

INTRO: This is part two of my interview with Scott Brills. 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 the conclusion of my interview with Scott Brills.

Matt Bowles: Scott, I also want to now pivot and talk a little bit about some of your other travel experiences. You had mentioned that after you did the Mongol Rally and drove from London to Mongolia, or almost to Mongolia, you tried to go to Mongolia. The following year, you did a longer drive from the U.K. to Cape Town, South Africa. Can you please explain what inspired this, what type of vehicle you did this in, and why you chose to do this journey? Give us the context.

Scott Brills: Yeah, so a couple years later, after that, actually. So, to put it in perspective, 2009 was the Mongol Rally. I drove almost to Mongolia, did the marathon, 2010, went to Africa for the first time, and then at the end of the year started up Moja Safaris officially. And then 2011 started planning with an ex-colleague of mine that did the Mongol Rally, our next big adventure. The next big adventure was going to be to start off with the Mongol Rally people in the U.K. and then take a little detour and instead go south through Africa all the way to Cape Town.

So, we planned this out for about a year. We roped in a few other people to join us. We decided to take two cars, a pair of old Subarus, I think they were, let's see, at least 10 years old. They had some aisles on them, and we decked them out in canvas, making them look like a pair of Chuck Taylor sneakers. We called it "Team Shoebaru" and we even had like the shoelace bow and everything on the top. Yeah, it was pretty good.

We initially were planning, doing a Tom's Footwear kind of thing and raising money for footwear to provide to some worthy recipients over there, you know, in one of the countries at least. But then logistically it just wasn't feasible. So instead, we actually raised money, over \$50,000, for a few other charities, including Charity Water and Mercy Corps. And we helped build some wells, provide some clean drinking water. We helped provide locally sourced clothing to a few orphanages in Ethiopia, in Tanzania. The wells were in Somaliland, which is part of Somalia, and then also Ethiopia.

So, we were actually doing some visits to these sites on the way down, which is really cool, really fulfilling, and just to see everyone there and how thankful they were that we were able to raise this money from friends and family that knew we were doing this. And we saw firsthand the change that it made. That was really cool. But nothing went right. Basically, that trip was very difficult from the get go. Just cars breaking down. We had multiple injuries and illnesses and a love triangle. I was not involved. We had a bandit attack. Sudan wouldn't let us in the country. We had to live in Aswan, southern Egypt, for like five weeks while we tried to make inroads with the government to be let into the country because there was no way around that.

Everything went wrong. It was really crazy. How many things went wrong over the course of this? Initially 3 months, but then 4 months eventually till we got to the end. We made it though. We got those two Shoebarus to the end to Cape Town and we were worse for the wear. But I would not be surprised if that was probably the most extreme long-term journey I will have done in my life. Even though everything went wrong. I mean, hey, that's where the best stories come from, right?

Matt Bowles: Well, I have to say, if you were going to get stuck somewhere, Aswan is not a bad place to be stuck. I spent about a year in Egypt, and I was living mostly in Cairo, but I did spend time in Aswan, and I stayed with the Nubians and a Nubian village.

Scott Brills: You went on Elephantine Island?

Matt Bowles: Yeah. I mean, They have botanical gardens that are islands in the middle of the water and it's a really lovely place. I found the Nubians to be some of the kindest people that I've ever met. And I have to say, if I was to be stuck somewhere, Aswan probably wouldn't be the worst place. And sometimes you just get to spend more time with people, right? More than you expected. And sometimes that can be a positive thing and a silver lining in some cases.

Scott Brills: Everyone knew us by the end. I mean, we were getting invited to Weddings. We were there during Ramadan too. So that was particularly tricky for part of the time. But everyone knew us. We were local fixtures. Basically, we were living in Elephantine island through a couch surfer that he didn't loan us a spot. We were paying for it, but at a very good rate. Shout out to Jasser. Jasser from Elephantine Island.

So, we had a spot where we could stay with all of us at that time. We had a crew of, let's see, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 people. Because we picked up another couple on the way that were in their Land Rover doing something similar and they joined us. So, we had an amazing time. Unfortunately, near the end, I severed part of my Achilles tendon. There's like one store you could buy alcohol at if you bring like a foreign passport. So, I bought a bunch of beers. There was nothing to carry and I thought maybe they'd have a crate. No. So this gave me like a plastic trash bag.

So, I put all the beers in there, carrying over my shoulder like Santa Claus and got almost to where the short ferry was to get to the island that we were living on. And I felt it break. I reached behind me, just barely stopped them all from falling out. But one of them fell next to my foot and a piece of glass came out and severed the back part of my foot. I started bleeding. That was tough. I had to hop my way over. My buddy who I was traveling with is actually a volunteer EMT, so that was very useful.

He stapled me back together again without anesthetic. So, then I was just kind of hopping around and on crutches. Luckily, one of the other people that was doing it already fractured his foot earlier in the trip. So, we had crutches and crutches with us. So, I was able to borrow his crutches and hop around while I was there. And it took a while to heal and then we took the staples out and it opened up again. I had to put more staples on me. It was an interesting trip. There were a lot of like foot and leg injuries for a shoe themed trip. It's kind of ironic.

Matt Bowles: What happened with the bandit attack. Where was that? How did it occur and then how did you get out of that situation?

Scott Brills: The bandit attack was our own fault because we didn't listen to the locals, because we thought we were more knowledgeable than them. I'm not sure. Basically, we had finally gotten into Ethiopia after living in Egypt and going through Sudan. Oh, I forgot there were embassy attacks too. Right as we were going into Khartoum, there was a mass demonstration of a thousand people. They evacuated the embassies. We were driving that night. It was Friday night, and we almost ran into this crowd of people. And we decided to get out of there. We camped on the outskirts of the city. Nothing bad happened. Everyone else there was super nice. Even the mob didn't really affect us, but we just wanted to play it safe.

Instead, we went to a mosque that night and hung out with some Sufi Muslim people that were doing kind of a get together, English language practice, get together and everything. And it was really cool.

So, it was after all this, we got to Ethiopia. It was our first night there. We had a big, long journey ahead of us. We had already found a campground to stay in. We had rooftop tents. That's where we stayed for many nights, it is on top of our cars in the rooftop tent. So, we knew where we needed to go. But we had already been told twice when we stopped places. Be careful on these roads. Don't drive at night in the mountains. We're like, okay, yeah, sure, but we have to get to the spot. We've got reservations. We need to stay there overnight. We can't just pull off if we're on the side of the road. So, we disregarded their advice.

And then the couple that were in the Land Rover in front of us radioed back to us as we were. Pitch dark on the mountain roads. They're like, something fishy's going on here. There's like a bunch of guys around. We're not sure what's going on but take caution. So, the two of us in two cars, we pulled over, we chatted about it. We're like, let's wait for some big trucks to come through. Let's shadow them, follow them, because they'll know what to do. They drive on these roads all the time. So, we waited until some semis came in some lorries. We followed them, and sure enough, a few miles up the road, there was a roadblock.

And there were people. All of them were masked. One guy had a police top and a rifle. And I was like, is this a legit crossing? But we'd already been told it looked shady, right? I remember the truck stopped right in front of us. So, there were two trucks. They both stopped and we're like, okay, and then my friend who was in the passenger seat, he was like, I don't like this, man. Go, go, go, go, go. And so, I just floored it. I went around the trucks, went through the barricade, which was some oil drums and some rope on top. I just blasted through. Luckily, the car in back of us got the gist. They followed me. I ducked down because one guy had a gun. So, I ducked down and, like, was driving like this just in case they fired.

Luckily, they didn't. There probably weren't bullets in the gun. I mean, those were 100% bandits. I mean, the one guy was kind of making it look, you know, it was enough for me to be like, huh, is that real? He's wearing a police uniform, and he's got a gun. But everyone else had masks on, their faces were covered. And sure enough, later on, we heard that somebody had been killed on that road. I'd like to think that they were just, you know, trying to get money, but we had our whole lives in those cars. We had all of our money, we had all of our camera gear because we were filming all this too. And luckily, we were able to avoid any nastiness by just driving through and drove to the campsite and adrenaline high, and we got there like 2:00am or something like that, went to sleep.

Matt Bowles: Well, I am noticing a theme in the types of travel adventures that you choose. And I know that the following year, after this journey, you decided to do the Rickshaw Run in India for the first time. For people that have never heard of the Rickshaw Run in India, can you explain what it is and then your decision, why you wanted to do it and what the experience was like?

Scott Brills: Yeah. So, the Rickshaw Run is another charity rally event put on by the same people that do the Mongol Rally. It's called the Adventurous, started up by a guy named Tom in the U.K. back in 2004. But the Rickshaw Run started a little bit later when they started up a Rickshaw, or some people may know them as tuk tuks. Three wheeled small engine vehicles, generally basically like a lawnmower engine, seven horsepower or so. And you drive this tuk tuk, this Rickshaw, auto Rickshaw, as they call it in India, a couple thousand miles through India with no maps or anything. They just set a starting point, you raise some money for charity, and then they'll see you at the finish line two weeks later.

And, you know, in between, hilarity ensues, inevitably, breakdowns and all sorts of craziness. I mean, anybody that's been to India and been to rural India or even the cities. I mean, it can be hectic. India for me is like there's a lot of everything, a lot of good, a lot of poverty, a lot of amazing people, some shady parts. It's like a really interesting microcosm of the world.

So, I did that in 2011 with my friend Mike, and we had all sorts of problems. I'd never driven a geared vehicle before, so immediately the first day destroyed the gears and we had to get the engine rebuilt. That was fun. All this led to all sorts of cool detours. Again, we didn't have any maps, so we were just going willy nilly through it. We went through southern Nepal as well, and we had one heck of an adventure. So much so that after three years had passed and I forgot all of the negative parts of the trips, most of which were caused by us, just lack of knowledge, I did it again.

And instead of driving across the top of India, I drove from Kerala in the south and went northeast, finishing in Meghalaya Province, the city of Shillong. So that was about 2,500 miles. And then I did it again three and a half years later in 2018. And I went from the other side of the country. So, I did through Mumbai, started off in Jaisalmer in Rajasthan in the northwest, and then went down the western coast all the way to Kerala, where I'd started the year before. And I'm doing it again, doing it for the fourth time in August. It's been a while since I've had an adventure like that. And I'm actually doing it in Kashmir in the city of Leh, and we're going down to the desert city of Rajasthan, where I've been a few times before. And that's where the finish point is.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk about this style of travel for people that are trying to get their minds around what it's like to travel in this manner? But why is it so rewarding? Why is it so rich and substantive and different from other types of travel and types of ways to see India? Why do you keep doing it? Why do you keep going back? I mean, maybe share some of your experiences, but also the impact that that style of experiencing India has on you.

Scott Brills: So, a Rickshaw, it's open, it's slow moving. I think at best you'll get 40, 45 kilometers an hour downhill. So, it allows you to drive a bit more slowly through the country and experience a lot of these really off the beaten path, off of the tourist path type cities and towns. We've met all sorts of amazing people and got so much help from the locals. A lot of people go to India, but generally you've got main spots that you go to. You go to Delhi, or you might go to some cities in Rajasthan, like Jodhpur, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, or you'll go see Agra and the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort. So that's all awesome.

But there's so much country and so many people and so much history and stuff like that in between all these parts that you can't really see unless you're traveling a little bit slower. You know, you're forced to stop a lot more often because of breakdowns or refueling or something like that, or you just don't know where you're going. You have to ask the locals. So doing it for the first time was tough, but we kind of, like, figured out how to do it enough. Where when I went back that second time, it was a much easier, much more pleasurable experience. Again, the first time, why was it tough? It's mostly because of me, and I didn't really know how to drive the thing or what I was doing.

But after that first time, I kind of figured it out. And then every time I've been back since, it's been a very different experience. We were on the front page of the Mumbai Times in 2018. That was really cool. We did a photo shoot there, and thanks to my friend Merle, who lives there, lived there at the time. It's been such a cool thing. The country has so many different culture and history depending on where you're at. Same can be said of many other countries, but India is pretty big. And, you know, the south is very different than the

north. I know that for the best chai, in my opinion, you go to the north, and for the best spicy food, you go to the south. And if you want some good Italy, you go to the south as well. And I'm a big foodie, so food is definitely a part of the adventure for me.

And it's really cool traveling along 2000, 2500 miles, how the food and culture and architect and fashion styles and all that change. Because you're going in a straight line, but you're going northeast, northwest, east to west. It's so different, and it gives you a totally different way of doing it. You know, I've talked to many of my Indian friends that still have family over there, and they're just like, wow, you've seen way more of India than me. Because I go over there, and we've got a driver. We're just visiting families in our city. And I'm like, yeah, there's so much to see. But it is intense, I'll give you that. It is super intense.

You're making it more intense by doing it the way you're doing it in this auto Rickshaw. But you'll stop somewhere, and all these people surround you because they don't usually see foreigners there. They want to learn about you. And somebody will speak English and they'll be like, oh, hello, how are you? What is your name? Where are you from? Some children will come up to you with notebooks and ask for your autograph. You're going to really far off places there. You can't do that on the tourist circuit or go through a tour company. It's a lot more difficult to have those experiences. And I love those more authentic experiences, of course.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to circle back now to your connection and your deepening connection with Japan. We talked about your initial experience there, the study abroad, connecting with the language and how transformative that was. And you mentioned that it really impacted the entire trajectory of your life. And I want to circle back now and sort of build on and go through some of that trajectory. For me, Japan is just a mind-blowing place. I mean, I have been back three different times for about one month each. And the first time I went to Tokyo, and it was just like, I mean, my eyes were just wide open. I was like, this is unlike anything I've ever seen.

People like, what is Tokyo like? I'm like, it's not like anything else that I've ever seen. You just have to go there. It's its own thing. It's like its own planet. Just go. But it will blow your mind. And so, I went to Tokyo for an entire month. Didn't leave the city, just stayed in Tokyo the whole month. I wanted as much of it as I could get. And then I left and then I came back, and I went to Osaka for a month, and I was based in Osaka for a month. And then I came back a third time and I went to Kyoto for a month. And I was just, what? I was like, this place is completely magical. It's entirely different than Tokyo. I love them both, but in totally different ways.

And then I was also able to do some shorter term traveling to other places in the country that were very different. Like I went out to Naoshima, which is called the Art island, and has all these like huge art installations around, just wild. And then I went out to the island of Miyajima and I stayed in a traditional ryokan and went to the onsen and did all of that. And I was just like, this is unbelievable. So, it's like each time I go to Japan I have like these extraordinary experiences which are super different from the one I had the last time, but super amazing and remarkable in different ways. And I know you have been back way more times than I have. You spent a ton more time there.

So, I actually want to just ask you, I mean, especially for maybe people that haven't spent much time in Japan, what do you love about Japan and what are some of your very favorite experiences and places that you've been in Japan?

Scott Brills: That first time when I lived in Japan, it was my first time in Japan. And of course, I was going over there for nine months to live, and we were taking three semesters of college credits. So, I got into Japanese history, architecture, religion, business, government, you know, we had courses on all this stuff. So, it was a real deep dive while you're living over there. And I was on a 10-minute train ride from Kyoto. Kyoto was a big city for us. I was in Otsu, which is a city not far away. I went to Kyoto every single chance I could. Many other spots as well, whenever I had the time off and I had the money. But Kyoto kind of ended up being my home away from home. And I still think of it like that.

So even when I go back, there is an over tourism problem in Kyoto nowadays. It could get crazy at times, especially like during the cherry blossom season in late March, early April. But you go other times a year or if you just go a little bit off the beaten track, you skip the Golden Temple and Kinkakuji and stuff like that everyone goes to. It can still be an awesome experience even during those peak times.

So, I have a real affinity for Kyoto even my accent in Japanese is more like Kyoto, Osaka. So that's kind of my jam. I've been there 30 times at this point. I've spent more time there than any other place outside of the U.S. Speaking Japanese and having a bunch of friends over there and a few businesses has really gotten me to go over there many times. But I would still go over there even if I didn't have any of that. It's my favorite spot.

And well, what I love about its same stuff I love about every other place that's on the top of my list, like Turkey, like Thailand. I love languages, people, food, the history. It really ticks all the boxes for me. And I love in particular Japan's devotion to quality. If you want the best of pretty much anything, even if it's like Italian food, go to Japan, because they take something, they'll clone it, and they'll do it even better. You know, that's just kind of the Japanese way.

Matt Bowles: I tell people the same thing. And I explained to them that there's different levels. When you start traveling the world, you start understanding, like, different things about the culinary experience, right? And there's great food in all different places. There's great food in Europe, there's great food in South America, but Asia, it's at a different level. And then all of a sudden you go to Japan and you're like, oh, there's even another level, and you just start understanding this.

What I explained to people, though, is it's not only the Japanese food, but also the Japanese food. If you've had sushi somewhere around the world, even at a really good sushi restaurant, and you go to Japan, you're going to be able to find things that you have never experienced before and cheaper. Yeah, but it's not just the Japanese food. I tell people the best Neapolitan pizza that I've had anywhere in the world outside of Naples is in Tokyo.

Scott Brills: It stands up to a lot of the pizza in Naples, too.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, exactly. Or the best coffee shops in the world, or the best anything. The standards of culinary excellence in Japan are just completely unrivaled. It is remarkable the meticulous level of detail and perfection and excellence that they put into the entire culinary space there. You know, it's funny, I can remember the very first time I ever went to Japan. I told you it was in Tokyo, and I went by myself. And I messaged my Airbnb host, who was actually not Japanese, but he was from another country, but he owned an Airbnb there. But he had been living there for a really long time. He was like a resident. And he's like, oh, I'll meet you at the Metro and I'll walk you to the place and check you in and stuff like that.

So, on the walk there, I can remember saying to him, oh, this is a really cool neighborhood. Do you recommend any restaurants around here? And he looks at me and he goes, dude, this is not like the United States where you need to look up on Yelp and see, is it a well rated restaurant and avoid the bad ones. He goes, this is Tokyo. Just walk in and it'll be amazing. If it's not, it'll be out of business.

Scott Brills: The fact that they're operating means that they're good. Yeah.

Matt Bowles: He's like, if it's not, it'll be out of business in a week. I was like, oh, got it. This is a whole different type of situation here. But I want to ask about that in terms of your connection with the food and the culinary scene and how you eventually started doing food tours and allowing people to experience the food, but then also the cultural immersion into the country through the lens and experience of food.

Scott Brills: Let's see. I guess it was right after the Africa Drive 2012. So soon after that I started to find other people that were kind of doing what I was doing entrepreneurs, digital nomads. For the first time in my life. I was doing it kind of on my own for a while before that. So, I decided to then take a group of friends over to Japan because I loved it so much. I was like, hey, I can speak Japanese. I could show you around. Is anybody interested? Yep, people were interested. It was a group of, I think eight or nine people in the first year, 2014, where I basically just offered my services and just charge that cost. And I was like, hey, I want to show this place I love so much to my friends. It went very well. And I did it again with a different group a couple of years later in 2016.

And I realized what's the main draw here. And I realized food, like, you know, food was the thing. And for both my trips we had a wide variety of food, street food, all the way up to some Michelin starred restaurants that I included. But out of all the places in the world, really, what better spot than Japan to showcase the country via its food and drink scene? Because it's so great, it's so varied and also, I know a thing or two about it. So, I decided from that point on to make it into a thing. It's more of a passion project that I've done now for over 10 years, but I open it up to other people as well. Still small group, seven people at a time, no more than that. Because as you know, you can't get into some spots if you've got more than eight people. And eight people is already tough. It's tough to make that happen in some places.

So, I decided to actually start up my company, [Eat Japan](#). What I do is I take people on a 10, 11-day food tour and I introduce Japan to them. Most of the time it's their first time. Many of my guests, it's their first time. And I'll show Japan through its food. We'll go to multiple Michelin star restaurants. We'll hang out with my friends from my chef. We'll go to visit sake breweries, tea fields and stuff like that. It's not all food and drink, but that's kind of the main vehicle that I used to enter the country. With this march, I'm doing three back-to-back, which will be nuts. It's like 33 days of guiding, which I've never done before, but I'm looking forward to it. And I generally do it in springtime, which is the off season for safaris, incidentally.

So, I'm able to leave everything. My partner and everything are going pretty slowly because it's a rainy season over there. And I go to Japan for a couple months, make some money on the side, I'll do what I love. I get paid to eat and drink in Japan with fun people. And yeah, it's perfect. I remember thinking way back when, if I could just get paid to go to Japan, that's my dream job, you know. And I was thinking like, oh, I'm going to work for a Japanese company. I'll have some work trips over to Japan. This is way better. I much prefer this.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. So, for folks that are listening to this and would be interested in an Eat Japan trip to see what you've got coming up, how can they learn more about that?

Scott Brills: Eatjapan.com I only do a few a year. They sell out pretty quickly. I generally release them after the current year is done. Maybe this year it'll be like in May. And I only do seven per trip. If I sell out a trip, I may open up another one, I may not. It just kind of depends on the schedule for that year. And I usually only do it in the March, April timeframe, which is when the cherry blossoms hit happen. A lot of people want to go over there anyway, so it kind of dovetails nicely. I am open to private trips, depending on my schedule throughout the year. It just depends on if we're able to kind of wrangle a group together.

But I just had a friend ask me about that the other day. He's like, hey, like I've told my friends, and they really want to do it. And I said, you know, like, can we do a trip on our own? And I just kind of sell out the whole thing myself. And I'm like, yeah, sure, if you get at least five people together, I'm cool to do that. It's a lot of time, even beforehand, to plan out the itinerary, to get all the reservations. It's a lot of work. Not even counting in the nonstop tour guide and translation and stuff on the ground. You know, it's a lot of time, but I love doing it. It's a perfect side business for me. I might take it to the next level at some point, but for right now it's a fun little thing that I do for small groups a few times a year and have some rave reviews. I think I'm doing something right.

Matt Bowles: Well, I will say that my perspective on all things culinary in the world is broken into before I went to Japan and after I went to Japan. Yes, once you go there, it is going to fundamentally shift your perspective on culinary excellence and what is possible and everything else. But it is an absolutely extraordinary place and an amazing experience. I also have to ask you about what you're up to in terms of distilling your own spirits, launching a sake line, a tea company. What are you doing in this realm and what's coming up that people can look forward to?

Scott Brills: Oh yeah, that's just the stuff I do in my free time. But I started getting into brewing and distilling in 2017. I actually created Tepache, which some people might not. It's like a fermented pineapple beverage that's traditionally made in Mexico. So, I started making that and then distilling it into a type of brandy and then started volunteering at some distilleries just in my free time and connected with them and learned a lot about the industry and then created my own consulting company called [Elusive Spirits](#).

And I just work with some distillers and some brewers around the world and just creating new product lines and new flavors. That's just something I do just on the side. And then my tea company is actually launching this summer. It was supposed to be last summer, but it's a lot of work. It's called Asate, A-S-A-Ttea.com. Right now, I just have an email sign up to let people know when we launch. But I have actually been in Japan and done multiple internships at sake breweries, at tea production, tea blending houses. And when I did my tea internship, I realized that this would actually be a fun business to get into. And I'm already doing stuff in Japan and how nicely this dovetail into what I'm doing already, which is, you know, food and drink related stuff in Japan.

I decided to partner with the company I did the internship with and export high end tea and matcha from Japan to the US and sell online. So that's what we're going to do and we're going to do single origin teas and custom blends and stuff like that. And I was able to find out a lot about the industry and I'm in a unique position to do that because I met a lot of other people in the tea industry over there from abroad that were visiting. None of them know Japanese. It was kind of surprising. So, they don't have connections or experiences that I do. So, I partner with a friend that's also into tea and we're going to launch that this summer.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. For folks that would like to get more information, get on that email list and, and so forth. How can they do that?

Scott Brills: Asatea.com, ASATEA and it means morning tea. And why did I pick that name? Well, not only do you tend to drink tea oftentimes in the morning, but while I was on that internship, a big part of it was waking up at 2am each morning and then going to the tea company and taste testing 25 to 30 teas first thing in the morning. You had to be done by 5am so that they knew which teas they wanted to order that were harvested the day before. And then they would order 40, 80 kg of tea and be shipped to them the next day.

So, unless you taste tested them and figured out what you wanted that quickly, other companies are going to get it. I went there with my host father every morning, at 2:00 and I was buzzing by the time it was 5am because I'm actually kind of sensitive to caffeine. And so, it was quite the experience. So, I'll always remember those early, early, early mornings at the tea blender trying out these different, different teas.

Matt Bowles: All right, Scott, I have to ask you for some of your tips and reflections now. Since you've been traveling the world for over 20 years and building businesses and all of this, the first thing that I want to ask you is for your tips on language learning. You speak five languages now and I want to just ask for people that are maybe at the earlier stage or maybe people that feel like you did when you were in your Spanish class and think, maybe this is hard, maybe I'm not very good at languages. Seems like other people can learn them easier than I can. What tips do you have on language learning both in terms of why it's really important to you and the value that you found in learning these languages and why people should put effort into it, but then also how you have found the ability to learn so many languages and, you know, any direction you would point people into.

Scott Brills: Like I said learning Japanese is probably one of the most important decisions in my life, and I'm so glad I did it. And I was coming from a place of thinking. I wasn't good at languages. Straight C student in Spanish class for year one and two of high school. It made all the difference in just me having an interest in the language and a reason for doing it and not being forced to do it. That was big. I think I learned Japanese very well by going over there. It was multifaceted as far as why I was able to maybe learn it quicker or better than some of the other students.

But I think mostly it was just not being afraid to go out there and use it to want to talk to people, but they didn't know English. And so, I had to up my game and had to be on their level because I'm in their country. And just going out there and just talking, not being afraid to fail, not being afraid to make a mistake in the language. I mean, for the first few months, I think I was telling girls that I didn't want a girlfriend, and they'd ask, oh, do you have a girlfriend? You know, I was trying to say, I don't have a girlfriend. And I mixed up the verb for those that are Japanese, it's to not have is 'Enai' and to not want is 'Iranai'. So, I mixed them up, and so, I'd say 'Kanojo wa Iranai'. And so, you know, I don't know if they thought I was gay or I just wasn't interested at all.

But I was saying that for a few months, and I was like, oh, man, duh, you know, and for me, there's no better way to remember something than to get a lot of embarrassment from doing it wrong. And that has helped me a lot of times remember a lot of things in the language and other languages as well. I have been able to make so many new friends. It's open up business opportunities and friendships. And even if you don't learn it to a level of fluency, learning just the basics goes a long way. Especially nowadays with phone tech and the ability to use Google Translate for things, showing that you've put in a little bit of effort to learn 'Hello',

'Goodbye', 'Thank you', or Ordering at a restaurant, something like that, goes a long, long way. Because I think the way tech's going is going to be less and less common to do that. Also, you get the secondary benefits of learning at least one language, which I encourage everyone to do. If you don't know already it is really important because every language kind of things differently, and you get to learn a whole new way of thinking and interacting with the world. Like in Japanese, inconsequential things, like Japanese, the signal lights, you know, you've got red, yellow, and green, right? They say red, yellow, and blue. And then you're like, wait, why do they say blue? And then you find out that there didn't use to be a green in their language, and they just called it green and blue, blue. And, you know, just interesting things like that.

And you'll find that in every single language. You know, you always hear, like, German has all these words that you don't have in English, like longing for a place you've never been to, '*Fernweh*'. You know, stuff like that. It's really cool to learn these different ways of thinking. And it helps you not only connect with other cultures, but also, I've learned a lot about my own language by learning other languages and kind of comparing and contrasting them. So, I feel like it's also made me a better English speaker as well.

Matt Bowles: One of the things that I appreciate the most about you is how much you've been committed to affecting positive change in the world over the years through your travels, through your businesses and so forth. And I want to ask you, just reflecting on your philanthropy and what you've learned over the years and how you might advise people to navigate through some of the pitfalls that sometimes appear when we are trying to make a positive change in the world and do something positive in terms of some of the problems that sometimes arise with the voluntourism space or orphanage tourism or the white savior complex when trying to do things in the global south or the continent of Africa, and so on and so forth. And what you've learned about some of those over the years, how you've navigated them, and any tips that you would give to people who want to make a positive contribution.

Scott Brills: Even though it may come from a place of good intention, all that stuff that you mentioned definitely exists. I know some people that were volunteering at an orphanage in Arusha where our company is based. And I found out later on through one of the volunteers, a 10 volunteer that worked there, he's like, man, these people are giving money to this orphanage. It's portrayed as an orphanage, but most of these kids do not live here. They're just here during the daytime. And the money that they're giving, the owner is taking most of it. I was like, what? We'd given, not money, but we had given supplies and stuff to them.

And we're like, wow, I can't believe that's happening. And I've heard since then, just in the area that we operate multiple stories like that, like, this is a thing. This has been a problem enough that we're starting our own nonprofit in Tanzania. We actually just incorporated it this year because we've had so many issues partnering with existing nonprofits or what we think are nonprofits. And then you find out in the end, you know, they're taking a cutoff at the top, you know, and so we're like, well, we still want to give back, and we still want to be able to accept donations and get into the country without being taxed on them, which is the main reason why you start the nonprofit.

It's a huge problem, not only in Tanzania, many developing countries, because they know people come over to do the voluntourism thing, you know, and help out with the children and get the Instagram shots and stuff like that. It's something that unfortunately happens. I can't really say much besides research quite a bit. Don't just talk to your friends that have done it, because that's what these girls I know did. And it looks okay on the ground, but you just don't know what's happening if you're not speaking the language and you don't have longer time there. And also, the fact that if it is a real orphanage, you know, having adults just kind of go in and out of their lives on a regular basis is not great for their developments as well, you

know. If they are actual orphans, they need, like, a solid adult presence there. And so, this is actually bad for development. There's a lot of education that needs to be done before you should sign up for that. And even when you're donating money to causes overseas, you just have to educate yourself and do your own research.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you about some of your lessons from your entrepreneurial journey. You have been building successful businesses for over 20 years now, and you've been building them while traveling the world. And I want to ask if you can reflect back on the last couple of decades and share some of the biggest business lessons that you might give to particularly remote or digital nomad business owners today that might be at the earlier stage of their journey.

Scott Brills: Yeah, I mean, I was starting it up at a time when my initial company doing the web design and IT and then and even the safari company where, like, it wasn't normal to be working on the road Internet was crappier. You know, they're like, oh, you're just like, you're just playing. You're just traveling, you know, I'm like, no, I'm working over there. You know, I'm like, okay, sure. Now it's especially after the pandemic, it's become more normalized, and so I think people won't have to go through as much friction in that way. You know, what I found for me is basically traveling slower helps a lot. Especially if you're starting off something, it's going to take time. It'll take you a year or two, and you have to budget that into your plans and travel slower.

There have been times where during the year, I've traveled to a new spot every 3.25 days on average. That is awful productivity. I can tell you right away, it's awful, awful. And I thought I could have my cake and eat it too. And you really need to stay somewhere. I thought then, like, oh, I'm going to stay somewhere for longer and I'll really focus on work. It's like, I'm going to stay somewhere for a whole month. That was a long time for me. I would say probably longer than that. Stay somewhere for like three months or so. Not only will you get a deeper look into that area like you were doing, when you're staying for, you know, each city for a month in Japan, you're going to be able to kind of get that tourism out of the way on the weekends or in the beginning and then focus on the work.

And it's tough, you know, when you're doing this for the first time and all of a sudden you don't have a boss. You are your own boss. And to sometimes keep the momentum going, to be your own boss, to set your own hours, it's tricky. That's why I think it's more important to start that kind of thing. You already have a 9 to 5, let's say, or paycheck coming in to start that on the side while you're doing that and kind of get an idea of how much work it's going to take and how quickly you'll be able to get some money in while you still have your health insurance and your paycheck and everything. I think that's probably the better way to do it.

And then lastly, if you're going to go into a partnership, choose your partners wisely. I've had partnerships that didn't work out. I've had partnerships that do. Luckily, Josh couldn't be a better partner, but I've had less than amazing partners as well, and part of that might just be kind of live and learn, but the quicker you can learn who is a good partner and who's not, that's pretty important.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you about your reflections on all of the travels that you've now done. Over a hundred countries and a lot of them really immersive and in depth and unique experiences and ways of connecting with people and experiencing different places. What impact do you think all of this travel has had on you as a person?

Scott Brills: Only good. I have been able to experience so much, meet so many people and be a part of so many cultures. It has taught me adaptability, resilience, that everyone around the world is very much the same, despite the color of the skin or their religion, that you can do without a lot of material objects. What you actually do need in life is very small and it can often fit in a backpack. And if you need it, you can go out and buy something. If you get invited to a wedding, you need a suit, go to Zara and grab a suit. I've been there before.

There's so much that's come from it. Patience, just a lot of good qualities. I'm sure part of it's just growing older. But also experiencing life in these other countries really also makes you appreciate what you have. If you have the ability to go travel and work in these countries and be a digital nomad, you're already figuratively ahead of much of the population of the world that is not able to do that because of money or time or passport. And it really makes you appreciate that. You know, I've got friends in a lot of countries where they're like, well, I'd love to do what you do, but I've got a Nepali passport and we can't go anywhere, you know, on free, you know, on arrival visas. It's the thing.

I've got my business partner in Tanzania. He's coming on the Japan trip. My next one I'm doing; it's his first time outside of Africa. He's only been to South Africa and Kenya for work, basically. So, he has never had Japanese food before. This would be a complete mind blower for him. But to get to Japan, he's having to jump through so many hoops where I don't have to. I could just show up there with a U.S. passport and he has to go to multiple interviews and prove, here's my bank statement and here's the reasons why I'm not going to leave my family and go live in Japan. So, he has to really jump through hoop after hoop after hoop. And it makes me angry. I'm like, of course he's not going to leave. He has this thriving business and a family and money. But there's still like. And I can only imagine for people that don't have all that Tanzanian, there's no way they're getting a visa ahead of time to go travel there or many other countries in the world. So that's another thing. It really makes you appreciate what you've got.

Matt Bowles: Scott, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into the Lightning Round. Why are you still so passionate about travel? You are about to do the Rickshaw run in India for a fourth time. You are still so passionate about seeing the world in these unique and substantive and immersive ways. What does travel mean to you today?

Scott Brills: I'm still very much into adventures. I'm working more than I have ever before and I'm staying in one place more than I ever have. But that thirst for adventure I don't think will ever go away from me. I always want to travel around, see new things, eat new food, see new people, and have adventures. And I'll always try to fit that in my life one way or another going forward. So, you know, I'm not doing as much of it just because I have to focus on my businesses. And that's another goal of mine. I'm willing to give up my life of non-stop adventure to do that. And that's worth it to me. But it's just kind of built into me, I guess. I don't know anything beyond that. It's just, it's also once you drink the Kool Aid, you know.

Matt Bowles: I relate to that, my friend. And I think that is a perfect place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Scott, are you ready to move in to the Lightning round?

Scott Brills: I will, and I haven't read any of the questions, so you are going to get my legit answers.

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

Scott Brills: One of the books that really got me on my thirst to travel the world and experience things was [The Travels of Marco Polo](#) when I was in third grade. I love that it just talks about Marco Polo and nowadays

we don't know how much of it was fictionalized or added to. But amazing for someone that's, you know, in the 14th century to be doing that kind of travel.

And more recently in my adult life, I really love the book by Robert Cialdini called [Persuasion](#) that talks about human psychology, how people operate and just mental models and things like that. And I think it's really important just being a human or having a company where you're trying to sell things or services to know how people operate. And it kind of gives you cheat codes to deal with people. We all have to deal with people in our lives, right? You know, not necessarily in a negative way or positive way, but just like interactions. I remember reading it and being like a lot of light bulb moments where I was like, oh, oh wow. Like that's right. Like I have noticed that, you know, and just kind of codifying some of those things that you've experienced before but maybe not thought of in that way.

Matt Bowles: Scott, what is one travel hack that you use that you can recommend to people?

Scott Brills: Take a roll of duct tape, which is pretty big, even the travel duct tape is pretty big. And then wrap it around a pencil and make a much smaller roll and throw that in your toiletries. Man, I use that all the time. My number one thing I use that for is I cover those bright ass LEDs. They're in so many hotel rooms on like the TV or the smoke detector or whatever. And I cover those things because they're just like blasting light into the room. I'm really light sensitive and you sleep so much better when you've got a dark room. I tear off little pieces of that gorilla tape or duct tape and I throw it on those bright LEDs.

Another thing is to use a binder clip, and I'll carry that with me to put the two curtains together of hotel rooms. Oftentimes you can't get them to go together and there's a beam of light inevitably in your face in the morning waking you up. And so, I'll use that to wrap them around each other and then I'll put the clip. The trick is to remember to take the clip with you when you leave. I've definitely lost a few of those, but those are two very low cost, high value tips I have.

Matt Bowles: Scott, what is one piece of advice that you would give to your 18-year-old self, knowing everything that you know. Now, if you could go back in time, what would you say to 18-year-old Scott?

Scott Brills: Keep on the path. Because I was very conflicted, not so much 18, but like right after that, right? So, 18, 19, I was in Japan. I was doing pretty well, pretty happy when I came back and started up my company. And then in the next few years, early 20s, I didn't know if this was going to be a for right then kind of thing. And I was just doing that to like to have a job going through school and to test out my entrepreneurial chops or if I was going to go deeper on that. And I definitely had a few years where I was, oh, am I just doing this till I get a real job, you know, and my parents would cut out newspaper clippings at the time and like, oh, they're looking for someone over here for web development and stuff like that.

And you know, they're waiting for me to get that real job. I'm about to graduate or I just graduated and yeah, I'm happy I stayed on that path instead of getting a 9 to 5 job. Not that I wouldn't have used that in another way to gain experience and connections and stuff like that. But in the end, everything turned out well. Just, you know, it took a while. It took a while to build up momentum, to feel confident in yourself, to then sell yourself and your goods or services to others and then make enough money to, to support yourself to the point where you're like, I don't need a normal job. I could keep working for myself.

Matt Bowles: Okay, of all of the places you have now traveled in 100 plus countries other than Tanzania and Japan, which we know are very deeply enshrined in your heart, what are three other travel destinations that you would most recommend? People should definitely check out.

Scott Brills: Turkey, Thailand, I've also spent a ton of time in Thailand. Same reason I love Turkey and Japan. A lot of amazing history, friendly people, amazing food. Food's definitely big on the list for all those countries. And then number three, I quite like Mexico because it's so close to the U.S. it's so easy to get in and to travel around. You can even drive down there. The food is amazing.

Matt Bowles: It's insane. It's amazing.

Scott Brills: Amazing culture and history and a lot of different landscapes. You've got the jungles, you've got the deserts, you've got the two coasts. Yeah, I quite like Mexico and there's so much more in Mexico I have yet to do. I haven't even been to Oaxaca, for instance. But I do love, you know, the culinary scene is a thing for me. And I mean Mexico, just about everyone loves Mexican food. Even if it's like Tex Mex, you know, it's some good stuff.

Matt Bowles: It's a great pick. All right, Scott, we have now come to the most important question of this interview. I am about to ask you to name your top five hip hop Emcees of all time. But before you name your five, can you share a little bit about what hip hop means to you, why you love hip hop, and maybe give people a little context on growing up in Detroit and your connection with hip hop?

Scott Brills: Yeah, initially, I was introduced to hip hop through I don't know if you'd call it faux hip hop but MC Hammer, Vanilla Ice, that was.

Matt Bowles: My first concert, by the way. I went to the MC Hammer "You Can't Touch This" tour in Buffalo, New York, and Vanilla Ice was the opening act.

Scott Brills: Whoa.

Matt Bowles: That's right, brother.

Scott Brills: Two for one.

Matt Bowles: That's it, man.

Scott Brills: And I kind of went from there. And I was really into music. I would just listen to the radio all the time. I would make my own mixtapes. I think I really got into hip-hop more when I was in Japan that first year. Because in Japan there's such a variety of music from around the world, including hip-hop from other countries and hip-hop in Japan. So that was right around the time when Def Jam Japan was a major force in the music industry in Japan. I, along with some of my friends, went to a bunch of shows. And also, this is right when CD burning became a thing. And they have CD rental shops, and they sell blank CDs there. It's kind of a weird system back in the day.

So, I would just check out all these CDs and I'd rent them. And I was the only person that brought a CD copier with me, like one of the first external CD copiers. And I made copies of all these CDs. I know it is not technically legal, but yes, that's what I did. So, I was exposed to a huge breadth of music that I'd never heard before. But I was able to really delve into a lot of music I'd never heard before, including a lot of hip-hop. And from there, it just grew bigger and bigger. I got really into hip hop and house music that year. I did DJ a little bit of hip hop. But I was really got into house music and. And did house. And the house music wasn't a thing in the us. I would DJ some shows at my friend's house and stuff like that. In the U.S. people like, what the heck is this music? You know, they had no idea. But yeah, like, I really got into it. I had a really

cool musical education kind of on my own and through these concerts in Japan and stuff when I was there in 2001.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing, man. Yeah. I mean, a lot of people don't know the history of house music. And Chicago, the Midwest, Frankie Knuckles.

Scott Brills: Frankie Knuckles.

Matt Bowles: All of that stuff coming out, man. And also, a lot of people don't know about the hip hop culture in Asia, which has been one of my things, because, as you know, I was a hip hop DJ in the 90s. And so, one of the things that I love about traveling is to see how the hip hop culture is in different places around the world as I travel. So, when I go to Japan or I go to Seoul, Korea, my gosh, I mean, it is, like, unbelievable, the hip hop culture.

Scott Brills: Oh, yeah, yeah. Korea's really big into it.

Matt Bowles: Korea. It's absolutely amazing. Going to break dancing shows. I mean, it's just like, absolutely amazing to see how some of that stuff manifests itself. But what were you telling me, were you at a party that Q-Tip was throwing or something like that?

Scott Brills: Oh, yeah. I was in New York with a buddy and he's like, yeah, my friend's going to be bartending at this show in Brooklyn. I don't know if he knew it. It was Q-Tip, but, like, I was like, oh, whoa, Q-Tip. What? I was like, all right, let's go. And so, yeah, I went there, and Key Tip was there, just putting on a local show, kind of underground. And yeah, that was really neat. That was 2010, something like that. Super cool. Especially since Tribe Called Quest is one of my favorite hip hop groups. Definitely the elder school groups.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. All right, well, we're going to get to it right now. Scott, of all time, dead or alive, who are your Top Five?

Scott Brills: Tribe Called Quest, OutKast, also People Under the Stairs, they're probably my favorite. They're two guys from L.A. that were underground for 20 years, just driving to shows and selling merch out the back of their truck. Basically. They did it really, really hardcore. So, I really respected them for that hustle mindset. And then I would have to say Tupac, even though it is on the East West Coast. But Tupac is definitely one of my favorites, even from way long ago. I have to add it. I love the East Coast a lot. I would say if I had to pick one, I would go to the East Coast. But Tupac is my man.

And then it's not one artist. But I love the west coast collective, the Hieroglyphics crew, and a lot of the different individual artists that came out of that, which is part of an evening bigger crew. But yeah, I quite like their beats and there. And their rhymes and the way that they would play with really complex rhymes. Yeah. So, I'll give a shout out to them.

Matt Bowles: Amazing, brother. I love that. All right, Scott, this has been an incredible conversation. I want you to let folks know how they can find you, connect with you, follow you on social media and then once again let folks know if they're interested in Tanzania and coming on a safari, hiking Mount Kilimanjaro, hanging out in Zanzibar, doing some cool East Africa stuff. How can they do that and get the special Maverick Show incentive and then if folks are interested in coming to Japan, how they can learn more about that and anything else you want to let people know about how you want them to come into your world.

Scott Brills: Yeah. So, I mean, the easiest way is probably to go to [the show notes](#) on this episode and click on the links. So, you've got [Eat Japan](#), which is small group tours, only a few a year. If you want to do that, hit me up now. Just let me, let me know because there's already people who signed up for 2026, not signed up, but like they said they want to go. So it'll sell out quick. For safaris, [pamojasafaris.com](#), P as in Paul P-A-M-O-J-A-Safaris.com and we do trip all year round, custom private trips for solo travelers all the way up to families, couples, groups of people. And we can put together the perfect itinerary for you. Also, if you want to climb Kilimanjaro separately or together with safari, we can make that happen as well. And then for the other stuff, Asatea, A-S-A-T-E-A that'll be launching this summer. But you can sign up on the email list on the site to figure out when we're going to launch that. Probably July. That's like the main stuff. If you just search for me, you know [my website](#), my [Instagram](#) hasn't been updated in a while. I'm too busy doing stuff, having my adventures and doing my business. I don't have a lot of time to devote to my own social media. But if you are interested in checking out our [Pamoja Safaris](#), at [pamojasafaris](#) [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), my friend Melissa who does our socials puts up some really cool stuff. Most of it has been taken by me personally. The videos and the photos that she puts up there, she has a really good job at it. We got some cool animal stuff to whet your appetite until you come over with us.

Matt Bowles: Well, I will tell you the safari that I did in the Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater and the hot air balloon ride was an absolute game changing experience, even though I had already done another safari in the Masai Mara in Kenya, it was a totally another level and was really extraordinary. So, folks have heard me on the podcast talk about that many times. They've heard me talk about summit in Kilimanjaro and how special and unique that was, as well as Zanzibar and some of the other stuff. So, everybody on this podcast knows who listens that I'm a huge fan of Tanzania.

So, remember to go to [pamojasafaris.com/maverick](#) to get your special Maverick Show discount on any of those trips that you end up doing. And we are going to link that up in [the show notes](#) along with everything else we have discussed in this episode. So, if you're interested in the Japan trips, if you're interested in the tea, if you're interested in following Scott and all of his amazing stuff on social media, all of that is going to be in one place. So just go to [themaverickshow.com](#) go to the show notes for this episode, and there you're going to find direct links for all of that and everything else that we have discussed. Scott, this was amazing, brother. Thank you for coming on the show.

Scott Brills: Quite the breadth of topics. Thanks for having me, Matt.

Matt Bowles: All right, good night, everybody.