your transition into the digital nomad lifestyle.

We've been talking about a number of experiences where you have lived in different countries for longer termed days. And you also done the more itinerant lifestyle with no base more recently. And you have found some incredible ways to do that very inexpensive way. And I know that one of the things you do with your brand is you share some of those hacks, techniques, and ways that other people can do this kind of travel without breaking the bank.

So, I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about your experience and then maybe share some of the ways the other people can do this less expensively than they might be thinking.

Sibiu Szymanowska: I feel like I've done it all. I truly have. I've lived abroad, I've studied abroad, I've taken advantage of scholarships, travel opportunities, and this has nothing to do with me being a content creator, by the way. These are opportunities that are available to anybody listening to this.

You just have to know where to look for them. It's wild the amount of opportunities there are out there. And we are raised to think that travel is only for those who are rich and privileged, and it could not be further from the truth. And that's something, like I said, my parents, working class background, and I understand that I do have a lot of privilege with my passports and everything.

But at the end of the day, I grew up with this mentality of scarcity, right? But I come to realize that there are so many different ways in which you can travel and whether it's through cheap flights, house sitting, which I'm doing right now, by the way, so I'm staying in Switzerland, Switzerland, I'm staying in Geneva, one of the most expensive cities in the world, and I'm here for like 25, 26 days.

I looked up Airbnb's today, apartments, around \$2,500 for an apartment. I'm staying in a house with a gym and a pool. So, it's not \$2,500, let's probably assume it's \$4,000 or \$5,000 for the whole time I'm staying here. Free, entirely for free, and they stocked up my fridge before they left.

Life is wild. And there are so many different things that you can do. You can study for free. And you do not need to have an amazing GP air like incredible record. You could live abroad if you wanted to. You could get a job abroad. There's a million ways in which you can travel, and I would like to think that I've basically explored most of them and that's what I share on my page, on my page [Go Global with Sibiu](#).

So, I share travel tips about all the different things that I've done, and I also share videos about the different places that I visit, which are a little bit more off the beaten path, where I like to think that I'm helping break stereotypes and showing you places that you might have never thought of visiting before.

Matt Bowles: Well, let's talk about some of those places you did an overland trip in Africa for 3 months across 9 countries. Can you take us back to that trip and share a little bit just for folks in terms of how you conceptualize it. What the plan was because you did all by public transportation. What the route was. And then, take us on that trip with you. Share a little bit about what you experienced.

Sibu Szymanowska: One of my dreams had always been to go to Cape Town to Cairo. So, basically South Africa to Egypt. So, from North to South. However, due to the current situation of Sudan and Northern Ethiopia that's impossible. So, I figured I would do half of it. So, I basically did half of uh, I mean not half because Africa has 54 countries, but I did a trunk of it.

From Southern Africa to East Africa. So, I flew out to Namibia. No plans whatsoever. I just figured I would find my way once I got there. I knew it was safe. At this point I don't plan anything. If you're traveling full-time, you're not going to have a set of itineraries every single day. That's absolutely exhausting. So, go with the flow. Hope for the best. And honestly, that's for me at least I'm a privileged physician because I have all the time in the world to be able to travel like that. I understand that if you only have a week or two, you need to have a set of itineraries, but you have a more time don't set an itinerary. Just go with the flow. See who you meet.

So, my way of traveling now is I basically just book a place for about 2 to 3 days, and I take it from there. If I like it, I stay longer and if I don't, I'll ask locals and or travelers about what to do, where to go and what to see. And then I'll take it from there.

So, I started in Namibia, spent a few weeks there. Met locals to travel with because in Namibia you need a car. It's the kind of destination where you need a car. I do not drive. So, I have to get together with other people to be able to split the cost. And from there, I was there for a few weeks, made my way down to Cape Town, and Cape Town made up with a friend, another content creator. And then from Cape Town, we went by land, all using public transportation through Lesotho, Eswatini, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, all the way to Tanzania.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. And what was the trip like? When you were doing that overland public transportation trip, what were some of the most memorable moments or highlights or things you can share from that experience?

Sibu Szymanowska: If you're listening to this, forget about European summer. Go down South. Go to the Southern Hemisphere. Yes, it's winter. It gets a bit chilly at night. There might be days in which it might rain a bit, but overall, it's a great, great time to be down there because it is not peak season yet. Peak season usually starts around late July, early August, but we were pretty much able to avoid most of the crowds.

The experiences were fascinating. I was in the desert in Namibia, and then I was having the most amazing food in Cape Town in South Africa. And then I went skiing, skiing in Lesotho, which is the highest elevation in the world, you know.

So, I went from the desert to skiing in Lesotho, and then from there we spent time in Botswana, where I've been in safaris, I think in maybe six or seven countries, and Botswana was by far the best country where I've ever done a safari. It was the amount of wildlife that was there was wild. Meeting up with friends in Zambia, friends that I hadn't seen in a while from Zambia. Oh, I forgot Malawi.

We also visited Malawi. In Tanzania, we took a train. It's a 28-hour train from the southern part of the country all the way to Dar es Salaam. So just so many different experiences. It's all very well documented. If you want to look at my website, my social media, I even have a couple of blog articles on the exact route, how much we paid and how you can do it too.

So, Africa, I'm going to generalize here. Northern Africa is different, but the rest of Africa can be expensive. It's not that it's expensive for locals, but it's expensive as a tourist because there is very little tourist infrastructure. So, it can be very expensive, unfortunately. But we managed to make it work. It wasn't about doing it on a budget. It was basically about not flying and not renting cars. And the only way to do that was basically by going by public transportation. Very safe.

Even locals were telling us that we were crazy to be doing this. But no, the only time where we ever felt a bit wary was in Johannesburg. On that side, people were taking care of us left and right, making sure that we made it to our next destination. They were so happy to see foreigners actually taking public transportation with them, because obviously we were the only ones.

Matt Bowles: Well, another destination that I want to ask you about, which is super high on my list, I have not yet been, is Pakistan. I know you have been a couple times. I'm wondering if you can share your first experience traveling to Pakistan, where you went and what it was like.

Sibu Szymanowska: Surprisingly, I've been to Pakistan, and I've only ever been to the cities. I haven't made it to the North, which is the most beautiful part of the country, and I will, I will for a fact. But over the years, I've met so many Pakistanis, whether it's traveling in the cities I was living in, through youth conferences. And so, I knew it was a matter of time before I made it to Pakistan.

And so, I finally went, and I met up with all my friends who were there, and we had such an amazing time. They were showing me around. So, it was basically didn't feel like I was sightseeing. It just felt like friends welcoming me into their world. And that's what the first time going into Pakistan was like. We will be obviously, since my co-founder is Pakistani of origin, we will be and we're working on it.

We will be hosting a Pakistan trip next year and what we'll be focusing on. There might be a few festivals involved, festivals that people have never heard of, but that's, we're going to leave that as a surprise. However, we will be covering partition, how the British came colonized and basically drew a random line through the countries.

And there are many reasons, of course, but one of the main reasons is colonization. And if you're listening to this, India and Pakistan have basically, even though they're neighbors and they have so much in common, they have no diplomatic relations whatsoever. And so, we'll be learning more about that through our [Hybrid Tour](#).

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to go to Pakistan. I may actually be on this particular tour. We shall see if I can align the timing because I saw what you're planning to do and I was like, ooh, I would really love, obviously, to experience Pakistan in general and then to experience it with you, Hira, and the amazing humans that come on your trip would be incredibly special.

Actually, at this point, Sibu, can you just share a little bit for folks that would like to learn more about what your upcoming itineraries are, what the dates are, take a look at the itineraries and stuff like that, where they can go and do that. And if they're a Maverick Show listener, can they get a special discount?

Sibu Szymanowska: Oh, yes, they can. So, the interesting thing about the way that we work is that we're not just setting up itineraries. We're actually going to the country, we're meeting with our vendors, we're meeting with everybody on the ground.

So, this takes time. It's not as easy as just launching a trip in a new destination. So, we want to make sure that everything's perfect on the ground. The most important thing is that every single one of our itineraries is unique. And by unique, I mean that no other company out there is offering what we're offering. Our itineraries are 100% unique, and we work with locals to make sure that that's happening.

It's not just about us thinking, okay, these are the pretty places that people want to visit in Bosnia. No, we work with locals so they can carry the itineraries with us so that they can show different parts of the country that they believe are being ignored and should get more attention. So that's basically what we're doing in Jordan, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and what we'll be doing in our other destinations.

So again, a mix of fun, because it's not just learning, right? We want to have fun. Like, we'll go on. If you're a foodie, please, by all means, my co-founder and I, we're big foodies. All we talk about is food, so come join us. Lots of focus on food, but you know, just having fun, going outside, seeing the country, seeing everything that it has to offer.

But every day or every other day, we're also going to meet with locals and we're going to hear about their stories and about what things are like on the ground, you know. So, we are trying to bring in that perfect balance. That's why we call it a [Hybrid Tour](#). And we came to realize that the only way that you can book something relatively similar to what we're doing is if you're a researcher, an academic, if you're studying, I went to Jordan for my master's degree, you mentioned that you were also traveling for yours.

So, these are trips that are usually exclusive to people who are traveling, who work in think tanks, who are already in the field. But what about the rest of us who have an interest in actually learning about these issues on the ground and supporting locals? That's who our tours are for.

So, if you're interested in human rights, but you also want to have a good time doing so, then yes, I'd highly, highly recommend you go. You join us. It's the perfect combination. And we're really, really proud of the itineraries that we've come up with so far. So, we'll be working in Pakistan soon. And another destination that we're working on launching for next year, should be out soon, but it's going to be for summer 2025, Armenian, Georgia. So, combining the two.

Matt Bowles: And where can people go to see the specific dates, see the specific itineraries, register to join a trip, and how can they get a special discount?

Sibu Szymanowska: So, all you have to do is go to thehybridtours.com. You can follow us on social media as well, even on [LinkedIn](#). And if you're signing up for one of the tours, you can either use the code **Maverick100** so you can get \$100 off, or for any reason the code is not working, just put it up on a little note and our team will make sure to process it manually. So, if you're listening to this, you're more than welcome. You'll be covered, don't worry, when it comes to that discount.

Matt Bowles: We will link all that up in [the show notes](#) as well, folks. As always, you can just go to themaverickshow.com, go to the show notes for this episode, and there you're going to see the direct links for how to check out all of the upcoming hybrid tours and see the detailed itineraries and dates, as well as how to get your special Maverick Show discount.

Sibu, another traveling experience that I have to ask you about is your choice to go to Afghanistan. And I want to see if you can take us through the decision to go to Afghanistan, what the experience was like getting the visa and getting into Afghanistan, and then what you experienced on the ground.

Sibu Szymanowska: Afghanistan has really changed. So, I'm sure that I was one of the first people to go after the Taliban took over, probably among the first three groups to make it into the country. I normally, yes, I joined trips every now and then. I might travel solo, but this was obviously one destination where I felt like I needed to go as part of a group for safety reasons.

So, among the first three groups to make it into the country. And I knew that if I went to Pakistan, I needed to try to get into Afghanistan. Now, as someone who's always been fascinated by the world, obviously from the Western media, we've heard a lot about Afghanistan. But the funny thing, and this is a little, I don't know if you've ever realized that whenever you're scrolling through a list of countries and you have to choose your country code, Afghanistan is usually the first country to pop up on the list because alphabetically it's the first country, right, AF.

And so, I've always known about Afghanistan, even as a child, because it was the first country on my encyclopedia. It was always there, Afghanistan. And so, from a human rights perspective, I didn't know what to think. I also wasn't sure who I was going to be supporting, you know, like what's going to happen? I was a little wary, but I knew that I needed to go.

The opportunity just came out of nowhere and I saw this group that had perfect dates from the time I was going to be in Pakistan. So, I went all dressed in a black abaya and hijab. They're very strict, so I had to even use pins to make sure that my neck wasn't showing, and I went all dressed and asked for a visa with the documents that I had from the travel agency that I was going to be going with. And they were fascinated. They were like, are you Muslim? Why are you dressed this way?

I was like, "No, I'm not Muslim. I'm just here to show you that I will be respecting your traditions, culture, and your current policies", because they're quite strict. And I just want to go and see the country. And of course, they had a lot of questions for me. Why are you going? Why are you interested?

They do not under any circumstances want to hear that you're a content creator. So obviously, that's not something I brought up. So, I just said, "Okay, these are the different sites that I'm interested in, please let me go in". So, I went first thing in the morning, I had a bunch of interviews, it was pretty nerve wracking, because I just went on my own.

And it was just all these men asking, like drilling me with questions about Pakistan, about the political situation about how much I paid. And then finally they said, okay, come in the afternoon and we'll give you a visa. So, the visa was issued. I paid a little bit extra, \$50, and the visa was expedited. And so, I flew to Kabul. And then in Kabul, I was picked up and that's where my journey started. And Afghanistan is, it's really interesting because we always have this black and white perception, because that's the way we've been brought up. That's how our reasoning works.

There is nothing black and white about Afghanistan. There truly isn't. And so, we think, okay, Taliban bad. I'm not in any way condoning the Taliban or what they're doing or the policies that are in place. However, there's a really big struggle of power happening right now between the older and the newer generations, where the older generations want to, you know, catch up with times and just be as modern as humanly possible while respecting their local culture.

One thing that everybody will agree on is that they do want more tourism. And so I was actually in a group, half of the people in my group were from the U.S. and the other half were European, and in no moment did anybody ever question or even make us feel unsafe, despite the fact that there were Americans in our

group. The interesting thing about countries that are lesser known or visited is that people have a very good awareness of the fact that politicians and governments do not equal their population.

So, people in Afghanistan understand, I'm not saying everybody, but most of the population understand that just because the U.S. was there, that doesn't mean that every single American that they will encounter supports that. And most importantly, I think there's this fascination in many countries around the world with the U.S. because of the movies, because of the music industry and Hollywood, you know, so a lot of people are genuinely curious about what the U.S. is like. So, you'll be met with more curiosity than you will with animosity, for example.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about some of the things that you saw, ranging from landscape to the Blue Mosque? Like, can you just give folks a sense of what the experience is like there in Afghanistan?

Sibu Szymanowska: The first thing that comes to mind is diversity. I don't think I'd ever been in such a diverse country before. And by diverse, I don't mean people like migrants. I mean people who are actively native to the region. So, you could have a redhead from Ireland, and he could be Afghan. You could have someone from Japan, and they could be Afghan.

You could have someone from South Asia, and they could be Afghan. Beautiful. Like, so much diversity. It was fascinating to see. Now, there weren't many women on the streets, but with the men you could truly see that diversity.

The landscapes absolutely stunning. The history, I mean, you know, the Silk Road. So many things happened in Afghanistan. The food was incredible. But it was just the curiosity in people, you know, meeting with locals and them being in shock, like, wow, we're getting tourists.

We're actually getting tourists. And so, what people need to understand is that we spoke with locals, and they were like, oh, yeah, from 1979, we've been bombed on a regular basis. Now that the Taliban has taken over, we get bombed maybe once or twice a month.

We're actually getting tourists. And so, what people need to understand is that we spoke with locals, and they were like, oh, yeah, from 1979, we've been bombed on a regular basis. Now that the Taliban has taken over, we get bombed maybe once or twice a month.

And we also met with many people who did not agree with what the Taliban was doing, but there were no other means of employment, and so they were working with them and even taking their girls, because women are not allowed to get any kind of education after the age of 12, which I completely obviously do not condone. But people working for the Taliban who were actively enrolling their girls through online schools, so people working for them but at the same time opposing them.

And so, it's not that it's a matter of good and bad, it's just a matter of the Taliban no longer has anybody to fight. And that's why it's become so much safer. So now you couldn't even drive from Kabul all the way to where the Buddhas are, the Bamiyan Buddhas are, or to where this, I don't know if you've ever seen this crystal clear, beautiful lake that's the Bande Amir. You couldn't even drive there. It was a six-hour drive. You could not drive there because of how dangerous it was. You can know.

So, the country has truly opened up, and that's why I say it's not a black and white situation. In many ways, it's safer, but that has come at a price in which human rights have been completely obliterated, especially for women.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about how your interaction with local people was? What was the dynamic in terms of being able to get into these conversations with people that had these different perspectives and also with regard to the gender segregated spaces, were you as a foreign woman able to interact with any Afghan women in female spaces or what was that dynamic like?

Sibu Szymanowska: The only Afghan women I was able to interact with was the one sitting on the plane next to me on the way to Kabul. I think had I been traveling with a female guide and only with women, I think my experience would have been very different. That's what actually happened to me in Syria. I had a female guide, female driver, and a female companion, and our experience was completely different from anybody else's that I've ever heard of.

That was not the case in Afghanistan because, of course, it was a mixed gender group, so we mostly spoke to men, but we spoke with people from all backgrounds, basically, so it was interesting to see how the country was changing. One funny story that I have for you is that we were riding the duckies in the Band-e Amir Lake and there are stones, right?

And if you go behind the stones, there's a lot of people also peddling there, but they're not being supervised by the Taliban. And we came across a little boat that had maybe four or five men and they were getting high. They had a bomb, and they were getting high, and they were taking pictures with us, they were super happy to see us, they were like, oh my god your tourists.

The reason I'm telling you this story is because they were like, oh yeah, we know the Taliban doesn't agree with this but we're going to do it anyway and they were singing and dancing and playing music. These are all things that are completely forbidden. People will go out of their way to do things whether you want them to or not. So yes, the Taliban has completely restricted people's lives, but the locals will always find a way, like these men who are actively enrolling their girls in online schools, people will always find a way to oppose the local government, especially if the government is not, in this case, the regime, is not acting in favor of their citizens.

Matt Bowles: Well, you mentioned Syria. I also want to talk to you about the Middle East. I know you have a really deep love for the Middle East, as do I. And I think I want to start with Lebanon. We both have a super profound appreciation for Beirut and for Lebanon. I know we both have a lot of Lebanese friends. So can you share a little bit, first of all, about what you love about Lebanon?

Sibu Szymanowska: Lebanon is tiny. Lebanon can be driven from north to south in three hours, and yet it has so much to offer. Do you want Roman ruins without the crowds? Please go to Lebanon. Do you want vineyards? I remember I went to a wine tasting event, six, seven euros for a proper wine tasting event at a really nice chateau. Six, seven euros, go to Lebanon. Nightclub scene, incredible. Lebanese food is very well known all around the world.

And I thought it was good. I always thought it was good. And then I went to Lebanon, and I just died. I absolutely died and I went to heaven. People, incredibly friendly. And it's really interesting because Lebanon has gone through so much over the last couple of years. And I've been in countries where after a crisis, you can feel the sadness in the population, right?

You can feel, it's not that they're not welcoming, but maybe they're not as open or friendly or warm-hearted as they normally are. I did not in anyway feel that in Lebanon, despite the fact that they've gone through so much. We felt completely, completely welcomed. And then I was there on my own, so I was traveling with

a friend and then my friend left, and I was there on my own. And I want to highlight this, that I've been to many countries in the Middle East on my own. Me, a solo female traveler, on my own. I did not speak any Arabic. And I felt safer in the Middle East than I have in many parts of North America in Europe, for example.

There's just so much prejudice and misconceptions against this region and people truly need to go there to understand what it's really like.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, shout out to the Lebanese people, huge love. I also want to ask about that Syria trip. Can you talk about how the Syria trip came about and then what your experience was like in Syria, particularly in the situation that you were describing.

Sibu Szymanowska: So, for Syria, Afghanistan, you can travel on your own. You could travel on your own then, you could travel on your own now, and it's really opening up to tourism. So, the Afghanistan I experienced in 2022, in late 2022, is very different from the Afghanistan that is happening as of right now. It's really opening up to tourism.

But Syria, on the other hand, you need a guide. You cannot travel on your own by any means. You just cannot. You need to have a guide with you at all times. You can either hire a guide, a registered licensed guide that will help you with the paperwork for the visa, or you go with a travel agency. And I knew that if I was in Lebanon, I knew that I needed to make my way to Syria. I just knew that it needed to happen. And a friend gave me a contact for an agency, and I also didn't want to go alone because that meant more cost.

And I found this woman, a Slovakian woman, who really wanted to go. But the funny thing about this Slovakian woman is that her aunt had married a Syrian man in the late 70s, if I'm not mistaken. So, she had half Syrian cousins growing up, half Slovak, half Syrian cousins growing up. And she even spoke the Arabic, the Syrian dialect, not super fluent, but she spoke it. And she knew that she needed to go to Syria.

She'd been trying to go for a year. So, we somehow connected over a group on WhatsApp. She saw my dates and she was like, look, I'm in Slovakia. I'm willing to fly out. We jump on a call. And then she says, "I have something to tell you". We're getting along. It's obviously if you're going to Syria, I think it's very different going to Barcelona than it is going to Syria. Of course, I'm not just going to go with someone who has no travel experience whatsoever, right?

It needs to be someone who is a seasoned traveler because it is a risky country after all. So, we jumped on a call to make sure that we vibed. She told me about all her travel experiences. I mean, the fact that she spoke Arabic already was a plus. I knew that she had experience in the region, but she tells me that she has something to tell me.

She wasn't sure if I was going to be okay with it and I was like what's going on we're doing a video call she stands up and she says and I can see her whole body and she says I'm pregnant and I'm like okay she was like look but it's not showing please let's go together and I was like okay but like I mean we're not going now we're going in a while how is this going to pan out are you going to be okay she was like yeah it'll be fine it'll be fine. It'll be fine. Like, I really need to go to Syria. I need to connect with this part of the family before my baby's born because I don't know if I'll get a chance. Anyway, I say yes.

We arranged the whole thing. We both got picked up in Beirut. She's already in the van because we're staying in different locations. I jump in the van, and I look at her and her belly is huge. And I'm like, what is

happening here? She was like, I'm sorry, she's actually apologizing. She was like, it grew a lot since the video call. I don't know what you want me to say. That worked in our favor. Because imagine traveling with a woman who's visibly pregnant in Syria. I mean, our experience was, and I think the company that we used, since we were two women, they went out of their way to choose a female driver and a female guide for us.

So that means we were four women traveling around the country, and our experience was completely different. But the beautiful thing about that trip, yeah, sure, we got to sightsee and get to know the country, et cetera. But the beautiful thing about that was that she wanted to connect with her part of the family. So, she had pictures from the 70s and 80s, different places that her family had taken pictures.

We were looking for these places, trying to recreate the pictures of her with her baby, her unborn baby, like the next generation of the family in Syria. And we also got to meet with some family members of hers, which we had a hard time finding, but we eventually found them, and we met up with them as well. We had to ask for permission over and over again from our guide because they were like, you're not allowed to be on your own. You're just not.

And we were like, please let us meet with this family. And eventually it happened. But in theory, you're not meant to be left alone at all in Syria. So, it was a beautiful experience. And it was that much more beautiful because we're family history. So, I was just there for the ride, basically.

Matt Bowles: That's so amazing. Well, one more place that I want to ask you about is your experience on the Yemeni island of Socotra. Can you share a little bit for people that have never heard of this island and are not familiar with why it is so unique and extraordinary? What is so special about the island of Socotra and what was your experience like there?

Sibu Szymanowska: There are places around the world like Galapagos and Madagascar that are completely, completely unique in terms of nature because of evolution, because of the way that they've grown and developed, right? And so, this island off the coast of Yemen and Somalia is exactly like that. And they refer to this island as the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean. And so, this island belongs to Yemen. It is part of Yemen.

And if you look up Yemen, it'll specifically say, do not under any circumstances go to Yemen. However, Socotra is governed by the UAE. So, despite the fact that it is Yemen, and you do need a Yemeni visa, you do not even need to fly into Yemen to go to Socotra.

There are direct flights from the UAE, from Abu Dhabi into Socotra. However, this island limited flights two to three times per week. These flights cannot be bought online, and it's only run by one airline. So, it's very, very controlled up to, as of right now, they're usually around 3000 tourists going to this island every year. 3000 tourists, that's nothing. The flight has a set cost, it's \$960 round trip. You cannot bargain, you cannot use points, nothing.

This is the sad price end of the story. And these are humanitarian flights. These flights, they're in place for actual Yemenis in Socotra to go back and forth from the UAE to Socotra. But sometimes they have empty seats. And so, you contact the local agency, you say you want to go on a tour, and they'll book the seat for you, and you'll just handle the payment directly with them. You cannot travel independently in Socotra. And I would not recommend it anyway. I mean, there is very, very little infrastructure.

So, if you think you can rough it up for a week, no glamping, actual camping, one week, in one of the most beautiful, diverse places in the world when it comes to nature, then I would highly recommend it. And even if you can't, rough it anyway because there are very, very few places in the world like Socotra. And I was there just recently in March during the blooming season, spring.

And so, to see the blooming trees everywhere, I mean, I was hugging trees. Everybody was taking pictures and hugging trees. Like I have never seen the – some people described it as AI. That's the way I like to describe Socotra. It's like an island made by artificial intelligence. Some people like to say that it looks like something out of a Dr. Seuss book. It is incredible, incredible. People are super friendly, very welcoming.

And you normally go for a week. You can stay longer, but because of the flights, if you land on a Tuesday, you leave on a Tuesday. It is an absolutely incredible experience. It is a pricey experience because you have to fly all the way to Abu Dhabi and then from there take the \$1,000 flight basically all the way there. I went for work, which was very lucky. I was there leading a team.

I work as an international, one of my many gigs, I work as an international guide. So, what that means is that I work with local guides. Travel companies hire me to work with local guides to make sure that everything's running smoothly in terms of logistics and customer service. And in the case of Socotra, making sure that everybody was doing well because it's such a remote island, right? Yeah, that's one of my many jobs.

And I'm very grateful because I got to go to Socotra. Highly recommend it. Again, I have resources on my website. And if anybody has any questions, you are more than welcome to reach out to me, more than happy to help.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, if folks are not familiar with Socotra, I have not yet been, but just do a Google image search and see some of this incredibly unique foliage that grows no other place in the world besides this one island and just take a look at it. It has been super high on my list for many years and I'm still excited to go see it.

The other thing I want to ask you about is your passion for language learning. speak five languages fluently, and I know you're planning to learn more and all of that. I'm curious if you can share a little bit about your language learning technique and for people that would like to, in their travels, get more proficient at the languages and the places where they're spending time, any tips that you might have for folks?

Sibu Szymanowska: I have plenty of tips. I feel like everybody has different ways of learning. I know people who have picked up Korean from K-pop or Korean dramas, right? That is not me, by the way. I don't think that most people's brains function like that. That is absolutely impressive. Personally, I am a big fan of free apps, and I think Duolingo is amazing, but if you really want to take your language to the next level, I would not under any circumstances recommend Duolingo. I think it's a great app considering it's free, like I said, but if you want to take it up a notch, I personally recommend Babbel. That's B-A-B-B-E-L. They only have Turkish, and I think Bahasa when it comes to non-European languages, but that's pretty much what really helped me.

So, I was learning German in Germany, but I really needed help and so that's basically what helped catapult my German. And so, for example, with Spanish, they have Latino Spanish, they have Spanish from Spain. Apps are really good way. There's also Preply, p-r-e-p-l-y.com, where you can actually pay to talk to people in the language that you're learning. That's something I also highly recommend. And if you have the

time, if you're single, if you don't have too many responsibilities, take time off to learn the language. So, for example, in Poland, there are summer courses where you can go to Poland for two to four weeks and actually just enroll in a Polish course for 20, 30 hours every week.

There are so many different countries around the world that offer these kinds of programs. This is my favorite way of learning languages. And I know it's a privileged thing to do to be able to take time off, but if you're really, truly passionate about a language, take time off, go spend some time in that country. Like if you wanted to go to Spain, if you wanted to go to Mexico, please do. If you manage to do so, please do.

It will really, really help your language. And if you even want to take a gap year, there are plenty of language courses around the world. So, what you do is basically enroll in a course that's recognized by the government or by a university, and you'll be granted a visa. So, I can go to Berlin and pay for a six-month language course, and I'll be granted a six-month language visa, which will allow me to work part-time. And this is a travel hack that most people don't know about. So, I could actually just go to Berlin, study the language 20 hours per week, and the other 20 hours I could actually be working. Or you could even work online.

This is one of my favorite ways to travel and to actually immerse myself in the language. So as of right now, yes, I speak five. I studied even more languages. The only languages that I consider myself good at and fluent at are the countries where I've actually lived in. I've studied even more languages than that. But as of right now, I want to learn Arabic and I know my way of learning.

My way of learning means that I have to go to the country. So, in September, I'm going to enroll myself in a course in a month, in an Arabic course, and just stay a month, two, three, and just enroll myself in a language course, 20, 30 hours per week, and then work the rest of the time online. And that's the way to do it, at least for me.

But those are the resources that I'd highly recommend. And last but not least, practice, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. I would say that's the biggest thing.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. Sibü, when you think back on all of the travel that you have done up to this point in your life, how do you think all of that travel has impacted you as a person?

Sibü Szymanowska: I've come to realize that there's so much I don't know about. There's so much I have yet to learn. And that's absolutely beautiful because I see the world as a classroom, a massive classroom, a self-declared geek. I cannot wait to go out into the world and continue learning about it, whether it's through other people, whether it's through me visiting different countries around the world.

I know this sounds cheesy, but I truly believe the world would be a better place if we all traveled more. And that's part of the reason why I'm so passionate about sharing travel tips through my content, because I've learned many different ways of traveling over the years.

And I want to make sure that I don't keep any of that information and I'm able to share it. And most importantly, a lot of the information I share can actually be used by people of all nationalities. And that's something that's very important to me because most of the travel content and travel tips that we see on social media are specifically catering to people from the global north, from North America, Europe, maybe Australia, New Zealand. But I wanna make sure that what I share is actually applicable to anybody who's watching my content no matter what their nationality is.

Matt Bowles: I also want to ask about your reflections on increasingly conscious and ethical travel and how we as travelers can be and make more thoughtful decisions as we move through this world. Any tips that you may have?

Sibu Szymanowska: This is a very unpopular opinion, but I would say don't go where everybody else is going. We've seen all the massive protests going on, Spain, Italy, France, Japan as of recently, Croatia is really struggling right now. I don't think- they're protesting, but they're really struggling at the moment. Amsterdam, these are just a few examples of the places that are truly on the verge of collapse. And by collapse, I mean in terms of resources.

We think, oh, wait, what do you mean resources? I can still visit. I mean, resources for locals, right? Because they're the ones who still live there. You come and go for three days, but they're the ones who have to put up with the consequences of our visits.

So, one of my best travel hacks, something that I highly recommend when it comes to being ethical is just be flexible and don't go where everybody else goes. You will get a chance to go there, but then if you do, please go during shoulder season or even low season as someone who's been working in the travel industry.

So, I started working as a tour guide in 2006, another one of my gigs when I was in China, and I've been doing it on and off for almost 20 years now. If there's something I've seen in the travel industry, is that more and more destinations are slowly becoming more popular.

I remember 10 years ago, nobody wanted to go to Croatia. People would laugh in your face if you said you wanted to go to Croatia because they said, why go to Croatia when you can go to Spain or Italy? And now everybody's dying to go to Croatia, you know. And now Croatia is completely burdened by the fact that there's so many tourists.

Albania is on the radar right now. Montenegro is slowly picking up. And you can see this with so many destinations around the world.

I can assure you that there are so many places out there that are yet to be discovered by the mainstream media. So, my suggestion to you is go see them before everybody else does, because I can assure you there's beauty everywhere to be found. You just have to think outside of the box.

Matt Bowles: Sibu, you have been traveling the world now for almost 20 years. Why do you continue to travel? What does travel mean to you today?

Sibu Szymanowska: Travel is, like I said, an eternal classroom. I cannot get enough of it. Even though my body sometimes objects against me traveling so much, my mind just cannot get enough of it. And I feel the adrenaline rush every time I go somewhere new. I understand.

At this point, it's become an addiction. But I don't see it as a negative addiction, because I learned so much through it. And I just cannot get enough of the world.

And at this point, yes, I have no idea if I want to settle down somewhere, if I'll ever settle down, and if that's the case, where, because there's so many different choices and there's so many places that I have yet to see. But I just want to keep exploring the world. And the more I see, the more I want to see, and the more I keep adding places to my never-ending list of things to do and places to visit and people to meet.

And I think something that really excites me is I think about all the people that I have yet to meet and connect with. That's the beauty of traveling. And that's something that we're also trying to enable with our company as well.

Yeah, I'm obsessed. I'm obsessed. And I live in a world where I was somehow able to combine two of my biggest passions, travel and human rights, and make it into a company.

So, I'm happy the way things are going. Sure, like I said, my body could use a break. But as long as I can, I'll definitely keep going.

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

Sibu Szymanowska: Oh, let's see if I'm ready. Okay, yes.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. All right, what is one book that you would recommend that people should read?

Sibu Szymanowska: The Alchemist. Cheesy, but it's just right. Follow your heart, follow your dreams, you'll get there. Don't give up.

Matt Bowles: All right, what is one travel hack that you use that you would recommend to people?

Sibu Szymanowska: Flexibility. Just let Kiwi, Skyscanner, Google Flights, choose the anywhere option and let it lead the way. Let the algorithm surprise you. You won't be disappointed, I promise.

Matt Bowles: All right, who is one person currently alive today that you've never met that you would most love to have dinner with? Just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation

Sibu Szymanowska: I really want to meet Trevor Noah. I think he's a fascinating, incredibly smart man. And I love how he combines comedy with awareness, racing and educating the world. And I've read his book as well.

And I think he's a fascinating man. So yes.

Matt Bowles: It's a great pick. That would be an amazing dinner.

All right, Sibü, knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Sibü?

Sibu Szymanowska: Be yourself. Trust the process.

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

Sibu Szymanowska: Lebanon, Nicaragua, Pakistan.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, Sibü, what are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you have not yet been highest on your list. You'd most love to see.

Sibu Szymanowska: Bhutan, Madagascar, Kiribati.

Matt Bowles: All right, Sibü, at this point, I want you to let folks know how they can find you, follow you on social media, check out Go Global with Sibü and learn more about the [Hybrid Tours](#). How do you want people to come into your world?

Sibü Szymanowska: Hi. Yes. So, if you want to follow along on all social media channels, it's goglobalwithsibu.com. I highly suggest you sign up for my [newsletter](#).

It's a free newsletter that I release on the 1st and 15th of every month, where I actually share the free travel opportunities. So, I've been to around 100 countries, but 10 of those countries I went to entirely for free. And that's because I'm really good at finding travel opportunities.

So, at this point, like I said, I don't gatekeep. So, every time I find an opportunity, and these are available to people all over the world, I specifically say whether or not you're eligible for it, depending on your nationality. So, I list them all up and anybody can apply.

And my suggestion to you is no imposter syndrome, apply anyway. You'll never know when you might actually get that. Yes.

And that's something that I've learned over the years with jobs, with travel opportunities. So, sign up for my [newsletter](#). I highly recommend it.

Come follow along as I continue traveling around the world on more adventures. And if you ever wanted to join us on a [Hybrid Tour](#), you're more than welcome to. And like I said before, you have an exclusive discount, **Maverick100**.

And if it's not applicable, write it as a note. I'll make sure to add it manually.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. We are going to link all of that up in the show notes. So just go to one place at themaverickshow.com. Go to [the show notes](#) for this episode. There you're going to find all of the direct social media handles for how to follow Sibü and the hybrid tours and go to the site and see the trips and sign up. And all of that will be in one place.

Sibü, this was amazing. Thank you so much for coming to the show.

Sibü Szymanowska: Thank you so much for having me. It's been an absolute honor since I love your podcast. And yeah, I'll see you somewhere around the world, hopefully in person.

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