

INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Yooshita. If you have not yet listened to [part one](#), I highly recommend you go back and do that first because it provides some really important context for this episode. If you have already heard [part one](#), then please enjoy part two of my interview with Yooshita.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to talk to you about some of your experiences living abroad when you finally got your Austrian citizenship and chose to start living abroad in different countries for extended periods of time. And I would love to maybe just start with London. Can you share a little bit about what that experience was, why you chose London, and your very first experience living abroad on your own?

Yooshita: So, when I started studying in Vienna for International Business Management, it was very common to do a semester abroad within Europe, it is called Erasmus if you choose a European country. So, I picked London, and I stayed there for six months, which was my first experience of voluntarily moving to a new country all by myself and trying this out. And I was quite nervous doing this. I had no idea how it was going to be. It was the first time I was going to be by myself, and I had traveled here and there with my family, but I didn't really have the experience of traveling anywhere solo.

So, it was going to be an extended trip. And it turned out to be one of the best six months of my life. I had the best time. I met a lot of friends from all over the world, people that I was still in contact with, friends from Puerto Rico, from Spain, from all over Europe, from the United States. And we started traveling on weekends from London to other parts of Europe, wherever we could, to Barcelona, to Scotland, to Italy. And for me, trying out this traveling for the first time and discovering what a joy it brings to me and how easy it is and how excited I get about getting around the world.

Matt Bowles: I love that, and I can relate to it so much. My first time living abroad was also in college, and I studied abroad in Dublin, Ireland. I went to Trinity College for a year. I took the month of the winter break. My roommate and I went Euro rail all through Europe. And we were just like, this is amazing. And so, I feel like that's such a wonderful and transformative experience and also such an empowering experience. You can be on your own and living in a foreign country.

And London, I think, is just such an amazing place also, because you're not just immersing in English culture. You have all of these people from all around the world that are living in London. It's just such an amazing, diverse place that, as you said, you can meet people from all different places and learn about so many different cultures. So, I think that's such a wonderful first experience.

Another place that has a lot of folks from all over the world living there is Dubai. And I know that you also were based in Dubai, and I know that you worked for Emirates Airlines for a while as cabin crew, which some people might think is a pretty interesting way to try to see the world and travel to different places to work as cabin crew on an airline. I'm curious for you though, if you could kind of take us through that experience. What made you choose to move to Dubai and take that job? And then once you got into that job, what was that experience like?

Yooshita: The move to Dubai was just from an advertisement popping up on my Facebook while I was in the university trying to get prepared for an exam and I just see that Emirates is coming to Vienna to for an open day. And before that, I had no clue about this. I had one colleague in my office who had lived previously in Dubai, and she was not a cabin crew, but she was working as ground staff. And I had this thing in my mind that she had told me, oh my God, my time in Dubai was amazing. And working for

Emirates was amazing. We were getting all this free makeup materials and a lot of discounts for different restaurants and places in Dubai. That was the only thing I had heard about it.

And I just thought, I'm going to show up to this open day. I had no clue what's going to happen. I just thought, I'll go in the morning and I will buy some nice suit with skirt and I'll put my hairs off and I'm going to look so special and unique for this day. And I go there, and I see there are 130 or 40 other people there. They are all perfectly dressed, even with the correct red lipstick of Emirates cabin crew. Everybody looks amazing. And they are coming folders of their pictures and their resume and everything. And I started talking to these people and they told me that they had traveled from different countries. There was a girl who was coming from South Korea all the way to Vienna just to attend the open day, and another girl from Turkey. And some people told me this is their fifth or sixth attempt applying for the job. And I was like, okay, it's just going to be a nice day hanging out with these girls and that's it. I didn't think anything out of it.

And then the open day usually starts with the Emirates crew, starting with the presentation, talking about the job and then talking about living in Dubai. And they make this presentation, obviously so interesting and exciting that once you listen to that, you're like, okay, all I want in this world is this job and I want to move to Dubai tomorrow. So, after that I was like, okay, I'm going to put everything that I can. I'm going to deliver my best and I just hope that I get through this application process.

And I ended up going from one stage to another. They were coming out. Every one hour you would do a different activity and everybody had the numbers. So, every one hour they were like, okay, these numbers are in, and these numbers are out. On stage after stage, I was in, till only 10 people left. And I ended up getting the job, which meant a ticket to move to Dubai. They would pay for your ticket for your accommodation, and it was just like a dream coming true. Working as a cabin crew is for a lot of girls, I think, an exciting job that you would want to try out. So, all I had to do was to convince my parents that this is good. Which wasn't easy but it was done. And, yeah, I moved to Dubai, and I lived there for a year. And I truly had an amazing time working as a cabin crew.

Matt Bowles: Well, I have flown on Emirates multiple times. And one of the things that Emirates is known for is that I have also just observed as a passenger is how remarkably internationally diverse the cabin crew is. I mean, they hire people from countries all over the world and have this incredibly diverse staff of cabin crew. I'm curious how that in particular impacted you.

Yooshita: Sure. It's truly one of the most international jobs and places you can be. I mean, Dubai itself and then working at Emirates, definitely. So, they do hire people from really 170/nationalities, which means almost the whole world. And when I joined there, you went through eight weeks of training where you are in different groups. And in my group, every single person had at least a different nationality. Many people like me, two nationalities, people were from countries that I had never heard from, like Seychelles, Swaziland, what are these places? And they've never even heard these names.

And then you meet these people and they're really great in picking people from different parts of the world, but also from very different backgrounds. So, the majority of people coming to Emirates do not come from an aviation background. So, I remember in the group that I joined, we had an engineer, we had a pharmacist, we had an art dealer, we had an entertainer, somebody working in business, a teacher. Really very random and different backgrounds. And a lot of people joined this job to just experience this for a couple of years.

Some people end up staying for many years, but usually it's a job you do for a couple of years and have this experience. And I just love that they usually put you in accommodation where you share this with one or two colleagues. I was sharing my apartment with an Afro American girl and an Indian girl from northeast of India, which is a region where people look very Asian. I was like, wow, I've never seen Indians who look like Asians from Southeast Asia. And there were a lot of things that I hadn't seen or experienced. And I absolutely love this experience. Not only working with this very international group of people but literally flying every day to a different location. You would also be confronting and interacting with people of that country. So, it was truly a journey to a different part of the world every single day.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. Yeah. For people that haven't been to Dubai, I mean, one of the things I try to explain about it is that the residents of Dubai are 88% foreign nationals from other countries around the world. And it is so diverse. And so, if you spend time hanging out in Dubai, you will just have all of these conversations with people that are usually pretty recent immigrants from these other countries or people that have just moved there, maybe temporarily. Maybe not even trying to stay for a long time, but from every continent. Of course, if you're a traveler, you have things to talk to them about because you've been to their homeland.

And then you get into all of these amazing discussions with people from all over the world. So, Dubai is really a super fascinating place. So how did some of those types of experiences and connecting with those cultures and learning about new countries that you'd never heard of because you met someone that was from there? How did all that impact your desire to travel the world and to really travel extensively, would you say?

Yooshita: As you say, every time you meet one person from a new place that you haven't been, and they start telling you the life story and they start telling you about my country. Oh, but you have to visit this and you have to visit that, and you have to try this. It just started adding to my list that it's never ending. And once I was in Dubai, I knew, I want to do this, I want to travel, I want to see, I want to experience.

I realize every time we fly and have a layover, which usually you have, if your flight is longer than four hours, you end up spending 24 hours in that city. But normally you are just so exhausted because physically, the job of the cabin crew is really difficult. You spend a lot of hours at high altitude on the flight, and usually most of the crew, when they get to a new place, they're just destroyed. There's this insider joke that the cabin crew know that you always say, okay, you reach the hotel, you're like, let's meet in half an hour in the lobby, and we go do this and that and that. And then nobody shows up at the end.

But I was the one who always showing up, coming down to the lobby, I didn't care how tired I was, I didn't care how sleep deprived I was. And I always tried to use this opportunity of seeing and experiencing new places. And I knew that from then on, I want to see an experience as much as possible, and I want to see them all.

Matt Bowles: Well, one of the things that you have done in terms of structuring your travel lifestyle over the years that I have really appreciated and found very interesting is you have moved to different countries and taken a job there to live there for an extended period, a year or two or so, which is a really interesting concept to me. One of the things that I talk about is slow travel, but slow travel is relative.

So, in this sense, you're traveling much slower than I am and you're immersing much deeper than I am. When you stay somewhere for a year or two years. But the other thing that that's doing is it's giving you a

base that is in a different part of the world that puts you now, all of a sudden, in very close proximity to very different places than when you lived in another country. And I realized that too, because I lived in Cairo, Egypt, for a year. And when I was in Cairo for a year, all of a sudden, places like Dubai and Istanbul and places are now super close that used to be super far.

And now all of a sudden, you can just hop around and see these amazing new places that are much less expensive, much easier to get to. You can just go for a long weekend trip if you want to, because it's that close. And you definitely couldn't do that before. And so, for both of those reasons, I have found this technique of yours, I'm going to call it, that be very interesting. And I want to go into that a little bit.

So, can you share a little bit about your decision to leave Emirates? And then once you transitioned from there, I think your next destination was Portugal. Can you share a little bit about that? Because that's also one of my favorite countries. I mean, I try to go through Portugal every year. It's amazing. So many friends in Lisbon that I love to visit on pretty much an annual basis. I was literally just there last month in Lisbon, going through. But can you share a little bit about what you were up to in Portugal, where you were in Portugal and then what that experience was like and what you love about Portugal?

Yooshita: Sure. So looking back, it seems like I did pick up a country to live for a couple of years, but this was definitely not the plan. But I think it did turn out to be a good plan, and I do love how things worked out. So, every single country that I moved to after Dubai was super random and not planned. But I just felt like I opened myself to let the universe offer me these chances. And every time there was a chance, I was very happily accepting it and saying yes and trying it out. And so far, they were all good decisions.

So, after my time in Dubai, I wanted to move back somewhere in Europe, but I did not want to go back to Vienna. As much as I love the city, it wasn't that exciting enough. I had lived there for many years, so I was hoping to end up in a new place. So, I was contacted by a headhunting company for a job in Lisbon. It was a company I didn't know. They were like, you know, they're going to hire you. They're going to pay for your flight and a relocation package. They're going to offer you an apartment, share it with some colleagues. And I was like, this sounds too good to be true, but it sounds like a free trip to a country I haven't been to.

So let me say, yes, I've got nothing to lose. And I went there, and it turned out everything they said was correct. And there was a job, there was an apartment. I ended up staying with some people. Most people that they were hiring in this company were internationals coming from different places. So, it was Erasmus experience again but in a professional environment, you're just doing the same, but now you're getting paid for it. But it's a lot of very young and motivated people. So, I ended up staying in Lisbon for almost three years. And I absolutely love the city. It's still after having traveled to so many countries, Lisbon and Portugal has a very special place. The whole south of Europe. Europe, but Spain and Portugal, these two countries definitely are very special. And I always, as you say, also enjoy going back and meeting the friends from the time I was living there.

Matt Bowles: For people that have never been to Portugal, they've never been to Lisbon. What are some of the top things that you love most, that are like the most special, the things you remember or the things that you love when you go back?

Yooshita: Ah, the food. The food in Portugal is amazing. And the list is so long that I wouldn't even know where to start. And they have like so many different recipes for cooking, seafood and octopus. And I love seafood. So, some of the best seafood dishes that you can get in Europe are in Portugal. All the sweets,

pastel de nata, pastel de Belem, even the coffee. Everything related to stomach, eating and drinking in Portugal is amazing. That's no question asked.

Some of my favorite places, I love Sintra and all the castles in Sintra, especially Pena, which are like a half an hour drive from Lisbon. I absolutely love all the beaches around. So, from Cascais all the way to Costa de Caparica in south of Lisbon, and all the seven hills you've got in Lisbon, the city is structured in such a different way. It doesn't look like any other European city. It has a little bit of South American vibes, South European. A very unique vibe to Portugal. And it doesn't matter where you end up in Lisbon, you always see something, something new, unique. And it's just an absolutely lovely city to live in.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, it's incredible. I mean, there are so many compelling moments of my Lisbon experiences. I can remember sitting in the Alfama Quarter, the old city, listening to fado music, which are these super dramatic, emotional Portuguese ballads. And you're drinking Portuguese wine, which in my opinion is some of the most underrated and most amazing wine in all of Europe. I actually spent my birthday a couple years ago in the Portuguese wine country.

Took a bunch of people and went down to Alentejo and rented an Airbnb. And then we're just hopping around, wine tasting in these gorgeous vineyards and stuff. And so, Portugal continues to surprise and delight. And I continue to go back pretty much every year. It's a really special place.

Another spot I want to talk to you about though, is Switzerland. When people ask me what's the most beautiful country in the world, I'm like, I don't know, There's a lot of beautiful ones. Although it is really hard to compete with Switzerland. I can remember that I went to Switzerland and the tip I've been giving people, I have not spent a lot of time that you spent a ton more time than I have there.

But when I went there, I went in the wintertime, and I went, and I got a three-day Swiss rail pass and my business partner Valerie and I were actually there together. And what we decided to do for our annual executive leadership meeting, instead of sitting in a room in some building talking about our business plan for the year, we're like, why don't we get two first class tickets, three day Swiss rail passes, and we'll take trains like the Glacier Express from San Moritz to Zermatt, an eight hour express train through the Swiss Alps, and we'll just have our meeting on the train while we're looking out the window.

So, we went around Switzerland in like three days and then ended up in Zermatt and skied Matterhorn. And when you ski the Swiss Alps, I will also say that is something that for me, I mean, you talked about skiing and I've never skied in Iran, so I can't obviously compare to that. But I will say that I have skied in a number of places around the U.S. And I've now skied internationally. But when you ski the Swiss Alps, I mean it really for the other skiing that I have done, everything is all of a sudden now in a totally different perspective. I mean, they have ski runs in the Swiss Alps. If you ski the Matterhorn glacier paradise that are like 11 miles long from top to bottom, and you're of course right on the border with Switzerland and Italy, so you can go up to the top and then the run, when you're deciding which ski run to go on, it has a flag of either Switzerland or Italy to let you know.

If you take this run, this is the country you're going to end up in at the bottom. And so, you could ski down into Italy and have lunch in an Italian place and then go back up and then ski back down into Switzerland. And so, my entire perception of Switzerland, that it's just like this magically gorgeous place because I had such an incredible time there, but it was relatively short. I have certainly not lived in Switzerland. So, I

would love to hear from you what brought you to Switzerland and what was your experience like in Switzerland?

Yooshita: Switzerland, I completely agree to everything you said about Switzerland. It's definitely one of the most beautiful places in the world. I have to say though, coming from Austria, Austria is just as beautiful as Switzerland. But people keep talking about Switzerland as it is the more special one. But if you travel, especially in the west part of Austria, these two countries are so similar and offer the same type of experiences that you say.

I moved to Switzerland from for a job in Liechtenstein, which is a very tiny country between Austria and Switzerland. It's a very special place, tiny place with 30,000 people living there. And because of its regulations and tax system, it attracts a lot of startups and companies. So, you have a lot of companies registered there who have a base there, or sometimes these are just remotely managed companies, and you don't see the people there, but they're just registered there.

So, I moved there to work for a startup, and I ended up living on the border on the east of Switzerland in a small city called Bux. And as you say, one of the most favorite activities I would do while I was living there was just buying a train ticket and sitting in a train and just looking out of the window. There was something that you could get as a resident. We know Switzerland is not the cheapest country in the world. So, there was a ticket that you could get as a residence where you would pay, I think 40 Francs, and that would give you a one day pass to use any public transport in the whole country.

All the public ferries, a lot of the trains and a lot of the tele cabins take you to the mountains and I would just buy one of the stickers whenever I was off and I would just hop on the train and go wherever, all the way to the east of the country and come back to the west, south, north, anywhere and just sit in the trains and watch out of the window and do nothing else. And I absolutely enjoyed my time living there.

And the great thing I love about Switzerland is a small country. It's not big, but you have these different regions that you have in the east is the German part, where the official language is German. The culture is very close to Germany, the traditions are very close to Germany. And then you have on the other side, the French part, and in the south, the Italian part. And in a very short amount of time, if you really travel from one region to another, you feel like you're in beautiful Switzerland, but with the French touch.

And then the cuisines, the taste, the flavors, you know, people's behavior, the way they speak, everything suddenly sounds French. And you go in the south, everything turns Italian, but you are still in Switzerland. So, it's a very beautiful country. And I stayed there for two years, and I really enjoyed living in the middle of the Alps.

Matt Bowles: Well, first of all, just to endorse what you said at the very beginning about Austria also being amazing, and Austria actually has a really special place in my heart in my travel journey, I will say this. That trip I told you about, when I was living in Ireland, the first, first time away in a foreign country by myself and my roommate and I took the euro rail through Europe. We're like, okay, we got a month. And at the time it was like 17 countries. Hop on, hop off pass, and you could kind of go through all these places.

And we're like, okay, we flew to Rome, we started in Italy, and then we're like, okay, let's just zip through these places. And some of them will spend a few days because we know we want to spend a long time in a place like Rome, at least a few days. But other places where, like Salzburg, we'll probably only need

maybe like a day. There's there we got to Salzburg; it ended up being our favorite city on the entire trip. We ended up spending four nights in Salzburg, more time than we spent in Paris or Amsterdam or anywhere.

And then we came back from that trip, people were like, what's your favorite place? We were like, Salzburg, Austria, don't sleep on it. Let me tell you about it. And so, we were just raving about it. And then that was the first time I ever spent Christmas away from my family, because that's a big family holiday for us. Relatives come, and it's a really special time. And it was the first time I spent Christmas away from my family. And I ended up spending Christmas that year in Vienna.

And so, I feel like for me, from that trip, which was so many years ago now, still, Austria has a very special place in my heart. And I actually did go back and ski the Austrian Alps in 2019. And so, I can absolutely attest that there is amazing skiing in Austria at as well.

But I want to ask you about the next place that you moved after Switzerland, which I believe was the island of Malta, which is a really fascinating place. I lived in Malta for about a month and it is just such a unique and fascinating and different and interesting place. I'm curious what your experience was like in Malta?

Yooshita: Completely. I agree as well. So, I got approached again by head hunting company out of nowhere again. Malta was never on my radar to move to. And I got offered a job opportunity in Malta. And all these countries that I told you I moved to; I moved to them the first time I visited them. I had never been to any of this country. And the first time I went to Portugal was the first time I moved there, etc. So, Malta, again, I had never been there, even as a tourist. Sounds like an opportunity to see a new country again. I'll go, I'll see if it's not good I'm going to leave.

And I ended up staying for one full year. I absolutely love the island. It's a small place and has so much to offer. I just loved that I was living in Sliema. It's the busiest part of the island and where my apartment was located. Once I would go out, regardless if I would go to the left or right, to the front or back, in less than eight minutes I would reach the water and I could go swimming. Because of the way it's built, you have all these bays the whole time going in and out. You have these little beaches. You have access to the water from everywhere on the island, but it's a very different type of sea. You always have this rocky access to the beach. There's not a lot of sandy beaches, which is great because once you're living there, you just literally go to the water and out without getting all the sand on you.

So, you're just going to work in your lunch break, you just go and jump into the water, come out, you go back to work, and you end up going in and out of water the whole time. And it had this great mixture of South European culture mixed with the British touch because they were part of the British colony before and it's so close to Africa. So, you've got this mix of the African culture there. You have the Arab cultures because the Arabs controlled the region for a very long time. So even the language is a mix of English and Italian, Arabic, and it is a fascinating place. It's also a very international place. You have a lot of expats living there. So, it's also a great place if you want to connect with people from different parts of the world.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And there is just such unbelievable history in Malta. I mean, I was there for a month, but I kept learning about these different aspects of history from all different historical periods. I think it was in Gozo, which is like the sister island of Malta, and I was on some tour there and they're like, yeah, you know that story in the Odyssey where the Calypso holds Odysseus in a cave as a sex slave? Yeah, that was right here. Like, this is supposed to be that cave, apparently. And I was like, what?

And then, like, you learn the story about how St. Paul the Apostle is the patron saint of Malta because he was being transported as a prisoner and got shipwrecked in Malta and brought Christianity to Malta. And then there's a story of Caravaggio, the Italian painter, who apparently was in a bar fight, I think it was in Rome or something like that and kills someone in a fight. And so, they're after him for murder charges and Malta apparently offers him sanctuary. You can come here if you paint.

And so, he moves to Malta, and so apparently the only painting that Caravaggio ever signed is his painting in the St. John's Cathedral in Valletta in Malta, the Beheading of John the Baptist, which is unbelievable. And it'll allow you to take your pictures there, no cameras and stuff like that. But then there's this story about Caravaggio. He gets invited to be part of the Knights of Malta and he's rising in the ranks of the Knights of Malta. And then all of a sudden, apparently, he gets drunk, gets in another fight and almost kills one of the top people in the Knights of Malta.

So, then he gets defrocked and gets chased out of Malta and he flees to Sicily. So, there's just all of this wild history in Malta. If you look a little bit into that, you're just going to be like, where am I? Like, this place is crazy. It was so interesting, though. So, I also want to talk to you about where you are now. In the Gibraltar region of Spain, or I guess, technically the United Kingdom, if you can share a little bit about what brought you to Gibraltar and how you have found your time there.

Yooshita: Yeah, so I ended up moving Gibraltar for another job opportunity. It was, again, not on my radar are not planned to come here, but I got offered a job opportunity for a company in Gibraltar, and that's how I moved here two and a half years ago. So, I live on the Spanish land, on the Spanish side, here in San Roque in Spain, and I cross the border to Gibraltar, which is an overseas British territory. It's a very small place, a very special place where you have the Rock of Gibraltar. And this place has been controlled and governed by Britain for many years.

And if you have ever been here, you cross the border and you suddenly feel like you're in Britain. You have all these red phone booths, and the streets structures very differently, and you spend a British pound and you're suddenly in a completely different place in south of Spain, which is a very unusual place. And I've been living here. I love Spain. And my favorite part of Spain is absolutely Andalusia and south of Spain. So having had the opportunity of living in South of Spain has been one of my dreams. It came true by joining this job. So, I've been absolutely loved the experience of living here and then using the time to travel to all different parts of this region, which is, especially during the summer, incredibly beautiful.

Matt Bowles: Well, I definitely have to ask for some of your favorite places and experiences in Spain. That is another country that I try to go back to at least once a year. And I have spent about a month in a number of different regions. So ideally, as you know, the way that I prefer to travel is to go and stay somewhere for at least a month at a time. So, I spent a month in Bilbao in the Basque country, I spent a month in Valencia, I spent a month in Barcelona, and then I've gone through Andalusia, I've done a road trip through Andalusia, and I've spent time in Madrid and this kind of stuff.

So, I keep going to different places. And it is amazing how culturally distinct and unique all of these different regions are. But share a little bit for folks that maybe haven't been to Spring Spain, maybe they've never even heard of the Andalusia region. Just about some of the cultural dynamics there, the Arab and Muslim cultural influence and other things that you like about Andalusia, and then maybe put people on to some of your favorite places or things to do there.

Yooshita: Sure. So first of all, it sounds like you need to spend a month in Malaga or somewhere in Andalusia. You've been to a bunch of really beautiful Spanish cities. But as I said, the south is just something different. So, the south of Spain, when it comes to the climate and weather, has much nicer weather compared to rest of Spain. So, you have a lot of sunshine and sunny days throughout the year, which makes it really comfortable place to visit and stay. That's why it attracts a lot of people. You are in the south, where Andalusia starts on the east. You're on the Mediterranean coast and very close to where I live in Tarifa. The Mediterranean ends and the Atlantic Ocean, ocean, starts, which completely change the scenery and the type of beaches, the water and everything.

Both sides have their own unique atmosphere. But once Atlantic starts, the beaches become so beautiful and unique. So, you have this very long stretch of beaches, starting from Tarifa, which is the first town, and then going through Bolonia and you reach to the Cadiz region, where you then end at the Portuguese border, where you also have underground, the Portuguese side in the south of Portugal. Very beautiful places. And this place has been ruled and governed by the Muslims, the Moors from the North African regions for hundreds of years. That's why you find a lot of Arabic influence in south of Spain.

If you visit cities like Cadiz and Granada, Seville, Córdoba, you see this very clearly in old Alhambra, which is in. In Granada, the most visited tourist site in the whole of Spain. And it's the same as in Seville, and it's incredibly beautiful. You know, once I remember when I visited Seville many years ago, the first time I was there, I was so much in love with this place. I couldn't believe I'm still in Europe. It's just so different to the rest of the European cities. And what I really love about the Spanish culture is they have this very beautiful, beautiful cities and every place that you can visit.

But on top of that, they have a lot of special traditional festivals and ceremonies and traditions that they have happening throughout the year in different regions. And in the south specifically, you have all these different festivals that happen throughout the year, specifically from Easter time when they start, and each one of them is so unique and special to visit. So, I would definitely recommend, if somebody's coming here, try to check out this calendar and try to be here, for example, when one of these festivals is happening. One of the main ones is that the Easter holidays in Seville is incredibly unique.

They have all these processions happening. The first time, actually, I came to Seville, I came during Easter, and I had no idea. I just ended up coming here because I was living in Lisbon at the time, and it was a very accessible place to come. And once I arrived and I saw what's happening in this city, I was completely blown away. And then I realized that, you know, people, thousands of people, they travel from all over the world to come and see this. And once the processions finish in Easter, they start the feria, which is a big celebration of one full week. The main one starts in Seville, and then it carries on one week in every little or big town of Andalusia. And it goes on all the way till October.

And they suggest celebrating for one week, day and night. They set up these tents that they called casetas. They bring in music and food and then dress up in this traditional Spanish clothes. And it just looks like something from outside of this planet. And it's definitely a very unique experience to visit Andalusia specifically during the feria time.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, the other thing I would put people on too is that flamenco music is from Andalusia. And if you can go to a flamenco show in Andalusia, that is just a mind-blowing experience. I mean, it's really special. They do them in these incredibly cool, intimate theaters, and they usually include a glass of wine when you sit down. But then the flamenco dancing is just extraordinary.

And so, there's so much amazingness about it from the food and the wine and the culture and the history and stuff. And to your point, I mean, especially some of these places, like the Albison Quarter in Granada or the Old City, you really feel like you might as well be in North Africa. I mean, it is really an amazingly culturally distinct region from other parts of Spain. So highly endorse that recommendation.

Well, Yooshita, I want to talk to you now about some of your travel travels outside of Europe. And I love this technique of moving around and staying places for a while. But I know that you also, a few years back, were able to take a sabbatical and do a different type and a different style of travel through the world. And a couple of places that you went on that trip I want to ask you about. So, let's start with Afghanistan, because you went there first and then to Pakistan. Can you talk about your decision to want to go to Afghanistan and then what your experience was like there and what you found?

Yooshita: Sure. So, I had lost my job, so I came to the conclusion, I'll use this time that I hadn't planned to be off, just to use it to travel the world. The opportunity came up to join a group who was going to visit Afghanistan myself, someone I was following on social media, that he wants to go with a couple of people to Afghanistan and you could join. So, I ended up being in this group. We Went to Afghanistan, and it was a very life changing experience for me. It was one of the best trips I ever had. Afghanistan, being a neighbor of Iran, it just had a different place in my heart and a different way I could connect to people. I could speak the language.

So, the experience I had was very unique and different. So, from the moment we landed there, I had the feeling I'm just in a different part of Iran. I could easily communicate and speak to everyone. I was able to read everything. And this was at a time that the situation in Afghanistan was very bad. This was a couple of months before Taliban took over the country and the country were truly in war. So, Taliban was fighting to get over the control. And there were on a daily basis multiple bombings and attacks happening in Kabul and outside Kabul.

So, for example, the day I arrived at Kabul, on the same day I took a flight out to Herat. At a time, it was not possible to do any road trips. It wasn't safe. There was a lot of risk on being kidnapped or being attacked. So, you had to travel by plane to different cities. And as soon as I arrived at Herat, we heard that Kabul University city was bombed and a lot of people were killed, which got a lot of media attention. It was not the only bombing happening on those days, but because it was a more special place, it got more attention, and this was happening on a daily basis.

Still country being in such harsh conditions, I still had a great time and it seems like life was going on for a lot of people. I met some truly amazing people on this trip. I traveled to Bamyán where I met some very inspiring women who had done amazing things in their life. I met Fatima, a girl who was literally the first woman who ever started skiing in that region. Because it's a very mountainous region, they get a lot of snow in winter. And some people had just started bringing in some ski equipment and trying out skiing. But we're talking about a place where there isn't any ski lift or facilities for skiing.

You just, just got the mountain, the snow and some equipment that you can use. So, skiing literally means you have to climb the mountain up to just ski down for a couple of minutes. And this girl had done this so many times that she had become a ski champion and started inspiring other women to start skiing in the region. So, yeah, it was a very life changing trip for me. I stayed there for a week. The country wasn't on a condition that you would be able to spend more time. So, we did this one-week trip and from there I continued to Pakistan, where was in a little bit of a better conditions when it comes to safety. And I ended up staying for a full month in Pakistan.

Matt Bowles: Well, I definitely want to hear about your Pakistan experience and what you did there for the month. Can you share a little bit about the itinerary? And then what were some of the highlights? I mean, especially for people that have never been to Pakistan, what was your experience like?

Yooshita: So, Pakistan definitely now after having visited, is one of the top maybe five countries I've ever visited, is one of three countries that completely changes your mind about your conception of the country. It is so different to what a lot of people would think about. And especially as an Iranian, I can relate a lot to this. And I started my trip to Islamabad. I flew from Kabul to Islamabad. I spent a couple of days, then I traveled to the north region where you've got the very beautiful mountains and Honza, where you can drive all the way from the Karakoram highway to the China border, which is one of the highest altitude located highways in the world. I spent a couple of very beautiful days there. I came back to Islamabad, I went to the west to the Afghanistan border, to Peshawar, where I had some beautiful days there.

Along this trip I was only spending time with the locals. I was couch surfing and literally going from one couch to another, from one home to another, from one wedding to another, meeting all these different people. And I ended up in Lahore where I got very sick. And I felt so sick that I couldn't get out of the heat. And at the time I was staying with a family from couch surfing in Lahore. This is a family, a couple at my parents' age that host travelers on a regular basis. And I was staying with them. We had a really great time till I got sick. And I was doing all Covid tests which were turning out negative, but there was a lot of evidence that I did have Covid. But the bottom line was that I wasn't feeling well. And I was asking them every day to let me move to a hotel because I was so worried to have people around me who could get sick the same way.

And this family did not let me move out till I was fully recovered and feeling well, which took, you know, almost 12 or 13 days. They were taking care of me like their own tire, bringing me food, making sure I had access to any, anything I need till I was fit enough to continue my trip. And from there I really wanted to go to Iran. And I really wanted to go to Iran by land because I was so close to the country. And it just didn't make any sense to me to take a flight to one or two other locations. I think if I wanted to fly it, I needed to go back to Dubai or Turkey and then take a flight to Tehran when I am so close.

But the problem was that the land border was closed and the land border between Iran and Pakistan is in the Baluchistan region. Baluchistan is a shared region that both countries have. The people from the regions are Balutis, which are of ethnicity, they speak the same language, traditions, et cetera. But both these ethnic groups have a lot of problems with their governments in both countries. Both in Iran and in Pakistan, there's a lot of clashes happening there. The governments are discriminating the people a lot in this region and they are considered to be the least safe parts of both countries.

In Pakistan specifically, you are not allowed to travel there unless you have a special permit from the government, which wasn't able to be obtained during pandemic. But I really wanted to go to Iran by land. The whole month that I was there, I was just asking people, is there any way, can I go there? And people were telling me off that, you know, don't try, just, just take a flight. And I insisted that I want to go there. And from all this couch surfing, local experience ball kept rolling and I kept meeting more people. At some point a friend of a friend was from Baluchistan and they told me, okay, just book a flight, fly to Baluchistan in Pakistan and our friend will pick you up. Just pretend that you are a Pakistani woman, don't speak to anyone, just try to blend in as much as possible. Go there, see the situation and if it works out, they might help you drive all the way to the border.

And I did this. I spent a couple of days in Baluchistan, had an amazing experience, went to places and done things that you don't get to do as a tourist. And at the end, these people helped me to drive all the way to the border which was closed for two years at a time. I think it is because of some incidents that hadn't happened before there. There were some tourists that were kidnapped a couple of years ago, even in the region were telling me I should not try it, etc., but at the end we found two people who agreed to drive me all the way to border, and we did this. This is a long way that you go without any stop because there's no settlements or villages on the way.

So, if your car breaks down or if you're out of Petrol or if anything happens, you're screwed. We left early in the morning, at 3am and we just drove. I think it was around 7 or 800 kilometers. We just drove all the way to the border. They dropped me, I passed immigration. They had spoken to a lot of police officers to make sure that they know I'm arriving and keep the border open. And I managed to cross to Iran where I was welcomed with open arms by the Iranian officials questioning me for three full hours, explaining what I have been doing in Pakistan and Afghanistan for the last few weeks. Coming from a journey that from in the morning we had made any stuff, we hadn't eaten anything, we hadn't had any breaks. But eventually they let me in.

Matt Bowles: So, I want to ask if you can expand a little bit more about Balochistan and the marginalization that you were describing that those communities experience in both countries and what you had known about that region before going there or what you had heard about that region before going there. And then when you spent time there, what did you find and what was your experience like in Balochistan?

Yooshita: I did not know much about these regions, to be honest. I knew as an Iranian, all you get to hear is avoid these regions. This is not a safe place, do not travel there. In the Iranian part of Baluchistan, they consider the border to be very dangerous and they considered the people to be very dangerous, which is obviously not true. The truth is that on the Iranian part, for example, the people living there are Muslims, but they are Sunnis, which are a minority in Iran, which is a majority Shia country.

And ever since there's been some clashes between them and the government because they always wanted to have some sort of independence, which has been always oppressed by the government. But from the government side they've never been given the same rights and opportunities and support as the other parts of Iran is the least developed part of Iran. The government does not take care of the people when it comes to wealthy situations. The people are worse off of other parts of Iran. Education, health system, everything is in a worse condition.

And because of all of this, people had always to fight for their own safety, etc. So similar things happen on the Pakistani side and for this this reason there is not a lot of government control there. So, a lot of parts of it in Pakistan is controlled by the local Balutis which are self-armed for a lot of different reasons. For example, in the house that I was staying in and couch surfing, the person who was hosting me, he had three bodyguards who were escorting him the whole time with weapons, with them and being armed, etc.

And I was all the time like, but do you really need three-armed people being around you? And it was like, you don't understand the situation here. And the day, the morning that I left them, the next day he told me that someone was trying to sneak into his house to steal things and the security had to step in and protect the house. Something that in maybe a normal part of Pakistan, the police would intervene, but because it's just lack police and infrastructure in other parts, people have to take care of their own safety.

Matt Bowles: When you were describing this trip through Afghanistan and eventually into Pakistan, you had mentioned that it was really a life, life changing experience for you. Can you share why that was the case? When you think back now, what impact did that trip have on you?

Yooshita: It was life changing because after that trip I absolutely knew that I want to visit every single country in the world. I was in the country with the worst reputation. The place that if you would ask 100 people on the border, it is the one place that you should not travel to. Maybe half of them would name Afghanistan. I went there and I truly had one of the best experiences ever and one of the most eye-opening experiences ever because I saw things that I could never experience or see through the media or from the news, etc. I could see the true face of the country that has been through a war from the day that I was born.

So, literally all I knew about Afghanistan was through the war and the conflicts happening there from the day I was born. Being from a country just next to it, I didn't know much about it, and experiencing the country in a completely different way and seeing how people welcome me. Being from a country that hosts a lot of refugees from Afghanistan, not always being treated in the best way, of course, not by everyone, but unfortunately, we have a lot of people in Iran who do not treat our Afghan neighbors in the best way.

And then seeing how well I was welcomed and received there, a lot of people had told me, you know, do not mention you're from Iran. They might not like this. I did not do this because I always shout very loudly that I'm from Iran. It doesn't matter where I go and what I received in return, everywhere and especially in Afghanistan was just people's kindness and an extra level of respect and kindness and hospitality from the people.

Matt Bowles: Alright, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part two. Everything that we have discussed in this episode is going to be linked up in one place in [the show notes](#) along with all of the ways to follow and connect with Yooshita. Just go to themaverickshow.com go to [the show notes](#) for this episode and be sure to tune in to [the next episode](#) to hear the conclusion of my interview with Yooshita. Good night, everybody.