

**INTRO:** This is part three of my interview with Youshita Fathi. If you have not yet listen to [part one](#) and [two](#), I highly recommend you go back and do that first because they provide some really important context for this episode. If you have already listened to [part one](#) and [part two](#), then please enjoy the conclusion of my interview with Yuoshita Fathi.

**Matt Bowles:** So, I of course want to ask you about your experience going back to Iran on this particular trip. But I feel like it would be good to start a little bit earlier and just talk about your connection with Iran since leaving at age 13.

**Youshita Fathi:** Yeah, absolutely. So, the truth is, I never wanted to leave Iran. When we left initially, I was very much against this decision. I was telling my parents I want to stay here. I love the life that we have. We did have a quite comfortable life, and I had a lot of friends, a lot of cousins, and I had just painted out my future at that age. And I knew I wanted to stay here and maybe at a later age I would move out. But I didn't want to leave.

I was always a little bit angry at my parents that they did this to me and left the place that I felt so comfortable with and that I loved so much. So, I couldn't wait to go back. And when we left Iran, because of the love I had to the country. I stayed very connected to everything in Iran. So, I kept following any news related to Iran. I was listening to the music coming out of Iran. I was watching all the movies coming out, watching anything related to the singers, to the actors, to how people speak, and just being very connected to what's happening. Being connected to my friends from childhood.

And I couldn't wait to go back. And it just took 10 years to have this opportunity. I went back alone, by myself, and the moment I landed in Iran, my heart was racing, and I was like, oh, my God, how is it going to be? I don't want to leave this country again. I would seriously think about staying and not going back. I did have a great time going back and seeing my family and everyone, and I love this country a lot. But I could see once I had this gap of 10 years and going back and seeing the differences to where I live now and just the enormous lack of freedom for the most simple things that impact your daily life on a constant basis. Seeing all of that and how people at my age, what they have to go through and how much of restrictions they have.

Simple things of downloading an application in your phone is impossible in Iran. Access to the Internet is a struggle. A lot of things are censored. You want to go on a YouTube unit, a VPN first, you know, before you can connect. So, a lot of things made me realize how privileged I am and how thankful I am to my parents, enabling this opportunity for me to leave the country. But I love the country, and I try to go back and experience and try different things and catch up with all the things I have missed and go to all the places I hadn't been before. So, every time I go back to Iran, I try to pick a different new region and try to explore something new.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to ask about your ongoing connection with Iranian culture and language. And I have noticed in following you on social media that a lot, if not the majority of your travel content is in Farsi with English subtitles. So, it's obviously accessible to me because you're intentional about putting the English subtitles there and so forth. But can you talk about your choice to do your travel content in Farsi as you travel the world?

**Youshita Fathi:** So, as I started sharing all my travel experiences and everything that I wanted to share with the world, I realized that traveling, traveling is a true privilege to people living in Iran. Traveling outside Iran is

extremely difficult. If you're living in Iran. We have one of the worst passports that you can have in the world. There are 12 or 14 countries only that you can access visa free with an Iranian passport. And getting a visa for a lot of countries means a very long, painful process of putting together a lot of documents, going to embassies, making appointments, paying a lot of money, waiting a lot of time, and then getting a rejection or an approval based on no valid reason. This is one part of it.

And then you get to the economic part because traveling for someone working in Iran would be so difficult. Because the value of our money has been going down and down over the years. We've had one of the worst inflations in the world. One U.S. dollar is 800,000 riyals today, which is crazy. By the time we left Iran with something around 40,000 Riyal. So, the numbers, usually you go to sleep, you wake up, and the prices are completely upside down. This is what we are used to.

So, traveling is a privilege. It's very, very difficult. And I understood that sharing my travel is something that can give access to people to see the world through my eyes and experience. At least if they cannot do it themselves, I can bring the world to their homes by sharing my experiences. And it's not only difficult to travel, but there are places that as an Iranian citizen, you absolutely cannot go in this world.

One example is Egypt or Morocco, one of the countries that are accessible to most people in the world. They are one of the most touristic places in the world. People in Iran love the ancient history and everything about Egypt and pyramids and all of these is not accessible to you. Even if you have all the money in Iran and the best passport, you cannot get to this country simply because you are from Iran. And I hope that by sharing this experience, at least I can bring a piece of travel to people's home.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I want to ask you a little bit about that trip. The last time you were in Iran, when you crossed the border from Pakistan into Iran, since that was the last time that you were there, what do you remember about that trip? What were some of the highlights from that time in Iran?

**Youshita Fathi:** The highlight was definitely the first two weeks that I stayed in Balochistan. One of my best friends who lives abroad as well, she was in Iran at the time. She came and picked me up at the border when I arrived, which made her to be part of those three hours questioning, plus the driver that came with her, they were questioning also the driver for hours. But we ended up traveling to Balochistan for two weeks, which was an amazing experience for me.

And then I went to the Capital. I think I still all together three months, which was the longest time ever. I stayed from the time we had left Iran. But I did spend some time with some of my closest friends and I used the time to travel in Baluchis and some part of north of Iran, which now looking back, I wish I had stayed forever because I don't think I'll be able to go back anytime soon.

**Matt Bowles:** Let's talk a little bit about why you can't go back to Iran anytime soon. One of the things that you and I are very much connected on was our human rights activist work that we both do. You approached me after I spoke out against the Palestine genocide on the stage at the ETF and I started talking to you and learning about your incredible human rights activist work that you have done and continue to do. And I want to ask if you can give people some context, so maybe share a little bit about the lead up to the World cup in Qatar but also give people the background and the political context in terms of what was going on in Iran. For people that aren't familiar with that.

**Youshita Fathi:** As most of you may know, as I said, in 79 there was a revolution in Iran which took a very unexpected turn which led to Iran being governed by a very Islamic dictatorship that has been ruling over

the country and taking away the democracy in a way that officially exists, but it doesn't really exist in reality. And they've been imposing a lot of rules and restrictions on people. And over the last 44 years people have been trying to resist and overthrow this government and take back their freedom. But it hasn't been easy.

And every couple of years there's been another movement coming up. The latest thing that happened was in 2022 when the Iranian officials, the morality police, that's the police, that's their whole responsibility is to go through streets of Iran and control that people are dressed according to the rules, that women's hair covered, that men are not wearing any shorts, etc. And they considered a young girl's appearance not to be good enough. That girl was a 22 year old girl called Mahsa Amini. She was traveling from Kurdistan to Tehran and the officials ended up beating her up to death.

She died after that incident, and she was obviously and unfortunately not the first or the last person that the government had killed. But her murder triggered a very big movement and triggered people to come out on the streets and making people very angry. Women started burning their headscarves in front of the officials on the streets, which is considered a huge crime. And that would put them in huge danger and put them at the risk of risking their life, basically. And others started cutting off their hairs and videoing this and putting it on social media.

All of this went viral. And for the first time in the last 40 years, international war and the media started paying a lot of attention. And this revolution called Woman Life Freedom was born. And the Iranians decided to put in all their energy and anything they can do from inside Iran and the diaspora outside to overthrow this government and just take the freedom back. Obviously, the government started oppressing all the demonstrations and they started killing a lot of people and arresting a lot of people who are still in prison.

And the movement is still going on. It's not successful yet, but people have been trying what they can do over the last few years. And the World cup in Qatar happened in 2022, just a couple of weeks after this. So, it was at the peak of the protest when people were constantly on the streets and on a daily basis, the government was shooting and killing people. The videos of all these crimes were coming out and were going on social media. And the Iranian national team was qualified to join the World Cup at a time.

And I had planned to go to the World cup because I just love football. And I had been to the previous World cup in Russia, and I had the best time there. And after I was in Russia, I told myself, you know, no matter what, I'm just going to attend the next one. And as soon as the tickets came out, I had secured my tickets to Qatar, and I knew I'm going to go there. But things changed very quickly. And as an Iranian, obviously, me and the whole nation, we didn't care about football anymore. It wasn't our priority anymore. All everyone was after was fighting against the government. And I decided, I was debating for a long time, should I go to the World Cup or not.

And I thought, this is the best opportunity to use this platform to speak for the people of Iran, because this is an event that is going to be covered internationally, and all the press and all the TVs and newspapers are going to be there. And with staying home, I'm not going to achieve anything. So let me go there and at least try to be voice of Iranian people.

So, I went to Qatar, and I had tickets for all three matches. For the first match, I showed up, I had found an artist from Egypt in Qatar that I had asked to paint my face with different elements of the revolution that

was happening. He made an amazing piece of art on my face. I went to the stadium; some photographers took pictures and the pictures went viral. And I started speaking up in front of all the cameras, whoever was asking me. And this is something that a lot of Iranian people were doing there who were coming from different parts of the world. And this started getting a lot of attention.

And for the next match, when we went to the stadium, the situation changed. So, we suddenly realized that there's a lot of people who appear to be fans of the Iranian team, but they were actually officials and part of the militia from Iran who were sent very quickly by the government to come and stop letting people speaking up in front of the international press and talking about the situation. So, these people were just sent there to disrupt whoever who was trying to speak up or say anything against the government, what they were doing. And there were hundreds of them everywhere.

If they would see anyone with anything related to MAHSA or Woman Life Freedom Movement, they would just go there and try to make a lot of noise and jump, jump in front of the person when the journalists were trying to take pictures, etc. I was trying to speak to a Chinese journalist and this group of guys just come around me. I had a piece of paper in my hands where it was written Woman Life Freedom. They take the paper out of my hand, they tear it off, they start making a lot of noise. Of course, they weren't so smart that there are so many other cameras. So other cameras from other news sources started recording this and they published it. So, it was very obvious in the media what they were trying to do. They were kicking my legs. Imagine we are in Qatar in a very international sport event somewhere that you would think there's a lot of security.

We were surrendered by police and security officials from Qatar who were just looking and not interfering or doing anything. In fact, they were actually backing up these people and they took me aside, they asked me to remove anything I had written in my hands. I had written a lot of names related to the revolution. Anyways, there was a lot of troubles getting into the stadium, but this was an ongoing movement that I was trying to speak up anywhere that I could and try to be a voice for people that at a time had absolutely no platform, not even Internet access or any source of media to let the world know what is happening at the time in Iran.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, you got a lot of media coverage. I have gone through a lot of the media coverage of your protests and your interviews and what you were doing there. Can you share a little bit just reflecting back on that experience at the World Cup in terms of some of the other people that you met there in that context, from the Iranian diaspora that were doing the same thing, and how you connected with them and built that solidarity and what it was like to be in that moment. And then also what the impact of the extent of the media coverage was that you were able to eventually, the.

**Youshita Fathi:** The positive side of this was that I could meet these people who had come from all over the world for the same purpose, despite all the risks that would come with speaking up about this situation. Because being from Iran, we know very well how the government reacts. As soon as your name is out and your face is out, they will try to do anything to silence you by threatening you or your families. And people know that doing this kind of activism will have a lot of consequences for you. That the smallest minimum thing is that you cannot go back to Iran. But that is not enough for them.

The government comes and finds you wherever you are in the world. They have resources everywhere, and you're not really safe from there, wherever you live. But it was amazing to see that people from all over the world are brave enough to take on all this risk and consequences and speak up for people who truly need

their help at the time, who on the other side, if they are in Iran, they're going on the street, putting themselves at a very different level of risk.

Being in Iran and demonstrating, you can literally lose your life with a bullet in your head within seconds. And having that in mind, people were not stopping. Going on the street and taking this risk on them and finding people who were doing the same thing was amazing. At the same time, I was experiencing that the fear that this government and dictatorship has spread over the years is so massive that there's a lot of people who want to help, who are sick and tired of this government, but are just so afraid of the consequences that very often they decide to be silent, which I also understand, because, you know, something that impacts your own family and immediate persons around you, you react differently. But they have just found a way to make people so fearful of them that they just agree to accept and be silent and hope for a miracle to happen, which we know that is not going to end like that.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to talk a little bit about your world travels and the extent to which your human rights advocacy and your solidarity orientation towards different struggles have allowed you to make connections with people and have different types of experiences. For example, like our connection at the Extraordinary Travel Festival was very much based on the fact that I talked about and spoke out against the Palestinian Genocide.

You then approached me, I then learned about what you do, and we made a wonderful connection and are now doing this podcast interview. As I was going through your travel content, another example that just warmed my heart, that I thought was just so special and amazing that you documented is that you went to Greenland and while you're in Greenland, you met a local woman who was wearing a Palestinian kufiya and who was in solidarity with Palestine. And then you shared a little bit about the history of Greenland and the struggles that people have had there and why they would feel a solidarity connection with Palestine.

And you've really been able to do a lot of that kind of education, which I think is so amazing that travel enables those types of meaningful solidarity connections and helps to educate people and bridge and connect different types of struggles around the world.

So, I'm wondering if you can share, share a little bit maybe just about the Greenland story. And I would love actually for you to share about the whole Greenland trip, because I have never been. I have heard that it is just such an amazingly beautiful and unique landscape and place to go. So maybe just start from the beginning of that Greenland trip and share what it was about. And then I would love to share the story of the woman that you met with the Palestinian kufiya, and also some political context about, about the history of Greenland that you learned about.

**Youshita Fathi:** Greenland, oh my God, truly a paradise. Something. You know, I really recommend anyone who can and want to visit something very extraordinary to visit this place. I visited Greenland a couple of months ago, and when you travel a lot and you get around a lot, you see a lot of interesting places and you're always excited, etc. But after a while, it's very hard to get that impressed by a new place. And Greenland was one of those places. It was so different and extraordinary. I felt like this is my country number one. This is the first time I'm seeing something like this. And I was blown away by the nature and anything you can see there, I mean, all these glaciers and icebergs, I could never imagine.

You can just sit down and watch icebergs for hours and hours. Pieces of ice floating in water. How exciting that can be. But once you're there, you realize you can literally do that for the whole week and still be as

excited as you were at hour one. So, I traveled to Greenland, and I spent a couple of days in Ilulissat, which is one of the main cities on the west of the island. Greenland is the biggest island in the world that is not a continent. And it's basically just made of ice. It's one huge, massive piece of ice. More than 80% of the whole island is ice. And only on the sides of this massive ice sheet, you have some little settlements in the east and the west and the south where people have been living for thousands of years.

Where originally the Inuits who've been living there and in the whole country, if you want to call it, you have 40, 50,000 people living. So, you have all these little settlements that are only connected by sea or plane, that people live there. And imagine, thousands of years people have been living there without any problem. They've been surviving and getting through one of the harshest climates ever. And from the 18th century onwards, that region has been controlled by Denmark. And from 1950s, it's been officially part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

Over the last couple of years, gaining more and more independence. It's kind of an autonomous region, but at the end of the day, they are not an independent country. And a lot of decisions and a lot of important things have to go through Denmark, which is part of European Union, which sometimes imposes as a place that geographically is completely separated and different to anything within European Union, and makes it very awkward for people living there sometimes getting rules and regulations which absolutely do not make sense for the people living there, just for the fact that people sitting in a parliament within Europe have no idea what it means to live or to work or to survive in a place like this.

So, people who have lived in Greenland, they've been through this colonialism already years. And it was very interesting for me to meet Neva, the lady that you were mentioning, who's a Greenlandic woman, who runs a local tourist agency, which is called Disco Bay Tours, which are also on the side. Really recommend whoever travels to Greenland to try to connect to the very few available local agencies, because the majority of touristic activities are organized by some very few big Danish companies, which do not really let that profit and the value of the tourists going to the Greenlandic people.

But she runs one of these local agencies, and once we went to her boat to get on a boat trip to go to Ilimanaq, which is a very sweet, nice settlement, completely isolated in a place where 52 people live in this little village that is only accessible by boat and by plane and by boat only half of the year because the sea freezes and you can literally, from December to May, you cannot access that place. They live in absolute darkness. And then from May till December, they have a completely different vibe and atmosphere. And it's a place where if you travel by cruise, you can stop by and experience that region.

So, I met Neve, who is coming, you know, with this coffee, which is the last thing I would be expecting to see in Greenland. Absolutely end of the world, you're in the Arctic region. And she tells me how fascinating she is by the Palestinian resilience and how much she supports, envies the fight that the people are going through. And she really feels the struggle of these people and she would love to spread the word. And she mentioned living in a small place like Greenland, you do get a lot of backlashes and criticism sometimes for having this. I think she mentioned she has had two different Kufiyas for many, many years and she's been trying to have them on every single day or as much as she can wherever she goes, which is a true sign of bravery living in a small place where you would be confronted with a lot of criticism.

She was still finding the courage to stand up and speak up for the Palestinian people. And she's not the only example that I've seen. It's obviously we know that the Palestinian situation has been gone for a very long time. Since both of us have been born, the situation hasn't been different, it's been worse at times, but

it has been ongoing. But the truth is, in the last 15 months, because of everything that happened, it has got a lot of attention in the media, more than any time before that. Maybe it's because of the social media presence, but I've really noticed in the last 15 months, wherever I've traveled in the world, you find a lot of people in different parts of the world trying to hang out a Palestinian flag from their home in the most random place.

And I'm always surprised and so happy to see that people do see and understand and follow and care, and they do give you a completely different image of what you see in the media. If you want to look at the conflict by only looking at the media, you will have a completely different perception than what you would actually see on the streets. I've been on the most random places, or actually not random places, places that the governments are completely and officially siding with Israel and clearly saying that U.S.A. is one of them. A lot of European countries are one of them.

And anytime I've been to any of these cities in the last 15 years, either I have seen protests happening by people in small groups, in bigger groups, or I've seen signs and flags and slogans on the streets, on windows of people. I live here in San Roque, a couple of blocks from my home. There's a street that there is a huge free pass Palestine slogan written by someone since a lot of time and every day when I'm driving to work, I'm passing by there. And it is definitely reassuring to see that a lot of people in the world do understand the situation and do care.

**Matt Bowles:** And it's one of the most heartwarming things when you consistently realize that the people are never the government. Right. So, you have all of these governments around the world that are doing all of these things, but then the people are not the government. One of the most heartwarming things to me as a citizen of the United States, which has consistently been committing a whole broad litany of foreign policy crimes around the world, is that when I go to those places that are either currently or have historically been impacted by U.S. Foreign policy aggression.

That the people of those countries, even though they know that I am a citizen of the United States, I'm from this place that has in many cases just wrought destruction onto their country, they are able to distinguish me as a human being that's walking into their country with an American passport from the foreign policy agenda of my government. And they do not assume or associate with me or have a negative view of me because of that. And that has just melted my heart especially in cases where the United States foreign policy has been particularly abusive.

For example, when I've been to Palestine, which I've been multiple times, and the people in Palestine, they're a million percent aware of exactly who is funding, arming, backing, and politically facilitating the Israeli occupation. Now, genocide obviously, I haven't been there since the genocide started, but as you said, the Israeli occupation has been going on since far before either one of us was born.

And they're very aware of exactly how it's able to continue. Who's backing it, who's funding it, who's facilitating that. And yet when I go there, they are able to distinguish me from the policies of my government and they're able to welcome me with love, and we're able to have an amazing connection. And that been one of the most heartwarming things for me about travel.

**Youshita Fathi:** Wait for Italy, go to Iran. You'll be surprised how much people love Americans being the number one enemy of the country.

**Matt Bowles:** Exactly. I mean, that's a perfect example because everyone that I've interviewed on The Maverick Show that is American, that has been to Iran has said exactly that. They're like, these are the most amazing people. This is the most Incredible country. I had the most amazing time. And I think that's one of the beautiful things about travel, right? I mean that you learn these things as we travel around the world.

Well, Youshita, I have to ask you about some places that you have been to and things that you've done that I have not done. And one of the most amazing things in going through your social media, and there is a lot of amazing things on your social media that I came across was what you did for your 35th birthday in Mauritania. And I want to almost not give too much of a preface for this, although I will say this, when I interviewed our mutual friend Ric Gazarian on *The Maverick Show*, one of the things that we talked about and actually the title of one of the episodes are two-part episodes. One of the titles of the episodes is *How Not to Take the Iron Ore Train in Mauritania*.

And we go through the travel mishap that Gaz had when he attempted to take the iron ore train in Mauritania. You, I think, are the countervailing example to that because you had one of the most unbelievable experiences that you structured and designed in terms of how to take the iron ore train in Mauritania. And it was just amazing to go through your [Instagram](#) stories and see that from start to finish. I would love for you to share the story with people, but just for people that don't even know where Mauritania is located, they've never heard of the iron ore train. Can you just share a little bit about what it is and then describe how you designed your experience and what it was like?

**Youshita Fathi:** Sure. So, Mauritania is a country in northwest of Africa, so it's basically below Morocco and above Senegal. It's a very massive country, mostly covered by desert, is very densely populated country, is a majority Muslim country. And there's a couple of places that you can visit in Mauritania which are truly beautiful. There are some very beautiful oases in the turgid region. You have some very ancient villages like Chinguetti, where you have some of the oldest libraries of the world where you can find handwritten manuscripts from the 12th century, et cetera.

So, the country has a lot to offer. But one of the most exciting things that people have discovered you can do there is ride the iron ore train, which is one of the longest trains in the world, which is not designed to carry any passengers. This is a train that is 3 kilometer or 3,000 meter long, going from the northeast of the country where is in the Zouérat region where you have the iron ore mines of Mauritania, which is the main source of income of the country.

And Mauritania counts in the top three producers of iron ore in the world, among Australia and Brazil. So, you have these massive, massive iron ore mines where they extract this iron ore every day. And there are three of these trains who get filled up with tons and tons of iron ore. These are just 250 wagons, massive wagons that each one gets 80 tons of iron ore, and it drives all the way from Zara to the east of the country, to the harbor city of Nouadhibou on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, where they transfer all this iron ore to massive ships, and it goes all over the world. So, these trains are designed to carry this iron ore and nothing else.

Now, it's a massive country and public transport is a bit complicated there. So sometimes locals do try to hop on this train just to use it as a means of transport to get from the east of the country to the west. And we tried doing the same, going from Zara to the way, with the small exception that it was a very special night of my life. It was my birthday, as you mentioned. And on top of that, it was the hundredth country that



I visited. I was coming from road trips starting from Guinea-Bissau to Gambia, Senegal, and then reaching Mauritania, which was a great milestone, a personal milestone for me, reaching my hundredth country.

And then I had invited some of my friends, friends who managed to come from all over the world, had friends coming from Germany, from South Africa, Romania, Poland, Russia, like truly international group. They all made it. And we did this one week of traveling within Mauritania, arriving to the train on my birthday and then taking this normally, if everything goes well, the 16 hours journey on the train, where you just hop on the train when it comes to the first station and you just spend 16 hours or more, depending on if the train has any problems or etc. You just carry on for 16 hours there and that means you have no access to nothing else. No more stops, no toilets, no restaurants, no water, nothing. You got on the train and that's it. You have to stay there till you reach the end station.

And we were there celebrating my birthday, which was truly one, one of the best nights of my life, one of the best birthdays of my life. I was so blessed having 10 travel friends with me who came all the way to Mauritania. I had one of my best friends, Vana from Croatia, who travels very often with me, and she had a very busy schedule she literally flew in just to come to the train. So, she came all the way from Croatia, arrived later than us, took a very long transport to the train, hopped on the train, we did the train on the next day she went back home and we, we had an amazing time.

We came really prepared. We knew we were going to use this time to have the best night ever. And we were all dressed well accordingly. We had all the decoration with us. We had birthday hats. My friends had brought two actual cakes on the train with candles. We had music, we had speakers. We had a bottle of Red Label that we bought from the Chinese restaurant in the capital of Mauritania. We had a shisha with us. You know, we had everything you needed for a party, and we truly had an amazing, amazing experience on the train.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, you have documented this, and it is on your [Instagram](#) stories and people can go and watch this and I would encourage them to do so because it was truly an extraordinary event, and I love that story. Youshita, when you think back now about all of this travel that you've done to all of these places and the people, people that you've met and the things that you've learned, how do you think all of this travel has impacted you as a person?

**Youshita Fathi:** Traveling has definitely made a different person out of me, has developed me in every aspect of my life. It's been the greatest self-development temple, let's say it's been the greatest university of my life. So, looking back, I think my whole understanding of the world, of the people, of the different cultures, of understanding of the political systems, anything about history, geography, most of the knowledge I have from the world and specifically about the people, it comes from the opportunity of going around and experiencing and seeing everything firsthand.

And I'm truly grateful for having this privilege which is not available to everyone on this planet. I understand it and I appreciate it. And I feel since I have this privilege to experience and see the world in this way, I have to do it and use this opportunity to continue developing myself and personality and learning more and more about the world.

**Matt Bowles:** I want to ask if you can give some tips to people that are not fully location independent. They're not fully remote. They can't just travel around the world at will and stay as long as they want in any different place. You actually were working a full-time job in 2024; you were not fully remote and yet you still

went to 24 different countries in 2024. Can you give folks some tips or ways to think about integrating Travel into their life if they're not remote or location independent.

**Youshita Fathi:** In my personal case, the last couple of years, I knew that travel is a priority in my life, definitely. But I've been always having corporate jobs where I was quite tied up to being in the location on site, almost never even having the opportunity of having some remote workdays, et cetera. So, I knew that I have to find ways around of maximizing the free time that I have. And I've been using all the free time that I have, the holidays, the annual leave with the weekends with the holidays, etc.

Literally at the beginning of the year, I map out the whole year on a calendar on an Excel sheet. Very old school. I'm crazy about Excels and spreadsheets. I have a million Excel sheets, each one of them with a million tabs. And I always, whatever comes to my mind, need to put it in Excel and look at it, because I need all in one picture. So, I write the whole year's calendar and then I start the Tetris game of moving around. I literally paint all the weekends, all the holidays and the days that I have, and I put them around till I find the maximum days that I can book.

And then the reality is I just sacrifice that time that a lot of people spend staying at home, resting and doing nothing, which is also amazing. I also love it. I just sacrifice them for traveling. All of those things, time and what I found for me work out best is the main part of planning is booking that one flight ticket that gets you to wherever you want to go. So, I'm not very big into planning the whole trip. I can figure out anything once I'm in that country. But the thing that determines whether I'm going on a trip is booking that flight. That means the trip is confirmed and I'm going.

And I try to do that as soon as I have an idea I'm going somewhere and I have the days off, I book it. Because that's not something that you say, okay, on Saturday, let me wake up and I might book a flight somewhere and go. Once the ticket is booked, you wake up at 4am and you haven't had enough sleep, you're going to put in that effort and make it to the airport and go wherever you want.

And there are things that, depending on the job you have, whatever profession you have, you can always push things to the edge. Whatever environment you're working in. Sometimes there are some opportunities of traveling for work which will give you the opportunity to combine that with some extra time exploring that area or the neighboring countries, sometimes with working around with hours and times. And I figured out very often your employer doesn't come and tell you, you know what, if you want to work this weekend and have a day off at a different week, they will not come up with all these creative ideas, how you can change your time schedule and work location, etc.

So sometimes it needs to come from you because your colleagues, your employers, your boss, they don't have the same priorities as you and they are not thinking the way you are thinking. And their priority is not your traveling, but if they can accommodate things without impacting your work, which would work out for you, enabling traveling more. A lot of people would do that. And I always try to come up with this, the most unexpected thing to my boss and I'm like, you know what? I could do six days of work this week and I can have a day off there and maybe I work some extra hours here and then I do this there. And not always, but sometimes I get through with it.

**Matt Bowles:** I want to ask you also about the concept of country counting and why the goal and the quest of going to all 193 countries is such a high priority for you. And maybe I'll contextualize this question a little bit more in that I think for some people when they think about country counting or they think about a

quantitative travel goal and a quest like that, the perhaps stereotype that comes into play for some people is that this would be more of a superficial type of thing where someone would go around to check boxes and maybe just quickly move through places so that they could achieve a quest rather than really experiencing and immersing in the place. You are the opposite of that. You are one of the most thoughtful, substantive, immersive travelers that I know. And so, I would really love your perspective on why the goal of going to all 193 countries is such an important and meaningful goal for you.

**Youshita Fathi:** Thank you first of all for saying that. I'm very grateful if my traveling is perceived that way. For me, when I started traveling, I was going currently country after country, and I didn't really have a goal and I was just going wherever I hadn't been was top on the list of the priorities. And people kept asking me why and what's next and you're going to travel till when? And when are you going to stop at country number one? Etc.

And when I saw the first person who had been or who was at the time trying to achieve to see every country, it was the click in my head that, wow, this is exactly something that gives me the structure that I want. And I didn't know it was possible. I didn't know that you can actually travel to every single country in the world. And once you go through the list, but even Afghanistan and North Korea really are all of these places reachable? And then the decision was made. This is exactly the structure I want.

And one of the main reasons people who travel a lot do not want to finish all their countries is because maybe they don't feel so comfortable going to certain countries. Maybe they think some places are off the limit, they're not worth the risk and the safety, the history. If you look at in the last couple of years, we have always, you know, at least a couple of countries in the world which are in war situation. As this changes very quickly, imagine who would have thought that Ukraine will end up in such a long war. A couple of years ago it was one of the safest places on earth.

So, for a lot of people, it's just not worth going to these places. And for me, these are specifically the places that I've enjoyed most traveling to. And I've had the greatest time. And I realize everything when it comes to safety and comfort, it's a very gray zone. There is no black and white. There's nothing like there is a safe country or there is a place that you can enter. All of this is perceived, perceived differently. And every single country has areas that are safe and areas that are not safe. It's just a matter of how you get there, how you organize the trip and how you end up going there.

At the time when I was in Afghanistan, I told you on the first day that I arrived, the Kabul University was bombed while I was in Herat. Ironically, on the same day, there was a person in Vienna, central Vienna, who started going around and shooting people and killing a couple of people on the street. So, at the same time that my friends were calling on me to checking if I was fine in Kabul, an hour later, I was the one calling them to check if they were fine being in Vienna, one of the safest places on earth, which I easily could have been there if I was not in Afghanistan at the time. Which was a very clear example of you can just label a place and mark it as this is unsafe and you shouldn't go there, and this is a safe place and you'll be always fine visiting this place places.

**Matt Bowles:** So, our friend Ric Gazarian has only a handful more countries to go until he gets to all 193 and he has identified that his final country, where he is going to have his party, which I have already been invited to, is going to be Ireland. You just mentioned that you went to someone's party, and they chose for their final country, Jamaica. Have you already selected or in the back of your mind, a specific country where you think you would like to end and do as your final 193rd country?

**Youshita Fathi:** I think when it comes to me, it's going to be a long journey to get there. So, things can change so much in the world. So, it's really hard to plan something like this. Who knows if the next pandemic is coming out or where the next conflict is going to start, etc. I have one or two ideas in my head, but let's see how things go.

One option would be Bosnia, which is one of the four countries I haven't visited yet in Europe, and the other one is Cuba. I want to keep a country that is easy for people to come to because I would love to have my family and best friends who are not into this extreme travel world. So, I want a place that is easy to travel to, but also exotic and a place to celebrate. So, let's see. At the moment, these are in my head, but who knows, in a couple of years, where am I going to end up?

**Matt Bowles:** I know that there are some people. I actually personally know a couple people that have done all 193 countries achieved that goal, that they identified as a quest, and now they're on to something different. Travel is no longer a major central, passionate part of their life. They did that quest, they had that experience, they accomplished a big goal, and now they're on to another passion, another goal, another thing. For you, once you go to all 193 countries and have your party in Bosnia or Cuba or wherever it may be, how do you envision travel being a part of your life after that?

**Youshita Fathi:** I would be very disappointed if that would be the end of my traveling life. I would not want to stop traveling at all, definitely. I'm sure about that. It would definitely change the structure of how I'm planning things because now I'm prioritizing everywhere that I haven't been yet. So, I think once you've been to all the countries, it kind of takes off the pressure from you to plan things and go back to, you know, places where you enjoyed yourself a lot. I'm very much interested in traditional festivals and ceremonies all over the world.

So, one of the things that I'm trying to do while I travel now is to attend all of these different festivals, but I know that there's an endless number of them. So, this is one of the things I would like to focus on and travel to. Other things would be a lot of autonomous regions, part of the world that belong to a country but are far away from that country. You have tons of British and French islands that are thousands of miles away from these countries and have nothing in common with the country, the language, the traditions, etc. So, I would focus on these areas, but I would definitely want to keep on traveling.

**Matt Bowles:** I'm curious how your view of travel has evolved over the years as you've gone to all these different places and all these different countries and met other travelers in these travel communities, communities and so on and so forth. When you think back maybe to when you started traveling, what it meant to you then, what does travel mean to you today?

**Youshita Fathi:** So when I look back at the years when I started traveling, I was obviously very, very young. At the beginning of my 20s, I completely had a different mindset. I remember, for example, at the time I was traveling a lot to European cities, a lot of places in Asia, etc., For example, one of the main things I wanted to tick off is to visit the best club of that city, nightlife, party. I needed to try out the best place in Madrid, the best place in Berlin, etc. These are things that have faded off a little bit in my travels. Doesn't mean that I don't party or I don't visit any clubs, etc., but these are not on my priority list or top 10 things that I need to do in every city if it has more changed in a way that I want to understand the country, the history of that country, how that country has come to the place it is, how is the people situation.

And one of the things that I've seen in myself changing over these years was going from a place I'm just curious to see and observe, going to. I want to let the world know what a better country all of these places are. For example, Iran is a place that people have a very wrong image of faith, thinking it's still in this war that doesn't exist in the last 37 years. But I don't know why a lot of people in the world think that country is in war or, you know, a lot of wrong misconceptions. So, I wanted to tell the world Iran is not a place like this. And I started going to other countries. So, I wanted to tell the world Africa is not like the way you think. Kenya is very modern. Ghana is very modern, these places are rich in this, etc.

So, I wanted to show the beauty of these places a lot. But now I'm reaching a place where I'm doing that. But on top of that, I feel the urge to tell the world also about the problems people go through. For example, Iran is a great example. It is such a beautiful country, and a lot of people don't know about all these beautiful historical and natural places. But also, a lot of people don't know all the struggles people go through. They think we have this war that we don't have, but they don't know that as a woman you cannot dress the way you want, you cannot go and watch a football match in a stadium, you cannot hold the hands of your partner or kiss your partner on the street and all of these little things.

And you find these things in many, many other countries. A lot of struggles that people go through. I feel that it is part of my obligation when I'm sharing my stories, to show the world how beautiful these places are, where they have gone through and what problems they are going through now.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, in that spirit, can you share a little bit before we wrap this up and move into the lightning round about what you have coming up and what people can expect from you and your social media and your travel content over the next year or so.

**Youshita Fathi:** So, I will be definitely continuing to share my travels as I've been doing the last few years, but I'm definitely going to be much more active on social media. It's been four years that I've been writing on my new year resolution list. As a number one point, I'm going to start a YouTube channel and I've been postponing this and this year this is going to change. I'm definitely going to start making more meaningful and long-term videos and putting them on YouTube and I will be definitely more active trying to share much longer content about the places I'm going to visit.

**Matt Bowles:** Amazing. How can people find you and follow you on social media? I mean, I want to recommend personally your [Instagram](#) because what you have done there, it's not just your ongoing posts that I follow through your travels as I just recently did in Jamaica and other places. But you have archived a number of your Instagram story series. I'll call them. So, if people want to go and actually look up that Mauritania birthday iron ore train story, they can see that really well documented in your story archives, almost like a documentary and kind of going through the whole thing with you, which is amazing. And so, people can go to your Instagram and find those archives and see those things. And you've documented them so extensively and so beautifully and so amazingly. And so, I definitely want to encourage people to do that. First and foremost, how can they find you and follow you on Instagram and then also any other place that you want people to go to connect with you?

**Youshita Fathi:** Sure. So, [Instagram](#) would be the main place you can find me. *Yooshitaa* with Y, double O and double A at the end. And you know, once you follow me there, you'll find on my YouTube handle soon there.

**Matt Bowles:** Amazing. We are of course as always going to link all of this stuff up in [the show notes](#). You can go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com), go to [the show notes](#) for this episode and there you're going to find all the ways to find the following contact Youshita.

And at this point I think that it is an excellent place to end the main portion of this interview. And Youshita, are you ready to move in to the Lightning round?

**Youshita Fathi:** I am.

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

All right. What is one book that you would recommend that people should read?

**Youshita Fathi:** [Sapiens by Harari](#).

**Matt Bowles:** Alright. What is one travel hack that you use that you can recommend to people?

**Youshita Fathi:** My absolute life changing travel hack is the [Couchsurfing](#) platform, which has unlocked a bunch of different types of travel hacks to me. So, if anybody's unfamiliar with this platform, I really urge you to start using it today because it just has leveled up my travels to another way and I wouldn't want to imagine my whole travel life without having access to this platform.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you share a little bit more about that? What has been the profound impact of Couchsurfing on you?

**Youshita Fathi:** Sure. So, the platform is basically made primarily for people to offer a place for travelers to sleep. For no exchange of money, you basically invite people to stay at your place. But it's just beyond just offering a place. It's a resource to enable you to connect with local people before even reaching a country. And you find the most unusual people, the craziest, but in the most positive way people on this platform. And apart from staying with people, you can create events, you can hang out with people.

You're in a random city, in a word, and you just want to grab lunch with someone, and you don't know anybody around, you can just find someone. And there have been things happening on this platform to me and there's been things that people have done to me without any asking of anything in return that has been really unbelievable. So definitely, great resource to get information, get in touch with people and meet locals and travelers all over the world.

**Matt Bowles:** Alright, Youshita, 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.

**Youshita Fathi:** Trevor Noah.

**Matt Bowles:** That is a really great pick and that would be an amazing dinner. All right, knowing everything that you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Youshita?

**Youshita Fathi:** Travel more and start traveling earlier and do not be afraid to speak up for what you think is right.

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

**Youshita Fathi:** I'll give you my favorite three cities starting with T. Tehran is my absolutely favorite city in the world. The capital of Iran if you ever end up there. It's a city that you don't only visit on the surface. You really need to get into that underground life of people and experience it. Tokyo is my second T; it is a city that doesn't need any advertisement. I don't know anyone who doesn't love that city. And my third T is Tarifa. The city I mentioned here in south of Spain in Andalusia is a lovely bohemian surfer town. Is where you can be on the beach and look at Morocco and Tangier on the other side and literally see the end of the Mediterranean and where the color and the waves change and the Atlantic starts.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, I know you've been to 110 countries, but of all of the places that you have not yet been, what are three of your tippy top bucket list destinations that you are most excited about seeing and experiencing?

**Youshita Fathi:** First one is another T destination, Timbuktu in Mali. It's definitely a place I would want to visit. The second bucket list item is the whole South American continent. I've been to 110 countries, and I haven't stepped foot on this continent. I've intentionally kept it pure and virgin for me to discover it all at once. And the third, third one would be Papua New Guinea and the West Papua in Indonesia and all the tribes there.

**Matt Bowles:** Amazing. We are going to link up everything that we have talked about in this episode, including all of your recommendations, all of the ways to find and follow and contact you in one place at [the show notes](#). Just go to [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com) go to the show notes for this episode. Be sure were to follow Youshita on [Instagram](#). Can you spell out your Instagram handle? If somebody is listening right now and they want to just type it into Instagram on their phone, how do they find you? How do you spell it?

**Youshita Fathi:** It's Y, double O, S, H, I, T, double A.

**Matt Bowles:** Trust me. Follow Youshita not only for what she is about to post but go through her archived stories on her [Instagram](#) and you will see some absolutely amazing things.

Youshita, I think you are absolutely amazing. Thank you so much for coming to the show.

**Youshita Fathi:** Thank you so much.

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