

**The Maverick Show, Episode 34**  
**HOST: Matt Bowles GUEST: Lydia Baikalova**

---

**Matt Bowles:** Hey, everybody. It's Matt Bowles. Welcome to *The Maverick Show*. My guest today is Lydia Baikalova. She is a location-independent entrepreneur, a photographer, a world traveler, and the cofounder and owner of "The I Do Photography", one of the highest-rated photography and videography companies in Los Angeles. Her company has done over 800 weddings, taken over 2 million photos, and received over 300 five-star reviews and numerous prestigious awards.

Originally from Kiev, Ukraine, Lydia moved to Los Angeles in 2010 to pursue an acting career. She started her photography business with her brother in 2012 with just a used camera and one lens. Over the past seven years, Lydia has scaled her business to 20 shooters, five editors, three managers, and automated it so that she is no longer required to shoot or manage on a regular basis, and can spend her time traveling the world, writing, speaking, snowboarding, free diving, tango dancing, and starting new businesses.

She has been to 37 countries. She is fluent in Russian, Ukrainian, and English, her third language, in which we'll be conducting this interview today. We are currently in Cape Town, South Africa, recording this. Lydia, welcome to the show.

**Lydia Baikalova:** Hi, Matt. I'm very happy to be here.

**Matt:** It is awesome to have you here. I feel like we need to start by literally setting the exact scene where we're sitting and what we're looking at. Can you describe this for us?

**Lydia:** Sure. I'm staring at the ocean right now and staying in this wonderful, beautiful co-living house called Co-Life. I've been staying here for a month. It's really living in paradise because we have a mountain on one side, an ocean on the other side, we have chosen family dinners every night, and we have a fireplace. A fireplace is very important. So, I'd say this is a pretty cool spot to record this. Good choice.

**Matt:** It's amazing. The scenery we're looking at is literally insane. If anyone has not been to Cape Town, I feel like for me, it's definitely in my top two or three most naturally beautiful cities in the world. Especially on the coast, it's a dramatic, stunning landscape, and we're literally looking at that as we're speaking here today. Can you talk a little bit about how your experience in

Cape Town has been? You've been here for at least a month now, right?

Lydia: Yes. I came here to stay with some friends in an organized co-living house. It was organized by Vlad and Vica, the owners of CoLife, and I think this is their third time doing this project. They did them in Medellín and Barcelona, I think, and this has been an incredible experience because I've been able to connect with the people that I'm staying with, and we've had an amazing experience. We've visited wineries, we were going to do a sunset sailing, but the sunset didn't happen that day, so we stayed, but honestly, we love this house so much that we've just been hanging out here for a long time and working.

Everyone's doing work during the day, and we have great times during the evening. We go out to town, we cook for each other, and then we sit around the fireplace with a glass of wine and share stories. We had a really cool experience – this whole month, we were preparing to go to AfrikaBurn, which is a regional Burning Man event, and we just got back from that two days ago, so I think we're all still getting used to normal reality and getting back in the flow of things.

But, I think it has been a really amazing experience. Co-living is probably going to be a big thing in the future. It's a new way to live for a lot of people because we're all missing community, and this is how you can get it. So, if you haven't tried one, I would highly recommend it.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about the Burning Man concept? They obviously do a Burning Man event in the U.S., they do one you just went to here in Africa, and they do them in a couple other places around the world. But, for people who aren't familiar with the concept of Burning Man, what is it, what are the principles, and what has it meant to you in your life?

Lydia: Of course. Burning Man did become a part of my life a little over two years ago, and it has been an incredible experience. Burning Man is not a festival. It's a community of people that gathers once a year in the Nevada desert in Black Rock City. It currently has 75,000 people, and I think it's growing every year. The beauty of Burning Man is that it's based on these beautiful 10 principles. Some of the principles are radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, gifting, communal effort, and communication.

It's really awesome because it's a very alternative way for a society to live. Even though it's only for a week, the city arises from the dust for just one week, and then it goes back to nothing. One of the other principles is also to leave no trace, so people don't leave anything there. You don't even dump the water on the ground. Whatever you bring with you, you take back.

One of the other cool things is there's no money. There's nothing that's commercialized. You can't buy anything at Burning Man, except for maybe ice and coffee at the center camp, but you will get a lot of stuff because one of the principles is gifting. There are a lot of camps. A lot of the beauty of it is that people create these camps. We did one at AfrikaBurn. AfrikaBurn is a regional event, and it's taking place in South Africa, so it's like a mini Burning Man in Africa.

We were actually creating a camp this time called The Vagabonds, and our camp had a sauna, which our friends Sam and Martin built, which we gifted to people in the desert. Anybody could come and enjoy the sauna. We also did massages and workshops, so it was very cool camp. The organizer did an amazing job with it.

But, that's one of the cool things at Burning Man. You can find a lot of different camps. It's the randomness of it. You'll start out your day, and you'll go to one place, you'll go to a teahouse and have some tea, and you'll meet some people, and then you'll get in an art car, and you'll go see an art piece. By the way, the art is incredible. I believe most of the money that's gathered through tickets goes to sponsor these art projects.

So, I think Burning Man is the best place to see true modern art because you have the desert, which is an incredible landscape. If you guys are not familiar with Burning Man, just google some photos, and you'll see this incredible postapocalyptic-type look where the people in the desert are all dusty, but the art is just amazing. It's honestly some of the most beautiful art I've ever seen, and so random, too, because the things that people create – I feel like it's a playground for adults.

In many ways, people there remind me of how people were meant to be because they're playful, they're enjoying life, they're trying new things, and they're not limited by these boundaries that we set for ourselves in society, and it's so beautiful. I think it's more viable because it is only for a week. To live that way would be very hard in the long

run. I think it's possible, but we're not used to that. We'll have to seriously restructure our brains to be able to do that.

But, yeah, I think Burning Man is amazing, and it's probably the closest thing to religion that I can see myself practicing – these amazing principles where you just love other people, and you want to gift, and you want to be open and do things. It's really awesome. Last year, I brought my parents, my brother, and some of my friends to Burning Man, and my parents absolutely loved it. They're not hippies or festival-type people. I don't think they've ever been to one. They loved it so much, and we're all going back again this year.

Matt: Wow, that's incredible. Now, is this your first time in Africa?

Lydia: Yes, it is my first time – at least, in southern Africa. I've been to Egypt once, but that's a very different Africa than here. But, yeah, one of the reasons I came to South Africa is for AfrikaBurn. Although there were some differences, some of which I liked and some of which I didn't, I think it's also an incredible option for people because it may be a little bit hard to make it to Burning Man in the States because you need visas and it's kind of expensive.

It does add up because you need to bring everything with you in order to survive in the desert, including food, shelter, and how to remove garbage – gray water containers, sometimes. It's a lot of stuff. I think Africa is a little bit easier. Tickets are a little bit easier to get, and it may be cheaper for people from Europe, for example, and an easier place to get to. So, if you're not able to make it to the big event in the States, then AfrikaBurn is your way to go.

Matt: Awesome. And, can you talk a little bit about your broader lifestyle design choices and structure right now? How are you designing your lifestyle? How much are you traveling? How long are you staying? How are you choosing where to go?

Lydia: Sure. I'm a part-time nomad, so I travel about half my time. Usually, it's two or three months on and two or three months off. My home base is Los Angeles, California. My family lives there – my mom, stepdad, and brother, who are very important people in my life. So, this lifestyle allows me to see them a lot. We actually share a house in Los Angeles by choice because that way, I can see them more while I'm there.

The rest of the time, I travel, usually with my best friend, and it's great. So far, we've probably done five of these two- or three-month trips, and it's been absolutely amazing because slow traveling is really cool. You get to experience what it's like to live in a place for two weeks or a month. Cape Town is actually one of the longest stays in one place that I've done, and I really like this.

I think this is really cool. You're able to feel like you have a home and another home. This house has been so awesome. I'm definitely going to miss this. This has probably been the most luxurious house I've ever stayed at, so this is a big check mark. I live by the ocean, wake up every morning, walk out on the balcony, and I listen to the waves as I'm going to sleep. I'd say this is a good life.

Matt: That's amazing. Let's go back and talk a little bit about your journey and how you got here to this particular lifestyle, and maybe we can start all the way back in Ukraine. Talk a little bit about what was going on in Ukraine in terms of your entrepreneurial roots, what was going on with you professionally, and what brought you to L.A.

Lydia: Sure. It's been a long journey. I was born at a very young age. Well, I did live in Ukraine until I was 23, and I got lucky with my English because I had American friends growing up, so I started speaking fluent American English at about 13, which gave me a lot of opportunities because language can get you places.

But, the cool thing about my entrepreneurial endeavors is that I always – I come from humble beginnings. My family was never rich, and I knew that if I didn't do it, nobody else would. I knew that I had to make my own money, I had to support myself, and at times, I would also have to help my family.

My mom taught me so much because she supported me and my brother and she raised us to be the people we are now. She's the most incredible woman. She picked up yoga seven years ago – what am I saying? Less, probably three or four years ago. Now, she can do the splits, she can stand on her head, and she keeps stealing my clothes all the time because they fit her. My wardrobe is not just my own anymore.

She's an incredible person, always looking for new stuff. I saw her journey from being

---

somebody that's always troubled and worried – she had to provide for two young kids in an environment that wasn't exactly great. The Soviet Union had just fallen apart, and money was very hard to make. At one point, I think we were surviving on the equivalent of \$40.00 a month.

I learned a lot from her. I learned how to hustle. She's a musician, so she was made to hustle, but she had to. So, she figured stuff out. She figured out how to raise us, how to make us into good people, and she was so loving. I think the only way I didn't come out broken and all kinds of bad is because of how much my mom loved my brother and me.

So, I started hustling pretty early, once I could speak English at 13. I did interpreting for these church groups at that point because there are a lot of missionaries coming to Ukraine, so I would translate for them, and that's how I started making my first money. I graduated high school at 16, I needed to go to college, and I needed to pay for it. So, I thought, "How in the world am I going to do this?"

So, I sat down and – I think there were still phone books at that point, or something where there was information, and I called every travel agency and every translation agency that I could find, asking if they would hire me. Let's just say nobody was excited to hire a 16-year-old. So, they didn't give me a job, but somebody did say, "Hey, I have an American friend who's looking for an assistant." I think at that point, I was actually 17, so I started working for this American guy, helping him out, translating, doing whatever I needed to, and running some errands.

When we went our separate ways, I thought, "What can I do well?" I get a lot of good ideas in the shower, actually. Lots of my great ideas come when I have this hot water away from the world and am just in there with myself. I thought, "Well, I can talk to foreigners very well. They seem to see me as this link between their world and mine, so I can do that." And, I came up with Kiev Assistant, which was the way I made my money for a few years.

I paid my way through college, I paid my way for traveling with that, along with some of the acting gigs that I was doing, but that was a really cool way to meet a lot of people. I was only working about 10 days a month, and I was making close to \$1,000.00, which is pretty damn good in Ukrainian terms. So, that was a very successful project, and then I understood that if I put something together and put effort into, then

it would happen and things would work out. “Hmm, let’s do this again.”

I put an ad in the local map you used to get at an airport when you got into a city, and I would literally go up to people I thought looked like foreigners in our central street of our city, and I would just tell them, “Hey, I’m Lydia. I do interpreting and guiding. If you need an assistant or any help, you can call me. Here’s my business card.” That was a great lesson.

I did that for a whole summer, and I got work out of that, but as I realized later, I got over this fear of going up to people and asking them for something. You deal with a lot of rejection, but you also get something good at it. Sometimes, you go up to 10 people, and they’re all weirded out, but you don’t die. Nothing bad happens. And then, you’re like, “Wait, failure isn’t that scary.” So, I think it taught me to do that and it helped me so much in my later life. So, if you guys have never done a failure challenge of some type, do it. It’s going to make you a better person.

Matt: I agree with that 100 percent. Anything in life – especially business, which is based on sales and selling – you’d better expect to be turned down 9 out of 10 times. With everything that you’re going to sell, no matter what it is, no matter how amazing it is, you need to be prepared for that.

And, in anything else – I’m sure it’s part of the acting experience as well in terms of auditions. I have never done acting, but I lived in L.A. for about seven years, and I know a lot of people in that space. You’d better be prepared to be turned down more than 9 out of 10 times for acting auditions. In any space where you want to be really successful, you have to be prepared to be rejected the vast majority of the time.

Lydia: I agree. But, learning that failure is not the end is a learning experience and a stepping stone, and it’s going to make you successful at the end of the day. It’s the grit. You’ve got to keep trying and trying until you get there or until you don’t want to get there anymore. So, it really depends, but yeah, I think failure is a great tool.

Matt: Yeah, 100 percent, and rejection is a great character-building experience to enable you to keep pursuing on, and eventually,



that's how you succeed, or build something, or move forward on your path, whatever that may be. So, from there, what was the acting part that was going on in Ukraine, and what initially made you decide to move to L.A.?

Lydia: During this whole time, when I was about 15, my friend and I were sitting in a food court at a mall, and we asked this lady next to us to take a photo of us, and she did that, and then she gave us her business card. She was a casting agent for a production company. I thought, "Why not?" So, I went to my first audition, and luckily, I actually booked it, and I got my first commercial when I was 15 in Ukraine. That was a big national commercial, so it was really cool.

Ever since then, I've just started doing these acting gigs, mostly commercials in Ukraine, and they were pretty big national campaigns at that point. It was so fun and I loved it so much. I knew that in Ukraine, an acting career wasn't a viable choice because there wasn't much of that going on. I can't say I loved theater back then. I love it a lot more now, but still, film is the medium I prefer because I love creating something I can rewatch and something that lasts.

So, doing these commercials made me want to do this more, and when I had an opportunity to go to the U.S. and try doing this professionally, I did think about it long and hard because that meant leaving my family, leaving my business, leaving that everything I'd built, and starting from scratch in a city I didn't know particularly well and where I didn't know anybody except for a few acquaintances. But, I'm very glad I took the risk.

Honestly, it was probably the hardest thing I've ever done. My first half year in L.A. was miserable, lonely, and very hard. I cried in the back of the bus very often, and I did think about going home, but if I'd gone home, I would have failed myself because I wouldn't have given it my best and my full effort. So, I stayed, and a great miracle happened two years down the road.

My mom won the green card lottery, so the rest of my family was able to move to the States and stay there, and that was kind of like, "Okay, I think this is something I actually have to do, and a place for me, and a place I have to stay." Now, all of us really enjoy this place. Los Angeles is a great city. As with every city in the world, it has its ups and downs, but it's an incredible space that has given me so much.



So, I moved to the States, and I started getting into the acting world, which, of course, turned out to be so much harder than I had expected. I was so naïve, now that I think about it. I was like, “Well, if I can get jobs in Ukraine, I can get them in L.A. because there are a lot more jobs.” One thing I forgot is there were a lot more people, too. Everyone from everywhere in the world goes there.

And, I thought I was a good actress. I thought I was actually good. I sucked. I could do a commercial pretty well, but give me a script – I’m ashamed when I think back about how much I sucked. I did get better – much better. To quickly fast forward, I did decide to let go of the acting career at some point because of this beautiful traveling lifestyle that I wanted to pursue, but by the time I quit, I was actually pretty damn good. It only took about seven or eight years.

It was an incredible journey, though, and I still love it. Being on set, being surrounded by these creative people, and everybody’s working so hard to do something and loving what they’re doing is an amazing environment. Honestly, this entrepreneurial lifestyle – the travel lifestyle – is the only thing that beat it for me. I would have probably not let go otherwise. But, this – being able to do that same thing, but while you’re traveling, and you have a lot more freedom, and you see these amazing places in the world, and you meet these incredible people that you connect with and build a relationship with, making the world small, having these friends everywhere – I have to say that beat it for me.

Matt: That’s incredible. I agree, the lifestyle is totally exhilarating and amazing once you’re location-independent, able to structure that, and able to plug in to circles with other people who have the same types of values and the same types of lifestyle choices. It is truly incredible. Can you talk a little bit about that transition for you, though? Maybe just start with your interest in photography and where that came from. I know you were obviously on the other side of the camera for quite a while as an actress, doing print modeling, and a lot of that kind of stuff, but how did your interest in being the photographer come about?

Lydia: It happened by chance. Now, I was always around photography, and when I was little, my grandma and I used to print shots in the darkroom. I was happy that I had that experience, where you take a blank piece of paper, you put it in liquid, and boom! You have a photo that comes out. I kind of miss that, actually. But, it came out

of necessity because I needed to make money somehow, and making money with acting – well, that’s the ultimate goal, but it doesn’t happen for most actors right away.

Actually, for most actors, it never fully happens, so you have to figure out ways to survive. For a little while, when my brother first moved to L.A., we did background acting because he needed a job and I needed a job, so we were surrounded by these actors all the time. Background acting – being an extra on set – means you’re usually a blur in the background of a scene. You’re one of the people who fill out the room or whatever space they’re using, so it’s not really a lucrative job, and it doesn’t require any acting skills whatsoever, but it’s a very interesting environment. I wouldn’t recommend doing that for a long time, but if you’re in an environment where you can do a little of that, try it. It’s super fun.

But, we were surrounded by these actors, and we thought, “Okay, how can we make money here? We’re in this environment, and they all need something, so what can we do?” So, we thought we were going to do these actor packages, which would have an acting website, business cards, and headshots, which are very important for actors. The problem was neither one of us was a professional photographer. We were both hobbyists, but we didn’t really have the equipment that it took.

So, we had a choice. We could hire somebody, but then we would have to deal with them all the time, and we weren’t sure we could make it work in terms of money, where we keep paying someone for it, or we could actually just learn it. So, we went to Sammy’s Camera. Neither one of us had enough credit to actually buy a full camera, so we got two credit cards, and we split the used camera payment – it was a Canon 5D Mark II at one point with one lens, which was an 85-1.8 Canon as well – a great lens, by the way; I still use it sometimes – and we split it between the two of us, and that’s how we started.

I asked a friend to give us the rundown of the basics. We watched a lot of YouTube – everything we could get our hands on. We looked up how to shoot, how to do this, how to do headshots, especially because that’s what we were trying to do, and we got really good really quickly. We lugged that camera everywhere and took pictures. Sibling rivalry really helps with getting good. We would show off our pictures to each other. “Look! Here’s what I took!” “Oh, man, he did so well. I’m going to go take some pictures now.”

We would play around with it. We would play around with macro rings, we would try everything we could try, and probably in two or three months, we were at a point where we could start charging money for what we were doing, and we created a great product. It was always a think that was very important for us – provide great value, provide very good quality. I think we were both in that mindset, that if you're going to do it, either do it well or don't do it at all.

So, whatever we're doing – both me and my brother – we get it to a point where it works really well. So, with the photography, we started doing these headshots. Also, we would take every photography job that we could. Back then, \$100.00 was a fuckton of money, and so, if you want to give me \$100.00 for a couple hours' photography, done. No problem. It's practice for me, it's money for me, it's photos for you, it's connections, and it happened.

So, one thing that happened was somebody called us to do a wedding, and we were like, "Come on, we don't do weddings. Are you sure you want to give this responsibility to somebody who doesn't do it?" They were like, "Well, we don't have much money, so you can take the pictures." I think we charged something like \$300.00-400.00, which is kind of funny now for photo and video for a wedding. Very quickly, we had to also figure out how to do video.

We did give them a very big disclaimer of "I have no idea of how well this is actually going to work," but it did work out well. We rented some really cool lenses, we rented more equipment, and we thought, "How can we do this well?" The funny thing is, one of the pictures from that wedding is still a picture we use in our portfolio, kind of like a lucky charm. One of the photos from that wedding is still there.

And, we shot that wedding. We had a lot of fun. I did not realize how much fun it would be because it was this creative environment where we could work with people, we could direct them, and they were so happy. They were dressed well. Everybody was happy. It was a party. I never expected I would have liked weddings, but we did.

So, we put together an ad on Craigslist that we were shooting weddings, and luckily, we partnered up with two small companies that were also just starting out, like a chapel that was doing these small ceremonies – a Vegas-style chapel in L.A. – and a beach wedding photography company that we still work with. We started shooting a lot of

weddings for them, and we got a lot of experience really quickly because we were doing a lot of these weddings.

So, we were getting good, we were getting reviews, and probably in two or three years, we got to a point where we were getting more work than we could handle, so that's when we seriously started thinking about either scaling or raising our prices, and for us, the answer was scaling because we still wanted to be affordable for people who needed it, and we wanted a price point where we didn't work exclusively with the top people, and that's still a concept that we keep. I think we're among the high-end, quality, professional companies, but we're still pretty affordable.

That started the scaling. We first hired an editor. We taught him to work in our style. We ran through weddings over and over so he would really understand what we wanted and work with our presets. He's still one of our editors. He's our top editor right now. We were like, "Whoa, a big chunk of work just disappeared. That was cool! Maybe I can do this again."

Moreover, the quality of our editing improved because he was experimenting and adding some of his flair to it. So, he would get a few photos in our style, and then a few photos in his style, and they looked really cool, so all of a sudden, we had a few editing styles, and that really gave us a taste of what it's like to add new people to your team, and we continued with that tradition.

Matt: That's really significant. The first thing I heard is to hustle as much as you can to generate more business than you can handle, and that's the first thing. You have to go, you have to sell, you have to generate business, you have to perform, you have to generate more business, and you just have to grind until you get to that tipping point where you have more business than you can handle.

Lydia: Yeah. Scaling does have – to be able to scale, you need to have a solid cash flow because if you don't have a solid cash flow and you start paying other people, that can bring you to a point where you lose a lot of money, and up until very recently, we've never lost money. We've always been profitable.

Some people say we're still profitable because overall, at the end of the year, we are, but we did recently have a couple of months – because we started being very liberal with where we put our money because we had a

very solid cash flow, so we were like, “Let’s invest in advertising, let’s get some new equipment, let’s do this, let’s do that, let’s hire people.” And so, when a pretty crappy season hit – winter is our low season – all of a sudden, we were losing very big amounts of money, and we were like, “Oh, okay. This is a good lesson.”

There was one good thing about it because this was always something I was really afraid of, and then it happened, and then I was like, “I think I survived. Well, cool. Now, I’m not afraid of it.” In a way, that’s another failure, but it also prompted us to make even more changes, and we started perfecting even more now. We started creating better systems.

Of course, we have very strong guidelines. We’re photographers, and we have a bible – an 80-page guide for how to shoot weddings that we created that was based on our style, but rather than just having it as a written guide, now we’re going to turn it into a video course, and we’re going to be able to communicate even better how we want to do stuff. And, of course, before we hire a photographer full time, we do lots of photo reviews and we work on stuff so that they can perform on the same level that we perform.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about the scaling process from the start and how someone should think about the principles of scaling when they’re at that point where they’ve hustled, they’ve generated more business than they can handle, and they want to scale? Can you talk about the first step, the second step, how to think about it, and how to do it properly?

Matt: Of course. For us, it was a lot of hit and miss, and it took a while to figure out how to do it properly, and I think we’re finally at a point where we have a pretty good formula, but a lot of people think it’s impossible to scale or automate a service-based business. It’s not. When you’re an entrepreneur, and you’re doing everything yourself, and you’re doing it super well – I had the same feeling.

For a long time, I felt like, “I’m the only one who can do this.” Yes, you’re the only one who can do all of it, but when you break it down, all of a sudden, you understand that there are people who can probably actually do it better than you, and in terms of the cost of labor, a lot of times – for example, a lot of photographers just want to shoot. They don’t want to do the business part of it because that is honestly the biggest hustle.

So, we're giving photographers an opportunity to focus on what they love and what they do best, which is taking pictures, and then we're giving editors a chance to edit photos, and that's what they do best. So, everyone is doing their part, and you can charge more money when you're doing everything yourself, but when you break it down, you can actually just give the person the amount of money that their specific skill costs, and a lot of times, that skill costs less than the combination if it's just you because being able to do everything yourself is a very valuable skill, and that's probably why you're getting so much money for what you're doing.

But, there are also proper steps to how you can actually get it to a point of automating, and this is breaking it down a little bit. So, first, you have to look at your processes. What are you actually doing on a daily basis? What do you do all the time that generates money for you? The first thing that you do is you eliminate the unnecessary. So, if there's anything in your process that really doesn't bring you anything useful – and, a lot of times, we do that. We think, “Oh, right now, let's do Facebook because maybe it will bring me something one day.”

But, for example, right now, it may be best to focus on something that will generate money for you now, or something that will be useful. So, you have to pick and choose because you only have 24 hours in the day, and you want to use those wisely. So, you eliminate something that's not necessary at the moment. You may come back to it later, but you have to be wise, and you know your own business, so this is how you're going to determine what you're going to eliminate.

The second step is to automate. So, once you have determined the processes that are happening, you want to see which of those processes can take place without you. For example, you can use a CRM to – we use a CRM called Streak that integrates into Google to help us sort our mail into categories. We know which is tails, which is this, which is that. It's going to automatically send out follow-ups. So, we can send a system of follow-ups that are going to go out automatically, where we don't have to do it manually.

There are a lot of other good things, like statistics, that you can pull out of that because at some point, we're like, “Oh, we don't need that.” When we were little, we didn't need that. Right now, we do. We also have HoneyBook, which is a tool that helps us with contracts, so we

don't have to do it manually. So, simplify your processes as much as possible. There are a lot of great tools, and it depends on the size of your company. For a lot of time, we didn't need those tools because we were small. I kept everything in my head. Now, let's just say if I kept everything in my head, we would have failed a long time ago.

So, look at what software you can use or what automated tools you can use to be able to do less. Once you have done that, what you have is the actual physical part of the work that you need to delegate. In our case, there's a difference between a product-based business and a service-based business because a product is still a product, and once you've automated, there is maybe not so much that needs to be delegated.

In our case, if it's a service, that's your main thing. It's very important not to fuck it up because if you've gotten to a certain level of quality – and, I do recommend having very high-level quality for whatever it is you're doing because then, you have a lot more leverage. Even if you're doing something cheaply, do it in a quality manner. So, for our service-based people, the process takes up a little bit more time because delegating that part isn't just shoving it on somebody and saying, "You do this."

We had to go through steps to figure out the system. At first, we were like, "Okay, we're going to hire photographers, so let's hire photographers." So, we found people who were really good and interviewed them, but at that point, we didn't have a big training process. We would just give them the basic rundown, but then, what we discovered is although they were taking really good photos, they weren't really in our style. They weren't really what we were selling to people.

So, we were like, "Okay, let's backtrack here and think about this." We thought we would train people more. In the second round, we would get people, and they would go to weddings with us over and over again, and we would show them the ropes, they would watch us shoot, and we thought, "That's going to do the trick." Well, not really. People would still forget and they would still fall back because a wedding is a very stressful environment, and you usually fall back on what you usually do once you're in that now-or-never, "I've got to do this now or it doesn't happen" space. So, people would still do what they were used to doing.



So, we realized that they'd forget the information we gave them, and that's when we sat down, and I wrote Wedding Photography 101, which is our 80-page guide for how to shoot weddings. And then, we started combining some of the in-person training and the guide, and that's when it finally clicked, because we were able to do that, and through that, doing some photo reviews, going over pictures, and saying, "Hey, this works, this doesn't, let's change that, this is great." That was the point where we were like, "Okay, this is working."

However, how do you create that training guide? It wasn't until I sat down and wrote it that I realized how I was doing things. It was all in my head, and then it was all on paper. So, what you do is you sit down and you figure out what makes your business your business. What's different? Why do people hire you? In our case, it was while everybody's using tuned-down tones – because that's what's really popular now – we were still using bright colors in pictures. So, everybody who wanted that was our niche. It was our brightness, colorfulness, and vibrance in the photos, and that was something we wanted to keep, so in editing, that's what we did. We kept that style.

We were also very good at being territorial. Our pictures look very natural. A lot of times, people say, "Oh, that's such a great candid picture," and we're thinking, "Oh, that's a very well-directed picture, and that's why you think it's candid." Actually, a lot of the time in wedding photography, people are like, "Yeah, I want those candids," and you have to explain to someone that they want somebody who's good at directing. A lot of good candids happen naturally, and a lot of them don't, and sometimes, you just have to give it a gentle shove to create that candid.

So, we brought that from the acting world. How do you direct people so they look very natural in front of the camera, so that they feel comfortable, so that they're enjoying the process? So, we put that in the guidebook, but we also put the apertures that we were using, the settings we were using, and the positions we were shooting from, and all of that was what made up our style.

We also had a communication style. How do we talk to clients? We make it very casual; we make it very easy. It's their wedding day. We want to be part of the fun. We want to be somebody who makes their wedding day better and not worse. We don't want to be those serious people. If

we wanted to be serious people, we'd be in corporate.

So, we brought all that to the table. You have to sit down and figure out what makes you you, why people use you, and a lot of times, it's not obvious. It's something like that you put someone at ease in your communication style, or you do your job in a very timely, efficient manner, and all of that is what's going to create your bible to automating and to delegating, because you want to teach other people to do that.

And, through teaching them to do that, you create value in those people. They bring their skills to the table, you give them your skills, and they become a very valuable professional who works for you. The cool thing about growing, though, is that all of a sudden, you have all these new skills, and you have all these people who are bringing their stuff to the table, and all of a sudden, you can offer more.

So, now, we're able to offer a few different styles. It's generally the same style, but it has a little bit more flair. Some of our stuff is a bit lighter and more natural. Other stuff is a bit more epic and dramatic. Now, we can offer both because we have a team that's able to do both, and that's really awesome. So, don't think that you're the best thing in the world for your business. Sometimes, letting it outgrow you is the best thing you can do for it.

**Matt:** I totally agree with that 100 percent. And then, at that point, can you talk a little bit about managing a team? How do you run a business as you're scaling, what is your responsibility as the business owner, and how do you make sure all the pieces are continuing to work in the most optimized way possible?

**Lydia:** Of course. I think the thing to realize is that as a business owner, everything is your responsibility, and when you're starting to scale, that's very important to realize. So, if anybody else fucks up, that's ultimately your fuck-up, and you're responsible for it. I think integrity is a big thing because if your people look up to you and they see that you're true to the cause, you value quality, you value this fun, and you have a respect for your team, I think those are very big factors, and I feel like – at least, I hope – in our company, that's true.

But, I think treating people with immense respect is a big thing. Also, you need to give them the time of day and let them do their creative thing.

Micromanaging does not work. You want to put your knowledge out there and give it to them, and then hope that it works. Honestly, sometimes, it doesn't. I've also unfortunately had people where things didn't work out and we had to let them go, but then, we've had amazing people who have stayed, and we've built amazing things together.

Moreover, actually, when we hired a manager, we started growing, because when I was trying to do everything myself, I wasn't able to give it the proper time, and the moment we hired a manager and we were able to give more in the packages because of outsourcing, we doubled our business.

**Matt:** Wow, that's awesome. I would love for you to share some photography tips. I have actually had the personal privilege of being in one of your photography workshops, which was amazing, and I think that one of the ways you really differentiate yourself and you've been able to differentiate your company is in the creative, and a lot of the stuff you're talking about in terms of direction and in terms of what you're actually able to produce.

If two different companies shot the same wedding, your pictures would look different than the other two companies, and you've created a very distinct differentiation, which I believe is largely why you're winning these awards, getting these reviews, and doing this kind of stuff, because you really have an incredible creative product that you've been able to do, and that also flows through to your personal Instagram and all the photos you're taking in your personal life, which is amazing, and I recommend that everybody start following your Instagram because it's totally off the chain.

But, I'm wondering if you could give some general photography tips for anybody, even people that are just taking their own Instagram photos or want to look better in pictures themselves. Can you talk a little bit about the theory, the concepts, and what people should be thinking about in terms of taking better photos?

**Lydia:** Of course, and this is something that I actually brought from the acting and directing world into the photography world. There are a lot of people who will take you how to take a good picture, how to use lighting, and even how to use posing, although some things that I saw in the posing videos when I was doing research for my workshop were really funny. "How to stick out your chin." Really?

There are a lot of weird things circulating out there.

The most important thing that makes a picture are your eyes and face. Of course, you can take big wide shots, which are a little bit different, but if you're talking up close and personal photography portraits where you can see the face, even if everything else is great, but your face is stuck in the fake world – you're trying too hard, you're faking the smile, you're putting in that emotion – it's never going to speak to people. It's never going to tick that box of "Ooh, I really connect with that picture."

Here's where this interesting thing comes forward. When somebody points a camera at you, you start thinking about yourself. You start thinking about how you look. You start thinking, "Do I look good enough? Did I work out my hair the right way? Did I wear the right clothes? Oh, man, the zit on the middle of my forehead is really the worst thing that can come out today."

So, all these thoughts are pointing to you, and that's where the problem comes in, because if you're thinking about yourself – so, if you're in a room with a person for two hours, would you rather be locked up in a room with a person who's focused solely on themselves or focused on you and their energy is flowing back and forth? You don't want to be locked up with a selfish person.

A picture is the same way. You don't want to be looking at a picture of somebody who's only thinking about themselves. You want to be looking at a picture of somebody who's interested in you or something else, someone who's driven, who has a passion. So, a very simple trick is to shift your focus. You take your focus away from yourself and you focus on someone or something else.

It can even be something that's personal to you. It can get in your head, but you have to get out of that mindset of "How do I look? What am I doing?" You have to either look at your photographer or – "That's a fucking beautiful tree. Look at the damn tree! It's amazing! It's incredible! Take it in. Take in every leaf. Examine it. Look at the sunset. Look at the horizon line."

And, if you have to look at the barrel of the lens, then be interested in your photographer. They're the most interesting person in the world right now. Give all the love that you can to that camera, but shift your focus away

---

from yourself. Do not think about how you look, because that's going to destroy your picture. If you keep thinking about how you look – those fake photos where people are busting out a smile and looking so cool – and, yeah, that also has a category. There's fashion photography, but what we're talking about is everyday pictures for everyday people.

Now, what you want to do is just be genuine. That's going to allow you to be yourself in pictures. That's going to allow people to connect with your photos even more, because they're going to want to talk to you. They're going to want to connect with you through those photos that you're taking.

Matt: One of the things you've done that I think is one of the hardest things to do is not just that you've scaled a service-based business, because there are a lot of services out there, but specifically an artistic, creative business. I feel like that is unbelievably difficult to do because as the artist, as the creative, you are doing something that is very unique to you. You are producing art the way that you see it, the way that you feel it, and you're doing something that's very unique.

And then, to be able to have your artistic vision and your artistic production scaled in a systemic, procedural way, and to be able to have other people come in and help to reproduce and monetize that – I feel like that's an extraordinary achievement, and I wonder if you have any tips for people on that because I feel like it's one thing to say, "I'm self-employed and I do everything the best." That's normal. Everybody says that. But, I feel like when you bring art into it, it's a whole other level of difficulty because it's so unique to you. So, I'm wondering if you have any tips for specifically creative and artistic types for building and scaling a business around that.

Lydia: Thank you. I've never even thought about it, to be honest. It was such a natural thing for me. I've never even thought of it like that. Yeah, this is an artistic and creative thing. For one thing, it's important to let people see the motivation of why you do things. You have to show them your "why." Your "why" is the basis of everything – everything from hiring people to scaling and teaching people why you create art. You have to show people why you do things. So, if you're taking a specific shot, you have to show them the reasons.

Also, you have to let them bring their own creative view into it, too. I think that would make things better. So, if you're taking a shot, you don't just say, "Here's how you take a shot. You do this, this, and this." You have to tell them why you do that. What's the reason behind that? We want to bring out emotions. We want to show the relationships between people, and this is how we do it.

Once they understand your motivation, they're really able to do it and see, "Oh, that makes a little sense." With creativity especially, what's your process? What moves you to do this specific thing versus that specific thing? There are other companies – there's a company I really respect who are also really big and who create beautiful pictures, and their epic style is amazing. They're really technical.

But, I think sometimes, they do lack that emotional aspect. We've learned a lot from them in the epic scale, but I think our signature is those emotional photos, and being able to teach somebody to bring that out of another person is the art, and I'm still learning how to do that. It's never a complete process. You still keep learning. But, you have to keep showing people your "why."

In the same way, when I was teaching one of my managers to create galleries, I explained to her that we want to create a story for the viewer, so we want every picture to flow, and you want to feel like you're in there. You want to feel little details. You want to go through clicking the pictures, and every next picture has to be interesting, and it has to build on the previous one. You have to build it like you're building the movie. You go from the wide to the close-up. You build a cinematic experience through pictures.

That's when she was like, "Oh, I got it," and she started making these amazing galleries, just from that one sentence, because she was like, "Oh, now I understand." Before that, for years, I was just like, "Oh, let's change out this picture. Let's put this here. Let's put that here." But, once I gave her the "why," she was totally able to do it herself, and do it beautifully.

**Matt:** What are some of the biggest challenges that you have experienced and run into on your entrepreneurial journey of building and scaling this business, and how did you overcome them? What did you learn from them?

Lydia: Oh, the fun part – the challenges. You’re definitely going to have challenges. Honestly, the entrepreneurial life – the beauty of it is great, but sometimes, when you’re going through the challenging phases, you’re like, “Why the fuck did I get into this? Oh, God, having a job is so easy. You come into work every day, and someone tells you what to do.”

Yeah, there are a lot of challenges. The biggest was people – finding the right people. That’s hard, and it’s not something you can lock in forever. Finding the right people is not easy because it takes a while for you to really understand whether this is the right person, and then to trust them. You’re trusting somebody with your baby. You’ve created this for years, and all of a sudden, you’re giving this into the hands of somebody else. It’s scary. Letting go of control is really tough, but if you’ve found the right people, it’s going to be easier to let go of control.

When I was first starting out, one of my biggest challenges was dips in quality because it was just so hard to give people something that I didn’t personally think was the utmost best that I could produce. Now, here’s the funny thing: A lot of times, people didn’t care about the things that I cared about, and that’s when I discovered people were just as happy with their photos the whole time. But, I was like, “This is grainy. It’s not exactly perfect.”

That’s how I realized one of the principles of our business – that emotional aspect. As long as they have that, they love it, but at first, it was really hard. When somebody wasn’t doing as perfect of a job as I thought I would do, I was going nuts. I was trying to be the control freak and get into every single detail. But eventually, when I started letting go more and I realized that other people should also have a say in this and bring their own creative vision as well, it made us better and stronger, and it gave us a lot more variety.

Matt: That’s awesome. Could you talk a little bit about how you manage your team and operation and run your business while traveling all around the world? Any tips on that?

Lydia: Sure. I currently have three managers, and the roles did change over time. For example, we started with just one manager, and then we realized the workload was way too big, so we divided post-production, sales, and management of daily operations, and at first, we kept all those positions in the United States, and honestly,

---



it was very expensive.

So, just a few months ago, we outsourced our post-production position to Ukraine. I have a wonderful manager in Ukraine who's taking care of post-production, and it's been great. I think that was also made possible because we first figured out the system of how to do it by working on a daily basis with our post-production manager in the States. The manager I had was wonderful; there was nothing wrong there, it was just costing me an arm and a leg. Now, it's cheaper, and we still have the same quality, which is incredible.

So, one of my people is in Ukraine, so that's already remote, and it doesn't matter where I'm managing from, whether I'm in the States or not. Then, the other manager is in the States, and I still have my original manager, Christina, who is absolutely wonderful, and the only reason we had to hire a second manager is because Christina had a baby and she wanted to spend more time with her family, so she switched to part-time. We have another beautiful manager stepping in right now who is going to be doing it for the other part of the time because now, we're bigger, so we need more people.

But, the way we're managing all of that is by having created the systems. It really doesn't matter whether I'm there, speaking right into her ear, or I'm creating a video tutorial by recording what's on my screen from here. And then, I also have a lot of training materials. We have an internal Q&A, and we have scripts – for example, if we have tough cases where we need to do damage control, I have case studies from previous cases where they can study that and look at stuff.

Also, I'm mostly available. I'm around the world, but they can contact me at any point. So, really, you'd be surprised how unnecessary your physical presence is, and you have so many options and times.

I've already created these systems for the photographers, too. Yeah, I spent a lot of time creating them when I was doing that, and I was losing sleep and getting blue circles around my eyes at that point, thinking, "Why did I get into that?" But, once it's done, it's done, and that's the beauty of it. Once you've created the system, you've documented it, and you've documented it in a way

that's understandable for other people, you're not really as necessary anymore.

So, creating all of those systems and just making sure that people understand that answering questions – we have phone call training, too. How do you talk to people on the phone? Most of the time, people just want to be heard and understood. You want them to feel that you care about their problem, and the trick to doing this is to fucking care about their problem.

Matt: I totally agree with that. Let's talk a little bit about travel now, and your travel lifestyle, and your choice to travel in general. I just want to start off with a broad question and ask why you travel. What does travel mean to you? Why do you choose to travel?

Lydia: I have a counter question for you. Why wouldn't you travel? Why wouldn't you want to see this beautiful, amazing planet with everything that it has to offer, meet different people, and grow as a human? Traveling always puts you in this environment where you're forced to grow because you always have some adversity. Adversity is not bad if you learn how to understand it correctly.

But, when you're traveling, you're not in your own comfy little bed. I honestly don't know how to stay in one place for too long anymore unless I have something that helps me grow there, but when you fall into a routine, unless your routine is very conducive to growth – I feel like I get depressed when I'm in one place and not doing anything that prompts me to become better.

But, when I'm traveling, even having to book new places, getting somewhere there's no hot water, having to choose food – that's surprisingly a big challenge. When you're traveling and going to a restaurant, you're not guaranteed to get the same menu you have at home, and a lot of times, you order something, and you're like, "This does not look like anything I have at home." If you order a caprese salad in Argentina, you're like, "Why in the world is there cheddar here?"

So, you get a lot of stuff you didn't expect, and how you deal with that, how you choose to deal with any situation that's not easy and perfect – it just forces you to think and be more present in your moment, and that's what life is all about: Being here now. And, when you're traveling, you get a lot more "here now."

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about the skill development that you've been focused on in some of your travels and some of the things you've been choosing to learn and experience as you've been going around the world?

Lydia: Yeah. I do have a big knack for picking up new skills, and a lot of those skills are extreme sports. It just so happens that adrenaline is a really fun thing. So, a lot of times, when I'm in a new place, if it has something really cool to offer – this isn't an extreme sport, but in Buenos Aires, Argentina, not doing tango is a crime. Although I now understand tango is a lifelong relationship, boy, it's a beautiful one. So, when my friend Julia and I were in Buenos Aires, we started taking tango lessons, and we actually carried it back home. We started tangoing back in L.A. when we came back.

In Brazil, there's a beautiful environment for kite surfing in Jericoacoara, so we took some kite surfing lessons, and there was a lot of gulping water and a lot of falling flat on our faces, but it was so much fun and so cool because you're constantly in places where you can learn something new, and when you learn something new – I don't know about you guys, but one of the best feelings in the world is when you try something, and all of a sudden, you can do it. You couldn't do it yesterday, and now you can do it, and it gets pretty damn awesome.

Matt: That is amazing. Now, you and I were actually in Brazil together in December for part of that, and then we parted ways, and after I left, I heard a rumor – tell me if this is true – I heard you got arrested in Brazil, and if you did, I totally need to hear this story. Is that true?

Lydia: Yeah, actually, that did happen. In Brazil, my brother and I went to an island called Fernando de Noronha to do some free diving because we heard that there was a local pod of dolphins – an actual pod of dolphins that lives on the island, and they're always there. We thought, "My God, this is awesome." So, we got to the island, and one of the mornings, we learned where the dolphins hang out. They hang out at the port early in the morning. So, we get to the rocks, we get in the water, we put on our fins, and it was a tough, rocky entrance. We swim out in the hope that the dolphins will come.

And, the dolphins swam up to us, and it was one of the best

moments of my life. They're incredible creatures. Dolphins in captivity are cool, but dolphins in their natural environment, in a pod, are so curious. They swim around you like, "Hi, human. What are you doing in my waters? Why are you here? Hello. You're so cool. You have fins on. I have better fins. I can do this better than you. I can do this cool thing. I can swarm all around. I can turn around." You're just looking at them in complete awe of how beautiful this planet is.

So, we had this incredible moment. Dolphins in open water – what could be better than that? So, we're getting out, we're like, "Oh man, that was incredible. We succeeded. We're so happy." We get out to the rocks, and there's this ranger that's showing us a badge, and he says something in Portuguese, and we're like, "Okay." He gets us to understand that he wants us to come with him.

Anyway, long story short, we basically got arrested. We were taken to the station because apparently, you are not supposed to swim towards the dolphins, which we had no idea about because it wasn't any kind of common knowledge and this was not in the marine park. Usually, marine parks have pretty strict rules, but this was in the port, so we had no idea that this was also some kind of protected area. We didn't cause harm, but I can see why that would be a rule because otherwise, a lot of people would be doing it, so I guess it does make sense after all.

But, yeah, we were taken to the station, we had a conversation for two hours, they brought in this girl who spoke English, and we tried to explain that if they wanted to convey this information, it would have been great to know it ahead of time. We would have never done this if we knew it wasn't allowed.

So, after a very long conversation, we actually ended up bonding over our love of the ocean and how we want to fix the seas, get all the plastic out of them, and not have people throw straws into the water. We became friends, shook hands, and gave each other a hug. They even asked us to give them a list of recommendations of what they could do to help foreigners better understand what they want.

We did get to complain about the trash because that island is actually very expensive and they charge fees even to get on the island. We were like, "Come on, guys. Clean up your trash." It was a really cool experience at

the end of the day, but we were scared shitless for a little while. We were like, “Are we getting arrested in Brazil? I don’t want to go to a Brazilian prison. I didn’t mean anything bad.” So, yeah, we got arrested in Brazil for swimming with dolphins.

Matt: Wow, an incredible ending to the story. That’s awesome. Can you say a little bit more about free diving, just for people who aren’t familiar with that? What is that, and what is that experience like? What does that mean to you?

Lydia: Ah, free diving. Thanks for bringing that up. Free diving is basically diving in a breath hold. You hold your breath, and then you go as far down as you can. People do free diving differently. With proper free diving, you go down the line and then up the line, and it’s a little more technical, but you can also just free dive, as long as you do it safely, and always with a buddy.

My brother is my free dive buddy, and he actually got me into this about five years ago, and it’s an incredible experience like no other because in regular diving, which I also do, you look outwards. You go down with a tank, but you’re very intrusive to the environment. You have these bubbles, you’re big, you can barely move, and it’s really cool for looking outside and looking all around you, but free diving is as much of an internal experience as it is an external experience.

You hold your breath, and you get into this different world where everything around you is – you’re a visitor, but you’re so blessed to be there with the fish, and the coral reef, and this blue, this amazing, big blue. On a sunny day, when you’re down at the bottom, and you’re looking up, and your friend – your buddy – is all the way up there, he’s a tiny little dot, you’re in a different world, you’re on a different planet, and you see the light shimmering in the water.

Sometimes, I wish I had a pair of gills so I could do that longer. I’d probably do the surgery. If there was a surgery to get gills that didn’t have too many risks, I would do that, because that world – if you don’t do diving, free diving, or any sea activity, if you can give yourself that gift because in that world, the sea and the creatures that live in it – it is one of the most profound and incredible experiences that I’ve ever had, being able to share that environment, being able to dip out of this, and also, being able to be without air.

You have this moment of “This is not going to last. I’ll need air. I’ll need to come back.”

But, once you’re there, just fully relax on the bottom and give yourself a moment because you have that moment where you don’t have to think about coming back and think about your air. It’s really one of the most Zen places I’ve ever been, just on the bottom of the ocean.

Matt:

That’s amazing. I know that you have done a lot of amazing things, obviously, as we’re talking about right now, and having a lot of incredible experiences, and structuring your lifestyle in a way that allows you to have all these extraordinary experiences, but I know that as you’ve been traveling, you’ve also been doing an increasing amount of writing and reflection, opining and pontificating on all this kind of stuff, and I’m wondering if you could share some of the stuff that you’ve been putting thought and effort into, and why you’ve been writing, and what types of things you’ve been writing about. Maybe you could start with some reflections on the nomad life that you’ve been writing about.

Lydia:

Of course. At some moment, you try to figure out your life, and right now, the life that I’m living is a dream for a lot of people. And yet, sometimes, you find yourself in the same mental state you have at home. You still have problems, and sometimes you have a bad day, and sometimes you’re just like, “Wait, I’m in paradise. How come I’m not happy?”

So, what I’ve been doing a lot is pondering life and trying to figure out how to really be somewhere. Even if you’re traveling, traveling is great, but it’s not the answer to all your problems. So, if you think that starting to travel is going to solve them, I think it’s probably going to do the other thing. It’s going to bring up more of what your actual issues are.

When you’re traveling, you’re far away, but you’re still there with yourself, so you have to build a better relationship with yourself, and then you can be anywhere, and you can be happy, and you can have a much better space to create.

So, what I focus on a lot is being able to find tools and things that enable me to have a better relationship with myself so that I can also serve people better, and that has been a lifelong journey – just figuring out how to be happier, how to really enjoy life, and how to

be more in the moment. I'm a Type A control freak. I really like to be in control, and that's one of the reasons I worry a lot, because that's your brain's attempt to control the future. Worrying is the most useless thing. It doesn't help at all. But, when you worry, you think, "Because I worry, I'm somehow going to have this grip on how the future is going to turn out." So, learning to undo all that has been something I'm still working on.

And then, relationships – relationships with people, relationships with yourself. Relationships are the single most complicated thing on this planet, so I think we have to learn to figure them out a little bit better than we have been. Our world could use a lot of improvement when it comes to relationships. We're struggling with community, we're struggling with family, we're struggling with love and friendship. How do you do all that right? How do you do all that better?

For me, it's just been trying to figure out how to be a better friend and how to undo some of my own demons, where I want what I don't have, and struggling with being able to get over suffering because of what I don't have, and focusing on what I have. That seems easier said than done, somehow.

Matt: For sure. One of the things that I think a lot of people – whether they're in the nomad lifestyle or thinking about it, a lot of people have questions about a lot of things, which are super valid questions – for example, with regard to relationships and the itinerant digital nomad lifestyle. How do relationships work? How does love work? How does that kind of stuff work in a digital nomad lifestyle? I'm wondering about your thoughts and reflections on that.

Lydia: Yeah, of course. Here's the thing, though: I've always been a person who's always wanted a family. Relationships, and having a partner, especially having a romantic partner, are great. I love being in a very deep, quality relationship. But, in this lifestyle – and, the funny thing is in L.A., I can't say I was able to find better quality relationships than I do in this lifestyle.

But then, you have a problem: Location. That has been a big issue because you meet somebody, you really connect, and it's great, but the logistics – yeah, it's great if you can both travel to the same places, but what if they're not location-independent? You don't get to a point to



know each other enough to know whether you want it to be something big and serious.

So, we have this mindset we were taught to think because of the millennia of our history and millennia of needing to have only one partner because of family and survival. That's how you do that. If you're taught to think that you can only have one partner, one lover in your life, because you have to know where your kids came from – all of that is just based on survival. But, the thing is that it doesn't serve us anymore. We're different. The world has changed, but our brains and our software haven't.

I'm sure a lot of people are going to be like, "Whoa, woman, what are you trying to say here?" As a person who was also raised in a pretty religious environment, where I was taught that you just have this one person, but I also know a lot of people who are very damaged by that belief, because what if that person doesn't come? I know you've got to let go, trust God, and this and that, but also, my beliefs have changed a lot, and my understanding of God and the relationship with the divine has changed a lot. I'm sure a lot of people will disagree with me, but this made me a much happier person.

When it comes to relationships, my current belief is that deep, profound connection and care for each other are more important than trying to cling to something which you hope is going to be forever, and honestly, we all really hope that we're going to find a forever relationship, but the truth is most people don't, and even though we find somebody that's profound and that's incredible for us, sometimes it's going to end. Either you're going to go your separate ways, or one of you is going to pass away. That's how life works.

So, being able to transfer this belief of "I have to have forever, and that's the only way I'm going to be happy, and that's the only way I'll be able to enjoy" to "I'm able to enjoy this incredible connection without having to have forever" is not an easy thing to do by any means. We have this mechanism – that old brain, clicking in. You still have a brain that's trying to save you from the saber-toothed tiger, and that brain is not geared towards trying to make you happy, it's geared towards survival and procreation. Those are your two basic functions.

But, our world is different. We don't really have to think about food, safety, and shelter

---

all the time. We have a higher hierarchy of needs now. We have a completely different set of things, but we still have this old brain that thinks in these old terms. So, it's our job to re-upload new software and constantly upgrade that software, and you do that through introspection, through analyzing your motivation, through analyzing your life.

I have a lot of tools that I came up with for myself that I hope I can eventually formulate and share with other people, but I think one of them is being able to focus more on the now. Of course, you're building your future, but when it comes to relationships, if you're with somebody and you're constantly worried because you know it's probably not going to last forever, that's going to damage this relationship.

Also, thinking, "I just have to have this one person, and if this person isn't my one person, I can't share something beautiful with them" is not true. I'm not saying you should go and sleep with everyone, unless that's your thing. If you want to go and do that, then do it, by all means. If you can be happy by doing that and be in a place where you're in balance with yourself, then sure.

But, for most of us, it's a very hard thing to do, and especially for women, because we're geared towards – our brains are made to find a partner and keep a partner because we need to raise offspring. That's how that thing works. That's why we're very concentrated on finding that one person.

But, if you're able to let go of that and be able to enjoy a connection – but, the thing is it does have to be there for both of you. If you're both able to fully give all of your love to that one person in that moment, you create an amazing moment, and it's honestly a skill. It takes some time to be able to get there.

One of the ways I do it is I'm more open to that and putting my vulnerability out there. As Brené Brown says, vulnerability is the core of fear and shame, but it's the birthplace of love and belonging. So, you're not going to have love and belonging unless you're able and willing to face the fear and shame.

But, we're now going back to that failure talk. If we fail, and then you survive – it's the same thing with vulnerability. You feel fear and shame, and then you're in this bad place, and then you're like, "Wait, I survived, and I put myself out there." I give myself a lot of brownie points,

---

even if I fail. If I try something and it doesn't work, I still give myself a pat on the shoulder and say, "Good job, Lydia, for trying."

So, just be able to be there and be open, and offer your love to people, whether it's platonic, whether it's romantic, whether it's any kind of love. When you're in the state of love, you can do amazing things. You're happier, you're grateful, you're able to forgive, you're able to get over things, and being in the state of love takes a lot of work, and you need to also love yourself before you can love anybody else because if you can't truly love yourself, if you can't let go – we have a lot of stuff built up in us.

Most of us have a lot of baggage because we're traumatized by so many different things, and a lot of times, we talk to ourselves in a way that we would never talk to another person. That's also something that's worth changing. When you have that conversation in your head, why don't you just talk to yourself the way you would talk to your best friend and give yourself that love and respect, too?

But, when you're in that state of love, everything is possible. You can change the world. You can do whatever you need to do. You can forgive. You can grow. I think that should be everyone's goal – to be able to love more, whether it's yourself, anybody else, or the planet, because that's going to make us a much better planet and much better species.

Matt: That's so awesome. I love reading your writing for exactly these reasons. That's why I wanted to make sure that we talked through some of this stuff here. It's so awesome. One important thing that you said also – and, getting back to these logistical questions about relationships that a lot of people have with regard to the nomad lifestyle – reflexively, they're like, "Oh, that's different. Doesn't it make it hard to X, Y, Z?"

One really important thing you just said is that it's not necessarily that it is dating in Los Angeles, to find whatever it is you think you're looking for. It's not necessarily easier if you're in one city or one sedentary place. In the nomad space, the other thing logistically speaking is that most of us are able to leverage and exercise our location independence in ways that actually give us a lot more flexibility than most people have to make certain things work.

First of all, we have options of a much broader range of people that can come into our ecosystem and our social world, and be able to interact with and meet with countries all over the world, not just from our local town. Second of all, we're able to insert ourselves into specific types of communities with people that have similar values, passions, and aspirations, so we're actually able to get a higher percentage chance of meeting people who have a lot of those overlapping core values and passions in terms of that compatibility stuff.

And then, logistically, if we are location independent, we have the greater flexibility to be able to say, "Okay, we can either" – I've been in relationships that have worked on different models. I've traveled with a relationship partner for years, traveled the world as a couple for years. There's that model. I've been in relationships where the other person is not location independent like I am. We've done some long-distance stuff, but I actually moved with her city to be with her, and I had the flexibility to do that because I'm location independent.

So, if I meet my soul mate, I have the ability to move to her city if the priority for me is to be with her, and she can't do that other stuff. I have that choice, whereas a lot of people don't. If you're on vacation, and you meet someone, and you have to go back to your respective jobs, there's no chance.

So, I feel like there's actually an incredible amount of opportunity to – for that whole thing, just for people who are questioning it or wondering about it. I feel like the nomad life actually provides an incredibly increased amount of opportunity to meet amazing people and form different types of wonderful relationships.

Lydia: I completely agree. Once I started living this part-time nomadic lifestyle, I met a lot more people with whom I've connected with much more deeply and with whom I'm compatible because we share these similar values. I think the other big factor is urgency. That's the factor that we miss in our everyday lives when we're staying someplace because next week, it's going to be the same. In a month, it's going to be the same. In a year, it's going to be the same. Same place, same people.

But, when you're traveling, and you only have that week – and, I don't mean in terms of where you're going. You don't just jump in

bed with somebody right away because it's urgent. It's the urgency to create something real. It's the urgency where you don't have the small talk conversation. It's the urgency where you meet tomorrow because you're not going to think, "Oh, next Thursday, I may have a little bit of time," because it's now or never.

When I'm in L.A., I really miss that because people don't understand that life is happening now, and if you want to try something, you try it now, or you don't try it. But, when you're traveling, that urgency is there, so you make the plan right away, and you do – I've done amazing things. I've had such great adventures. The people I've connected with – we're like, "Let's do this." You go swimming, you ride a bike – There's so much that's hard to describe, but I would have literally never had these adventures if I'd have stayed in one place.

But, the places – if you're together in some beautiful place and you have an opportunity to do something really incredible, you do it, but this urgency of "Here, now, or never" really gives you this chance to connect much faster and much more deeply because you dive deeply right away. You dive deep, and if you don't know what diving deep is, try going over "36 Questions to Fall in Love."

There's something called "36 Questions to Fall in Love," and you don't necessarily fall in love, but that's how you connect deeply with somebody because you basically – it's not magic. It's something that just fast-forwards you through something that you would normally do through the course of a relationship in maybe a month or two.

And then, you answer these questions, and all of a sudden, you care for the other person because you know them on a personal level, because you've shared vulnerable, deep moments with them, because all of a sudden, you feel like they've seen you naked, their soul naked, and they've seen your soul naked. That's how you can form those real bonds. That's how you care about people. That's how you get them to care about you, too.

But, you have to be in that space that's open for it. Just imagine that all of us – every person would be that open to new, beautiful relationships, and we would let people in on that scale. What kind of world would we have? All of a sudden, we would really care about each other.

Matt: That's awesome. I also want to ask you about your take on materialism and detaching from material items, but also, the concept of having nice stuff. One of the things that – I do a presentation on minimalist packing about how to travel the world for a year plus with carry-on luggage only.

Lydia: I remember it. I've seen it. It was a great presentation.

Matt: Thank you. For me, it was a really significant exercise to downsize my life to that amount of stuff because it really enabled me to thoroughly and completely detach from the social pressures to accumulate material objects and have that be any kind of pressure at all, because I can only fit what I can fit in my carry-on luggage. That's allowed me to focus a lot more on experiences, and on relationships with people, and on things that are not buying material items and upgrading material items, that kind of stuff.

But, with that said, the stuff that's actually in my suitcase – I actually carry a whole bunch of very nice clothes that I want to wear because I want to feel a particular way when I wear them, and I want to ask you about that and about some of your reflections on that concept and how you navigate that.

Lydia: You just said the key phrase: "Feel a particular way." The thing about the material stuff is that it's all tools, and you can't solely rely on stuff to make you feel a certain way, but why not use that tool if you need to feel a certain way? Sometimes, you put on a pair of heels, and all of a sudden, your back is straighter, you feel more confident, and you feel like you can go and conquer the world. It's important to be able to give yourself that stuff.

Now, by no means am I encouraging the culture of usage, because you want to be very tactical about what and how you buy, and it's better to invest in something that's good and going to last and serve you, but it's important to understand that physical stuff does matter because we have a physical body, and that's how it works. There's a mind-body connection, so that's important. You feel much better when you work out in a particular way because you feel good about your body.

You can use physical stuff in the same way. My friend Julia and I have a very big, important thing about having comfort. For example, when we go to Burning Man – AfrikaBurn this time – we

get string lights. We get beautiful string lights to hang in our tent because it's cozy. Coziness is a big priority because that makes us feel safe and good. A cup of tea is important for me. I actually travel with my spice kit and truffle oil because very beautiful food is important, and I make it a ritual. I love the cooking. I love the serving.

I feel the same way about an item of clothing. When I was in Buenos Aires, I was doubting whether I should buy tango shoes, and I think that's probably – I wrote a post about it, and I think that's the one you read. I was in doubt because they're kind of expensive and I didn't know whether I would be using them more. I didn't know if I would keep continuing with tango.

At some point, I made the choice that I wanted to buy the shoes. So, I went to this place, and I really crafted the time on my last day, and I went to the shop. Oh, my God, it was shoe paradise, total shoe paradise. You walk in, and it's this big, empty room with chairs. They come and ask you for your size, and what size heel you want, and then they bring you all these pairs of shoes in your size. Oh, man. Shoes. There's just something about shoes.

But, the cool thing is when I bought these shoes and I picked – I actually ended up buying a main pair and a backup pair because that was the moment I realized I would definitely be using these shoes, which I have been. I've been making the best out of them. But, when I put them on, all of a sudden, this feeling that I had – for one thing, I was like, "I'm going to be able to tango much better in these damn shoes. It's a whole other story."

And, I have been. Seriously, proper attire for the proper sports is absolutely necessary, and when it comes to dance, get the right shoes. But, I also had this feeling that I could embody the feeling that comes from the ground. The feeling of how your foot is standing on the ground determines how you stand and determines how you move. It's a tool. So, if you want to be a better dancer, get yourself the right shoes. If you want to be a more confident person, get yourself the clothes that make you feel like you're on top of the world.

I remember afterward – of course, like you said – I don't just carry a carry-on. I have a full-on suitcase. I do need a few more things in there – like tango shoes – that don't exactly just fit in my carry-on.



I have a lot of hair stuff. Curly hair does require a lot of care, and you can't do that with a carry-on.

So, anyway, long story short, I was coming back home, and I remember I had these black overalls that I had bought before the trip, and it was the same thing. I wasn't sure how much I was going to use it because it's such a stylish, beautiful piece of clothing. It's a nice, expensive, and beautiful piece of clothing.

But, I remember that when I go back home, I always have this feeling of, "Hmm, do I want to go home? The trip is ending—" For me, being home also means there's a lot of work because I usually go through growth phases when I'm in L.A., so I work a lot. I don't really go out as much.

But, I remember going home and looking forward to putting on those beautiful black overalls with a nice pair of heels. We were celebrating my mom's birthday, and I was able to do that, and I felt so good being in those clothes, looking great, just feeling like I was the person I wanted to be.

The most important thing in life is matching how you look, how you feel, and what you do with who you really want to be, because when you can fully feel like you're you, that's usually when you're very happy, when you feel like you can fully be who you're meant to be and you're fulfilling your purpose.

So, for me, material things are tools to be able to get there, just like everything else is, to be able to get to that place where I'm fully myself. Sometimes, that's when I struggle – when I'm not able to do that. Honestly, sometimes, if you don't have anywhere to go and you have this beautiful clothing, just wear it around the house. Just put it on, and feel great, and give yourself that gift. There's nothing about that that's useless.

We're also taught to try to make sure everything is useful and everything works, but the value of things isn't just determined by how much use you're going to get out of them. Of course, again, I'm not encouraging wastefulness. That's a bad thing. Don't do fast fashion where you just get a lot of things and throw them away. I actually buy most of my fashion from used clothing places, whether it's an exchange place that's a bit nicer or a thrift shop. I try to keep my shopping down to those places. So, I wear

something and give it back to the same store, and it's great.

But, this way, I can really feel like this is who I am. I can wear these clothes, enjoy them, and enjoy looking great, enjoy feeling like this is where I want to be at this moment of time, and this is how I want to feel. I made that choice, and I made that happen.

Matt: Awesome. I wanted to ask you what types of things are coming up next in terms of your business. What are you working on, what are the expansion endeavors that are going on, and what are you up to?

Lydia: Ooh, thanks for asking. One of the things that I'm very excited about is working on a boudoir vision for our business, which is a fairly new division, but I started building up the portfolio and doing these shoots because I feel like for me, it's also a chance to give back to people when they're in some of their most vulnerable states. When you're not wearing much clothing, or none at all, it's hard to let go of that.

I feel like it's funny because I've also had to go through that journey myself. How okay am I with nudity? How okay am I with not feeling like I'm not wearing any clothes? I actually really understood that I like not wearing any clothes. It's very liberating. Being able to not be ashamed of any part of your body is also a great gift, and I wish that more people realized how wonderful it can be to love all of your body.

I think boudoir is a thing that's able to do that. It's the ability to give yourself away, to see yourself as if you are on that magazine cover, to see how beautiful you can be, how romantic and sexy you can be. Especially for women, that's a problem a lot of the time. Most of us have a very serious issue with body image. I'm sure a lot of men struggle with that too, but because I am a woman and I have this body, I can better relate to them, so I'm going to start there, and then I'm going to expand to wherever it goes.

But, yeah, I want to be able to do that. I want to give this gift to women of being able to see themselves in a very beautiful way. I think it's a two-part journey. It's me being able to take a picture of them when they look really great, but also, some of them being able to let go of not liking certain body parts or being able to see them in a different light. So, it's a two-way street, and it takes an effort from both parties.

But, I'm excited to also make that. I want to do the same thing with it. I want to learn it really well, to create a system, and then teach other people to do it, and either create a separate company or another division of my business.

And then, I'm thinking of eventually going to other cities, not just Los Angeles. We've got this beautiful system already, so now, I'm perfecting it. I'm creating even more training courses, both for – actually, for our couples, we just created a training course that helps people understand how to get married properly because nobody really knows how to do that, and people make a lot of mistakes that they later think, “Oh, I wish I knew this before.”

So, I'm doing these things, and I also have a couple more projects that are not fully ready for me to talk about, but I'm thinking of getting into other industries as well and learning new things. I think photography is great, but I usually have to change something that I'm doing every five years, so I want to learn other industries as well and maybe get better at those. Maybe I should do some real estate. I'm just putting that out there.

Matt: We can talk. That's awesome. Lydia, do you have a morning routine? I want to ask about your day structure – first of all, about morning routines, and then any productivity tips that you have for structuring your day when you're trying to be really productive and building businesses.

Lydia: For sure. I think the morning routine is imperative. I haven't always had a morning routine. Moreover, I'm a very big night owl, and I used to think it was the only way I could function. The funny thing is that very recently, I understood that I can actually be a morning person if I choose to. It just depends on what I need more in my life at that moment in time. If you're a morning person, you get tired in the evenings faster, and you're not able to stay up and talk to people, and in some situations, it's better to have your evenings. For example, now, I'm doing some work for my company, so I'm having to stay up late to be on American time.

But, the morning routine I usually do is wake up and do a meditation. After I do my meditation, I have a short workout routine. I do a three-minute plank and a few other exercises. I do some breath work, and then I cook my breakfast, and I watch either

a TED Talk or another type of YouTube video that gives me a condensed but strong amount of useful information.

And then, I implement the stuff that I learn from there in my life. I make that into tools. If it's something that tickles my interest, I read more about it. I watch a lot of TED and TEDx talks, but those are hit and miss. Sometimes, it's easy to get on a TED Talk that may not be that great.

I really love a channel called Productivity Game. It's a condensed version of books, and that's how I can see what I want to read next. They have really cool videos. Or, there are a lot of videos that are going to give you really great information, and if you're interested in them, you discover more.

I actually make notes on the videos that I watch because otherwise, I forget. In my phone, I have structured lists of a few things that I've picked up from videos. And, you will forget the videos, so I make a note of which ones I want to keep and rewatch in the future, which may be useful, and I think that has really helped me a lot.

At some point, I also had a short Spanish lesson that was following my daily routine, but right now, I realized that unfortunately I'm not able to do that because I need my time for other things. Everything in life is about prioritizing. So, you want to strongly determine what your priorities are, and then base everything on those priorities.

I think the morning routine is the same. What's the most important thing for you? For me, it's being able to be there with myself for a second. The meditation really helps to break off from this rush. It was a really big struggle to unlearn looking at my phone first thing in the morning. That can wait. Give yourself the time.

So, when I do the meditation, a lot of times, when I do my morning routine, I will not even look at my phone. But, I can only do that when I know that everything in my business is working. When we're in maintenance phase, and I don't need to be doing any growth, and I'm not training anyone, when everything's working, that's something I'm able to afford to do time-wise. I know sometimes, that's also not possible, so then, you want to prioritize and see what the most important thing is.

But, meditation is imperative. If you don't do anything at all, I recommend figuring out one thing that is going to help you to get away from the routine and from the constant chatter in your head. Get away from that. Learn to break that off so that you can have a fresh perspective because then, you can start with a new look.

You break away, you look at the problem again, and all of a sudden, the problem gets solved because your brain is an incredible tool. It can do so much, but you have to allow it. You have to learn how to gear your brain towards what you want to do now and give yourself the tools to do it. Again, it's a tool, but if you don't pick up the tool and use it, it's going to be useless if it's laying around there. So, don't let your brain lay around there.

Matt: I love that. Awesome. All right. Lydia, at this point, are you ready for the Lightning Round?

Lydia: **[Sings Beethoven's 5th]** I am ready.

Matt: Let's do it!

Announcer 1: The Lightning Round!

Matt: All right. You just named one of your favorite video channels on YouTube that you typically watch. Let me ask you now for one book that you would recommend that perhaps has significantly influenced you in your life.

Lydia: Yup. It's a book that everyone should read. It's called *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Dr. Carol Dweck. I think it's a prerequisite for everything in life because she teaches you what kind of mindset you need to adopt to be able to do anything. I can't say that it's the most exciting book, to be honest. It's really useful, especially if you're a parent. I think that book gives you a lot of insight on how you give your kids the right mindset. But, it's also great for everyone. It literally should be mandatory for every human being on the planet.

Read the whole book. It gives great examples. I tried to read it twice. The first time I started reading it, I put it down because I was like, "Oh, I know all this shit. It's easy. Come on. Mindset? I know how to make this right." The second time, when I read through the whole book, it

gave a lot of great examples which I didn't think were – I didn't think to apply to those examples. So, make sure you read the whole thing, and if you come across a boring part, hang in there. It's going to get better. But, once you read that book, you feel all of a sudden like your brain is a much bigger tool than you thought it would be.

Matt: All right. If you were able to go back in time now, knowing everything that you know and everything that you've learned up to this point in your life, and you're able to give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what advice would you give to 18-year-old Lydia?

Lydia: Good question. When you're that young, everything feels like it's so final. Every heartbreak, every failure, you think that's it. You think that defines you. Just know that it's going to happen over and over again, so you might as well get better at that. That's probably a very useful piece of advice. Nothing is final. It's all going to change, and then everything's going to change again, and you're going to change, and that's okay. Accept that. The better you adapt, the better you survive.

So, when you have a problem, adversity is not a bad thing. Learn that adversity is a good thing because that teaches you to grow, that makes you better, and constant growth is absolutely necessary. If you're not growing, that means you're diminishing, and if you're diminishing, you're suffering. If your personality is not constantly expanding, then you're probably not going to be the happiest person you can be.

Matt: Awesome. All right. I was wondering if you could give us one travel hack from all of your world travels around the world. What's a travel hack that you use when you're traveling around?

Lydia: I have a good one. I shared it once in another interview, and I am sometimes hesitant to share it because what if everyone starts doing it? So, when you have flights, especially long transoceanic flights, a lot of times – well, if you're able to afford a first-class seat, good for you. I want to get there as well, but so far, I still fly in coach, and that's not the most comfortable way to fly. I don't know how you do it, Matt, because you're a much bigger person than I am. I'm pretty small, and it's still not very comfy.

But, I'm 5'4", and I still struggle with just sitting there in one seat for 12 hours. So, the

first thing I try to figure out when I'm about to board the flight is whether the flight is full, and a lot of times, it won't be. I'll very nicely ask the – sometimes I even do that on the registration stand. I'll be like, "Hey, by the way, I just wanted to check out whether the flight is full." If the flight is not full, then my job will be to figure out which seats are open because I want to find two, three, or four seats together where I can sleep, and if you don't do this fast, somebody else is going to sleep in that space.

I will gently ask, "Hey, by the way, do you have any open seats together that I can look at?" Sometimes they'll tell you, and sometimes they won't. So, I usually wait until the plane is almost done boarding, and I want to be one of the last people to get on the plane, and what I'll do is – you'll always have your seat. You don't necessarily have to go to your seat right away.

I'll walk through the plane, and I'll see where there are two, three, or four seats together that are open, and I claim the shit out of them. I put my stuff all over them, and I'm going to sit as if I own that space because otherwise, some lady is going to come in and try to do that. I'm like, "Nope." That's when I'm going to be selfish. This is my space.

So, of course, they're going to ask you to put your luggage under the seat, and I'll do that, but their thing is they give you blankets, so I'll put a blanket over a few seats right away. "This is claimed. Don't even think about it." So, a number of times, I've just had a four-sleeper all to myself, total first class, because you can always go back to your seat. They can't take that away from you. They're also not going to kick you out if you're not causing any trouble. So, I'll gently claim the seats and strap in there for takeoff, but the moment I can strap out of my belt and that seatbelt sign disappears, I'm going to put my stuff all over that, claim the seats, and then sleep.

Matt: That's awesome. You've been to 37 different countries now, and a lot of places within those countries. What are your top three favorite travel destinations of all time?

Lydia: I hate that question because it's so hard to choose. It's so hard to choose. Travel really depends on what you're trying to do. So, it's important to travel to destinations that are conducive to what your goals and priorities are, but for me personally – some places may be absolutely magical naturally, but the people aren't that great or



it's just hard to connect. I found that to be true in Greece. It was hard for me to connect with the locals because they're out, but they're out together a lot. I connected with friends a lot, but not so much with the locals.

Top three? All right, let's see. I have to say, this place we're in, Cape Town, is naturally in the top. Oh, my God. Incredible scenery. It's mind-blowing. The rocky cliffs, the mountains, the nature, the flora – the flora is just –wow. South Africa? Beautiful. For ages, I didn't even consider Africa. I was like, "I don't know much about that continent." I'm starting to discover Africa, and boy, Africa rocks. It's amazing. I'm so excited to keep traveling on this amazing continent.

The people, too. In Cape Town, they have the history of apartheid, and it's such a painful history. For some reason, when I was coming here, I expected to see a lot more hatred. I've been met with all this kindness. People are so nice. I have seen nothing but helpfulness and kindness since I've been here. Everyone's trying to help, everyone's there for you, and you can still see the hardship and where the dividing line is, but I was just blown away by how cool and nice people are.

Also, everyone speaks English, and that makes things easy for sure. So, I think South Africa is a big one. Wineries – my God, have you seen the wineries? I've been to a lot of wineries around the place, and I'm a big lover of wine. This place has the most beautiful wineries I have ever seen so far. I can talk about this forever. I'm going to switch to the next one.

All right, let's see. What else is beautiful? There are a lot of places in Europe, but everybody else is going to tell you about that. Europe is great, but I would say Argentina – Buenos Aires. I had a great time there. It's so cool and chill. Not all of the areas – we stayed Palermo Soho. I would say that area is my little paradise in Buenos Aires. Amazing street art, beautiful cafes, cool restaurants, really high-quality, lots of culture, and again, tango. Tango, mmm!

Music, everything there – and, all of that at half or less than half of European prices. Just affordable, cool stuff – that's Buenos Aires. Also, there are really cool people. Argentineans are awesome. I don't really eat meat, but if I did, that would be meat paradise. The food – man, Buenos Aires – I'm definitely going back there. I want to go back there for a month or two and really take it in because it was awesome. Especially for nomads, Buenos Aires rocks.

The third one would have to go to El Nido, Philippines on the island of Palawan. It is one of the most naturally beautiful places I have ever seen. You have the most beautiful floating islands. Underwater, too – incredible reef. I’ve seen some reef, and that reef was like –oh, my God. Also, there are very cool, kind people and affordable stuff. I was there with my parents and my brother, and we rented this private boat for a day that took us island hopping, and a part of that tour – I think we probably paid \$100.00 for the whole tour with two people helping us navigate and a whole boat.

And, lunch – they cooked us this lunch there on the boat, and they served it to us on these white, sandy beaches on an uninhabited island. It was just something. We were just sitting there, and this was not a sandwich lunch. It was a fucking feast. We had all kinds of fish there, we had shrimp, we had bread, we had rice. My mouth is watering just thinking about that food. And, again, kind people. People are big. People matter. For me, I think I’m discovering more and more that I love being in places where the people are kind and open because then, I can connect with them, build something, and get to know them, and it’s really awesome. I would say those are my top three highly recommended places.

Matt: Awesome. I’ve never been to the Philippines, but this is my second time in Cape Town, and I have lived in Buenos Aires for about four months total, and that city definitely has an important place in my heart as well. Okay, what are your top three bucket list destinations you’ve never been to?

Lydia: Bucket list? All right. Scotland! I’ve been wanting to go to Scotland forever, and I just never seem to get there, mostly because of the season. A lot of times, I end up in Europe when it’s not really hot, and Scotland is not a place I want to go in winter, so I think I’m going to try to go there in the summer, and I’m really excited because I love the Scottish culture. I had Scottish friends early on in my life, and they were so damn cool.

Those people are awesome. They’re down to earth, they’re open, they have that old, seasoned culture in them, and also, you have men in kilts. Come on. That’s so cool. Where else are you going to get that? The music – I don’t know about the food yet. We’re going to have to see about the food. Haggis isn’t really exciting right now, but –

Well, I don't eat meat anymore, so maybe that's going to be a little bit of a hard one. So, we'll see about the food, but Scotland, you've had a place in my heart for a long time. Now, I finally want to come see you.

Let's see. What else? I've been thinking about Antarctica, actually. That's been growing on my list, just because – I don't know. Antarctica? Just because. Amazing beauty, being away from everything, being in such a unique place. It is quite expensive to go there, so I'm still thinking of the logistics of how to do it best, but just to go hang out with penguins and killer whales, meet a few polar bears, shake a few hands – I told you I love the locals, right? So, I'm totally looking forward to connecting with the locals in Antarctica.

All right, third place – I still have not been to Italy. I have not been to Italy, and I'm looking forward to doing that. I've been saving it. I've been saving that destination for – I really want to go and visit friends there and meet the locals because I think that's the best experience. You visit somebody, and they take you to see their family in a small town, and they throw a feast for you – I want that.

But, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to throw out a few things that are on my lifelong bucket list that I want to achieve at some point, and I think I might need outside help in getting those, and I just thought about that. Two things on my bucket list are attending weddings in India and Japan and wearing cultural attire to both of them. I've been wanting to do that forever.

I love wearing a kimono. When I was in Japan, I tried on a kimono, and I felt wonderful. Actually, the locals told me that I rocked it surprisingly well, so I was very honored to hear that, but I love Japanese culture and Indian culture, and I think weddings are incredible places to experience that culture. So, if you're getting married in Japan or India, please invite me. I'll literally come to your wedding unless I have some other plans that I can't cancel, but I'll make an effort to come to your wedding, and I can even bring a gift of some kind. So, let me know. That's on the bucket list. I definitely want to do that sometime.

Matt: That's amazing. All right, Lydia. This has been so awesome. I want you to let people know how they can get ahold of you, how

---

they can follow you on social media, and how they can check out The “I Do” Photography and everything else you’re up to.

Lydia: Instagram is probably the best tool because I’ve been posting the things I’ve been writing with a few photos on my personal Instagram, and if you are into the wedding scene in any way, if you are getting married, or you just want to learn more, or you want to see beautiful wedding pictures, follow us on Instagram as well. You can check out our website, [www.theidophotography.com](http://www.theidophotography.com), to see everything we do and what we talked about today. But, Instagram is the biggest tool.

I also want to mention a project that we got into and that we have open here in Cape Town. If anybody feels like they want to be part of this project, it would be super cool. We’re currently doing fundraising for building a daycare in one of the townships in Cape Town. This wasn’t planned.

We went there, and we met this amazing woman, Nesife, who started a daycare in her own house, if you can call it a house, in a township which is basically the slum, in a way – or, some parts of it are quite a slum because the houses are built out of whatever they could find. It’s a lot of plywood or whatever could be used. It was heartbreaking to see what conditions people live in, but it was very uplifting to see how happy they can be while living in places like that, because I think the community there is going strong. But, the daycare that’s happening right there was literally built out of leftovers of a set of a TV show, “Black Sails.” Apparently, they filmed it in Cape Town, and some plywood –

Anyway, that’s not a place for kids to live like that or to be there, and she’s taking care of kids for 12 hours a day sometimes, and the most important thing about that daycare is a thing called Little Leaders. She’s starting to give them education early on. They’re learning stuff. They’re taught to take initiative and how to take the most out of the resources they have. I was amazed, and we all thought that if they could do this with the little that they have, what’s going to happen if they have more resources?

So, we want to build that daycare, and we’re raising about \$18,000.00. We’ve already raised about \$5,000.00, and we have a ways to go, and we want to build them a normal building because then, she can get government funding, and it’s fireproof, so it’s safer. You should

see those kids, man. They're so cool. They're so full of life and so well behaved. I think all of us just stood there and felt really compelled to do something about it.

So, if this is a project you want to participate in, get in touch with me. We have a GoFundMe campaign. If you can think of any other ways that are going to help us to build the daycare there in Cape Town, it would be great to participate because this is something we're going to go back to for a while, and if this succeeds, maybe we could do more of that. That would be a really cool project. So, I'm just putting that out there.

Matt: All right. We're going to link up all this stuff in one place in the show notes at [www.themaverickshow.com](http://www.themaverickshow.com). You can just go there, and we'll have links to everything that you're up to, but can you just give out your personal Instagram handle if people want to follow you?

Lydia: Yes. My personal Instagram is [www.instagram.com/LydiaBayLA](http://www.instagram.com/LydiaBayLA).

Matt: Okay. We are going to put a link to that in the show notes so you can just go there and click on it. By the way. I strongly encourage everybody to follow you on Instagram because your Instagram is amazing.

Lydia: Thank you, Matt. Thank you for letting me share. This is an amazing experience, and I'm honored to be a guest on your show. I think what you're doing is incredible. Matt is a super cool person. We met on Nomad Cruise a year ago, and you were one of the people I connected with, and we had a few really cool heart-to-hearts, and I think you have incredible value to offer people. I'm so glad you're doing this. You're also a really cool host, so thank you for leading me through this so well.

Matt: Well, thank you for being on the show. I've actually been trying to get you on the show for a full year now since we initially met, and it's been really fun because we've seen each other and hung out in a number of places around the world. We were initially on that first Nomad Cruise, we were in Brazil together, we're in Cape Town now, and it's been really amazing to get to know you personally as well as to get to see all the incredible stuff you're doing on the business side of things, as well as the charitable stuff that you just mentioned, and all these super cool things.

So, in some ways, I'm glad we waited a year, just because I feel like the interview is better now than it would have been a year ago, but I'm super excited that this finally happened, and I thank you for being on the show and sharing your amazingness.

Lydia: Thank you, Matt, and thank you, everyone, for listening. I was very honored to share with you guys.

Matt: All right. Have a good night, everybody.

Announcer 1: Be sure to visit the Show Notes page at [www.themaverickshow.com](http://www.themaverickshow.com) for direct links to all the books, people, and resources mentioned in this episode. You'll find all that and much more at [www.themaverickshow.com](http://www.themaverickshow.com).

Announcer 2: Would you like to get Maverick Investor Group's whitepaper on real estate investing for digital nomads, how to buy U.S. rental properties from anywhere in the world, and finance an epic international lifestyle? Just go to [www.themaverickshow.com/nomad](http://www.themaverickshow.com/nomad). The report is totally free and available for you now at [www.themaverickshow.com/nomad](http://www.themaverickshow.com/nomad).

Announcer 3: Do you want to learn how to travel the world for a year plus with carry-on luggage only and look good while you're doing it? Go to [www.themaverickshow.com/packing](http://www.themaverickshow.com/packing) to see a free recorded webinar and learn exactly how Matt does it. He shows you the luggage he uses, the specific items he packs, and the travel brands he likes most. Even if you're just looking to go on shorter trips, but pack more efficiently and eliminate your checked luggage, you won't want to miss this. You can watch the free recorded webinar at [www.themaverickshow.com/packing](http://www.themaverickshow.com/packing).

**[End of Audio]**

**Duration: 112 minutes**