

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Elsie Paulino. She is a New York City based Afro-Latina and first generation Dominican American world traveler. She documents her travel experiences of stepping outside her comfort zone, connecting with cultures and proving that travel isn't just for the select few. She is also passionate about helping others navigate personal finance with confidence and build generational wealth, especially within underrepresented communities. And she will be a featured speaker at the upcoming [2025 Latino Travel Fest](#).

Elsie, welcome to the show.

Elsie Paulino: Thank you. This is exciting.

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to have you here and I am so excited that we are doing this in person in your hometown of New York City. And we have just opened a really nice bottle of Rose' from Provence, which I went and got today just for this interview because I wanted to pick a wine from one of the regions that you have spent time travelling in that we are going to talk about today. France is definitely one of those regions. So, we are going to be drinking through that throughout this episode. I feel like, though, since we are in New York, I want to just start by asking you, as someone who lives here, what do you love about New York? What is so special about this city to you?

Elsie Paulino: Oh, my gosh, everything. I love everything you can find cuisine and language from every corner of the world. Authentic. I've traveled a lot. I've traveled to many different parts of the world and there's always a bite that reminds me of something that I've had in this city, there's nothing that compares to that feeling and that pride, like, oh yeah, no, we got this. And then also that skyline. Honestly, sometimes I drive, which is rare here, but I drive. And sometimes I just get caught, just completely taken aback and just like, oh, that's so pretty. So, I love New York.

Matt Bowles: I agree. I explained to people that it feels to me like the entire planet of Earth condensed into one city.

Elsie Paulino: Yes.

Matt Bowles: You can find all types of people and all types of cultures and all types of food and everything on the planet in one city. And it just has also I feel an energy about it that exists nowhere else on the planet of Earth. I come through New York on purpose at least once a year to infuse the energy into my soul from New York City and then go out and travel the world for the rest of the year.

Elsie Paulino: I mean, you can probably say that about a borough. I mean Queens, which is where I live. I mean the amount of languages that's spoken there is insane. And food, forget about it.

Matt Bowles: So yes, it is the most diverse place on the planet of Earth. The borough of Queens in particular, I mean we should emphasize that. The majority of the boroughs are foreign born, I mean it is just like a world tour of the globe walking around Queens.

Elsie Paulino: I love it.

Matt Bowles: It is absolutely amazing. And you and I also recently in New York City attended the Wits Travel Creator Summit. Big shout out to [Beth Santos](#) who has been on the show twice. Maverick show listeners know her, the amazing, wonderful community and WITS Travel Creator Summit. How was the summit for you?

Elsie Paulino: Incredible. It was actually my first time going to wit shout out [Vanessa](#) from Latino World Traveler who had an extra ticket and invited me and was so generous to do that because it was my first time. I went in there telling myself not to put a lot of pressure on this conference. It's the first creator conference that I ever attended and so I wanted to just go and make connections to further connect with people that I may have already met online. And I did just that. So, I met incredible people, I caught up with incredible creators and that was just so fun. I absolutely loved it. Can't wait to go again.

Matt Bowles: So many Maverick Show podcast guests also were speaking and were attending and all of that. It was really an amazing event, an amazing community. Big shout out to [Beth](#) for that. Well, I want to go a little bit into your background, Elsie, and before we talk even about your upbringing, can you share a little bit about your parent's story, what their life was like in the Dominican Republic and then their journey coming to the United States?

Elsie Paulino: Yeah, I Mean, it's very similar to a lot of our parents' generation that came to the US they came late 80s and it was just one of those things, the American dream, right, that they were chasing. They come from very, very humble beginnings. They met in the capital of the Dominican Republic. My dad came first because he was sponsored to come here. And then he brought my mom along with him a couple years after that. And it's a story that a lot of people can relate to. It was a story of opportunity and thinking about their future families, which at that point hadn't started. It was just them two. And they came here chasing the American dream.

Matt Bowles: So, when you were coming up in the New York, New Jersey area, can you talk about what that was like for you, coming up in an immigrant home and navigating your Dominican identity, your American identity what was that like for you?

Elsie Paulino: Being an immigrant child, you have to grow up a little bit quicker than everyone else because your parents might not have the language down packed. And so, you are tapped on the shoulder to translate, to come with them to very important spaces and be their translator, to read documents that you yourself don't understand, but can just verbatim, just word for word, tell them what it means and let them figure out the next steps. And so, you are forced to grow up a little bit faster than others. But in terms of identity, I grew up going to the Dominican Republic every summer. And it was weird because it's almost like they instantly knew I was American before I even opened my mouth and you can tell by my accent that I'm not from there, but they'd call me La Americana. And then here I am American, but I'm seen a little bit as a foreigner. So, there's definitely a little bit of identity crisis that happens because you feel like you're neither from here nor there. So, I experienced a lot of that growing up.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you specifically about the Afro Latina dynamic. And the first part of the is about how that dynamic played out for you here in the United States navigating the milieu of Blackness in the United States as an Afro Latina.

Elsie Paulino: It's interesting because while Afro Latina is very much, I don't want to say a common terminology, it wasn't growing up. It still feels somewhat new, that term. Because a lot of Latinos, they want to remain as far away from blackness as they possibly can. And so, I remember when I first heard the term, it kind of like clicked because growing up Hispanic and Latino is now under race on forms but growing up it was really what it was. White, black, Asia Pacific, and I can't remember the fourth one. So, I would naturally choose black because I'm definitely not white, I'm definitely not Asian Pacific. There's only one other option that I identify with in the mirror. But I grew up and I realized that my other family members

were choosing white. And I'm like, what? It just didn't make sense. And then after 2020 was probably when a lot of race related topics came up in my family and I realized how much members of my family wanted to assimilate and get as close to whiteness as possible.

Matt Bowles: Well, the other side of this question that I want to ask you about is if you can share a little bit about the dynamics of anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic, what the experience is like for Afro Dominicans there and then specifically for you and your family as you've gone back over the years, what's that been like?

Elsie Paulino: I mean, I'll talk about hair for a moment if you'll allow me. So, my mom relaxed my hair at 8. I was in elementary school and for those of you who don't know what that means, a relaxer is a chemical treatment that you put in your hair to essentially make it straight and make it manageable. I'm using air quality; you can't see me. And so, when I decided to go natural years later, I mean the uproar, it's like for what? You can't do that, that's not proper, that's not clean, that's not right. And I had to explain to them one, it's my body, I can do whatever I want. But two, what is this rejection of what's naturally coming out of your head. And again, it's just that desire to assimilate, that desire to be as close to whiteness as possible. And it's still very much a thing today.

Matt Bowles: And how does it manifest in the DR? Can you talk about experiences from young age all the way up until now going back to the DR and what have you observed with regard to dynamics of anti-blackness in the DR for Afro Dominicans?

Elsie Paulino: Yeah, so I'll explain it through dating. A very common phrase in the Dominican Republic and probably many Latin American countries is *tenemos que mejorar alas raza*. That means we need to better our race. And you know when that comes up, that comes up when you're dating someone who's dark. That comes up when you're dating someone who's black, which in many houses is a huge problem to this day. And so, there's definitely this rejection. And you get nicknames like Negra and Morena, which means black. And then your lighter skinned counterparts or family members, they get nicer nicknames. And you don't realize that until you're grown enough to understand what it means. So, yeah, there's very much a rejection of blackness even today. And then you also see it with how Haitians are treated in the Dominican Republic. And it's very disappointing today. It is atrocious how many of them are treated by many of the Dominicans in the country.

Matt Bowles: Did you observe that personally when you were going there as a kid? How did your consciousness about that get raised?

Elsie Paulino: I would say that happened after I grew up. It wasn't something that I realized was happening when I was a kid. It was one of those hindsight is 20/20, and now I realize how problematic some of those conversations were. I mean, there's definitely a lot of phobias that we struggle with as a country. Yeah, it's not something that I noticed growing up, but it's certainly something that I definitely know now.

Matt Bowles: So, the other thing I want to ask you about, as you were growing up, you were traveling to the Dominican Republic and back, and you were living in New York, and you had exposure to different cultures in New York. But how did your interest in world travel to places outside of the US and the Dominican Republic begin?

Elsie Paulino: A book. I read a book when I was a teenager. It was called *The Thief Lord*, and it took place in Venice, Italy. And they even sprinkled Italian words throughout the book. And Matt, I became obsessed. I

was like, what is this? I need to go there, and I need to go there now. But at the time, again, I've only been to the Dominican Republic and home, and no one had explored outside of those two places in my family. And also, as a teenager, I didn't know what studying abroad was. And so, I spent months researching, not even knowing what I'm looking for, but probably researching things like teenager goes to Italy. And it just took months to finally find an answer. And the answer was studying abroad. And I'm like, oh. And then it took months to convince my parents to let me go. I mean, it was like, no, it was absolutely not. It was kicking and screaming, it was bartering, I mean, tears. It was months of hell because I felt this need to get there and they were this wall that I needed to go through. But they're your parents, so you can't disobey your parents. And it felt like very much going against them, but eventually I won the battle. I did go to Italy when I was 17.

Matt Bowles: And where in Italy did you go? For how long did you go and what was your experience like?

Elsie Paulino: It was incredible. It wasn't even a glamorous trip. It was a summer cultural immersion program. It was six weeks. The first two weeks were orientation between Rome and Calabria. And then my host family was in Gela, Sicily. I just spent this summer with this family that I'm meeting for the first time. And it was very much just living their life and that they just invited me into their day to day. So, it wasn't this glamorous trip where I got to see all of Sicily. No. But I got to live with an Italian family.

Matt Bowles: And what was that like for you at that age? Can you describe some of your memories from that and the impact it had on you?

Elsie Paulino: Goodness. It's also one of those things where you don't realize how monumental something is in your life until you're looking back at it. But I remember I had a whole sister. She was 14, I was 17. And so those ages, they kind of don't really click. It's only three years. But at that age, it's tremendous. And so, I would fight a lot with this stranger. But it was nice because looking back, that just means how comfortable and how fast we fell into this sisterly relationship. And it was the same with the parents. They just completely embraced me. And by the end of that summer, I was pretty fluent in Italian, which was also unbelievable because I'm like, holy crap. I learned a new language. I was completely immersed.

Matt Bowles: I feel like Sicily is such a magically special place and it's really fundamentally culturally distinct from the rest of Italy. I mean, if people have spent time in other parts in Italy, and then you go to Sicily, you're like, whoa. Because for many years it was not part of Italy. And so, there's this massive Arab history there and Greek history there, and tons of immigrants that have come there from all of these different places, from Tunisia and other places. And it's just like this remarkably interesting, unique cultural space. And also, it's just drop dead gorgeous. I lived in Ortygia in Siracusa for a month.

Elsie Paulino: Wow.

Matt Bowles: And every single day when I walked out of my place, I was like, I can't believe I live here. This is just ridiculous. And you just walk out of the piazza and there's like someone playing the accordion. And every night you have the aperitivo hour and the sun sets over the water and it's just perfect. Every single day I was like, I really can't believe that I live here. This is insane.

Elsie Paulino: Stunning. It's such a special place. I used to say that I want to retire there, and I definitely want to spend a long period of time there. I almost don't want to go now because I know that it'll just be a week of PTO and it's just not going to do it justice. I'd rather hold off and just go when I can spend proper time there.

Matt Bowles: Well, the other study abroad experience you subsequently had was in Vienna, Austria, which I have been to a couple times, but both of them were very brief. I am so enamored with the old downtown city Vienna. And I will say this, if anybody hasn't been to Vienna or through the Vienna airport, one of the things I give huge props to for the airport in Vienna is that if you have a layover of, let's say, four hours or more in Vienna, which I now intentionally tried to schedule, they have this thing where you can get off your plane, lock your luggage in a locker, jump onto this express train that shoots you directly down to the middle of the old city, and you can just walk around, have coffee, have some food or whatever, jump back on, and then shoot back to the airport, get your luggage and get onto your flight. It is fantastic. You, however, have spent more time in Vienna than I have, and I want to hear what your experience was like.

Elsie Paulino: I almost didn't choose Vienna. Vienna chose me. My options were limited at the time. It was a new program for Baruch College. And so, I knew nothing about this city, country. I probably, when they first said Vienna, I probably heard my mind heard Venice. So that's how little I knew about this city. But it was great. What I love most about Vienna is accessibility. You have Western and Eastern Europe, and I mean accessible. I can decide at midnight if I want to go to Prague for the weekend and be on a 6am bus to Prague direct. You can't beat that. So, I had a great time. That was probably the semester where I traveled the most. And I realized, no, I want to see the world. I want to see the world, and I'm going to do as much of it as I can in these five months. And Vienna gave me that.

Matt Bowles: When I was studying abroad in my undergrad in college, I studied abroad in Dublin, Ireland. And very similarly to what you're saying, my roommate and I would take every weekend, and we would just go either to somewhere else in Ireland by train and just spend the weekend in a different city or we'd go to London or Edinburgh, Scotland, or some close place where you get a super cheap flight. And then on the winter break, when we have a month off, we're like, let's get the Euro rail, hop on, hop off, unlimited pass and just go through Europe. And we did. And it was life changing. When you do that, all of a sudden there's before that trip and after that trip and everything has changed.

Elsie Paulino: Yes, because you realize what's possible, right. And you're still on your own. You feel like you're a kid. It's the first time that you're so far from home, but you survive, and you have an incredible time. And oh, by the way, you're meeting unbelievable people along the way. And now you have friends all over the world, people with different mindsets. You can't beat it.

Matt Bowles: Well, I know that your travel journey has led you to a number of super amazing places. One of them that I want to start with is Sri Lanka, which I know was a very meaningful and impactful experience for you. Can you share a little bit about the context in your life and why you chose to go to Sri Lanka and then what it was like for you there?

Elsie Paulino: So, it was summer of 2021, and I was in a very dark place. I had to move back home and unfortunately, I sort of sacrificed my mental health to do that. For financial reasons, I had to move back home, and I love my parents. But once you're out on your own and you've gained this independence, it's really difficult to live with your family again. You've grown; you've changed. You feel like maybe they don't know you as well as you wish, and maybe you don't know how to communicate that you want them to know you more. Long story short, I was in a very dark place. Coming out of the pandemic, I was very much isolated, and I am an extrovert and people give me energy and I just love being around people. I love sharing moments with people and I couldn't do that.

And so, it got to the point where I felt like I needed to get as far away as possible. I don't know if you've ever had that feeling where you just physically want to be as far away as possible because people were like, just go to Austin, just go to California. But I almost couldn't explain that. That's too close. LA, CA is too close. Texas is too close, Europe felt too close. I needed to go far. And it's funny because, like, shortly after I was online and I saw this woman talking about going to an Ayurveda retreat in Bali. I don't know what Ayurveda is, but I still probably can't explain it fully. But I was like, okay, Bali's far, really far. And so, I do research on Ayurveda. Ayurveda, it's an Indian practice. But then I read that Sri Lanka, Ayurveda originated also in Sri Lanka. I'm going to Sri Lanka from the time that I heard the word Ayurveda for the first time. To me getting to Sri Lanka, it was maybe three weeks. I mean, it was one of those crazy things. And I spent a lot of money to get myself out there, but it was one of those things where I'm like, I need to do this.

Matt Bowles: Well, I want to hear what Sri Lanka was like for you also, though, just to give you context of how much love I have for Sri Lanka. So, when I was living in Washington, D.C. one of my housemates was Sri Lankan. Two of my other housemates had lived in Sri Lanka for like a year plus and had studied Sri Lankan cooking. One of them was an aspiring chef. So, you can imagine that in our house in D.C. we had Sri Lankan cooking happening all the time. Grating coconuts, I mean, from scratch, real deal stuff. So, it's one of my favorite foods in the world. I finally went to Sri Lanka. It's probably about 10 years ago now, was my opportunity to go to Sri Lanka, and I did, and it was absolutely just incredible. But I want to hear about your experience, particularly in the state that you are in, the mental and emotional state you're in in your life. And then you get Sri Lanka and then what was the experience like for you?

Elsie Paulino: Ayurveda is a practice of the mind, the body and the soul. And so, it's a healing practice. And you're there and a doctor kind of evaluates you. And at that time, I didn't know this, but trauma manifests in your body as pain, or it can. And so, I had chronic back pain that I was treating. Therapy a couple years later showed me that, or I learned that it was a trauma response, but the pain was very real. And so, I went to this hotel, and they fixed me up, which is kind of weird to say because I left feeling like it didn't happen, which is weird. But it was one of those experiences that you don't understand how impactful it is in the moment. You're just in survival mode. And so, Sri Lanka was life changing. But at the time, honestly, I didn't know what it was doing to me. But yes, it was very much four weeks of healing of the body, of the mind, of the soul. And it was just so relaxing. It was a dream. I still feel like it didn't actually happen. But to your point, the food, so it's all vegan, where I was for the first three weeks. I didn't have meat for three weeks and I thought I was going to go crazy. I never missed it once. The flavors, I mean, what the hell? It's sorcery. Yeah. So, I agree. One of the best foods in the world, 1,000%. I mean, it is sorcery, how good it is. So, yeah, I was vegan for three weeks and I'm Dominican, so I'm a huge meat eater. So, I wait to go back. You actually said there's a Sri Lankan place around here that's really good.

Matt Bowles: I just went three nights ago in New York City to one of the best Sri Lankan places in the city. And I sent you the address. So, yes, highly recommended. I just recently talked about this on an episode with [Phil Marcus](#) for Maverick Show listeners that have listened to that episode. And we literally started off the episode talking about him and met in Bangkok at this festival called the *Extraordinary Travel Fest*. And he hit me up and he was like "Yo, do you want to go get Sri Lankan food with me?" And I was like, I don't know if you have any idea, this is like my love language. Like, you are speaking straight to my heart, 100%, I will go get Sri Lankan food with you. And he said to me "this is my favorite food in the world". And he's traveled to 190 countries, almost every country in the world, and he's like "This is my number one favorite food in the whole world. And so, whenever I'm in a city that has a Sri Lankan community and has Sri Lankan restaurants, I will always seek out the best Sri Lankan restaurant is a thing that I do." I was like, well,

I want to roll with you. And so, we had Sri Lankan food together and we started off the episode also talking about Sri Lankan food. So big up. If anybody listening has not had Sri Lankan food, put it into the Google map search, see if there is a restaurant around you and go get some Sri Lankan food. Because it is absolutely game changing.

Elsie Paulino: It's life changing.

Matt Bowles: Well, I know that you eventually did get to India a couple years later, 2023. And I always love to ask people about their India stories because India is such a wild and unique and remarkable and incredible place. But a lot of times, if it's your first time going to India or, let's say, a place like India, it can be a bit of a sensory overload. And it can be just overwhelming at first. But then you start to realize all of these different layers of what's happening and all of this organization to what appears to be super chaotic stuff. And then you start to realize all these different things. And I just love to hear people's stories from India and also people's takes on what their impression is of India. So where did you go and what was your experience like in India?

Elsie Paulino: So, you kind of said it. It's organized chaos, and they beep their horn for sport. I remember at one point I was driving overnight, and my driver just never stopped lying on the horn. I'm like, sir, I have a headache. So, yeah, definitely a sensory overload. But I actually went to India for my best friend's wedding, so that was unbelievable, because I was in Mumbai, and I got to celebrate her. We had spent a year. I saw her plan this wedding, plan all the events. So, to be there in India and actually celebrate and do the thing that I've heard her talk about for two years was unbelievable. I got to dance, and I got to wear all the outfits, and I got to eat all the food. So, it was so, so special because of that. But, yes, definitely sensory overload. And I like immersing myself when I travel, and I realize that people don't do that.

So obviously, I wasn't alone. There were many of us, and at one point, we had a free day. I'm like, oh, let's go to downtown Mumbai, whatever that looks like. And we ended up at this market, and I was just. Just so happy. Because you're, like, in the thick of it, right? And I love that stuff. And they were uneasy. They're like, we have to go. I'm like, what are you talking about? So that's when I learned that I don't necessarily travel like others. I definitely like immersing myself while others rather just do the touristy thing, which is okay. I am not a travel snob. Yeah, sensory overload is the perfect way to describe it. The food is absolutely incredible. I never got sick, so that's good. I know a lot of people can't say that, so. Yeah, no, it was amazing. The wedding was in Mumbai and Kerala.

Matt Bowles: Wait, the wedding was in Kerala?

Elsie Paulino: Yes.

Matt Bowles: Oh, wow.

Elsie Paulino: Yes. And then the reception and the mehndi were also in Mumbai, so it was between those two places.

Matt Bowles: Oh, my gosh.

Elsie Paulino: Yeah. I know. And then after I made sure that I had a few days, I wanted to see Jaipur, and I wanted to see Agra, the Taj Mahal. And so, I extended it for a few days. It was very rushed. I want to go back to Jaipur. It's absolutely stunning. Oh, my gosh. And then seeing the Taj Mahal was. It was funny. It's funny

because you see these wonders and you feel like, are they actually going to move you? Yes, it does move you. It is so beautiful to be in front of the Taj Mahal.

Matt Bowles: Okay. And how amazing is Kerala? I think the other thing we need to talk about, because I've been to Kerala as well, is how different and diverse the different parts of India are. How different is Delhi from Kerala? I mean, fundamentally on so many different levels. I mean, Kerala is the cleanest state in India. It has the highest literacy rate in India. It's probably the most socially progressive state in India. And the food is just preposterously good. Like, it's ridiculous. But quite different from North Indian food, right. And also, to your point about the vegetarian stuff, if you're not a vegetarian and you don't think you like vegetarian food or you can't subsist on only vegetarian food for an extended period of time, just go to Kerala and then talk to me. I mean, it's very vegetarian, and it will blow your mind every single meal.

Elsie Paulino: Yes, definitely. I mean, I feel like I can continue to go to India and feel like I visited a new country. Like, that's how different the different areas of the country is. I mean, it's vast.

Matt Bowles: I tell people. If you tell someone you've been to India, that's like saying you've been to Europe, right? Where in Europe did you go? Because all these places speak different languages. They're different cultures, different foods. Same with India. It's just unbelievably diverse and amazing.

Elsie Paulino: Yeah.

Matt Bowles: And I feel like I just need to go back and give India a year plus of my time because.

Elsie Paulino: Minimum.

Matt Bowles: Come on.

Elsie Paulino: I agree.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. All right, Elsie, I now need to talk to you about Vietnam.

Elsie Paulino: Yes.

Matt Bowles: Here's the thing. So, I have been to Vietnam multiple times. Love Vietnam. I lived in Da Nang in central Vietnam for a month. I went to Hawaii. I went to Hoi An. I've been to Ho Chi Minh City a couple times. I have not been to Hanoi. And I want to tell you why I haven't been to Hanoi.

Elsie Paulino: How dare you?

Matt Bowles: I know, but I have to tell you why. So, I was living in Da Nang for a month. And some of the people I was with were like, yo, we're going to go up to Hanoi for a long weekend. Do you want to go? And I said no. And here's why I said no. I said no because I don't want to give Hanoi any less than one full month of my time. Because I have heard that it is that spectacular. I'm not going for a long weekend. I am waiting until I can devote a full month or more to Hanoi because I've heard it's that amazing. And then I'm going through your content and you're ranking all these places that you've been around the world. And Hanoi, Vietnam is the one place that gets a 10 out of 10, a perfect ranking. Please tell me, why is Hanoi so amazing?

Elsie Paulino: 10 out of 10. And I can't even judge you because that's what I'm doing with Sicily. I'm not going to Sicily until I can spend an extended amount of time. So fine, fair. You were forgiven.

Matt Bowles: You understand?

Elsie Paulino: Just this time. Hanoi is beautiful. The food is incredible. It's super affordable, which I don't like focusing on it, but you just get so much. Your money goes so far in Hanoi, but outside of that, it's just the quality of everything that you consume, right? I mean, everything just feels fresh and almost like it just came out of the earth. So, the food is absolutely incredible. But one thing that is underrated and we need to talk about more as a society and a global society, coffee. The coffee in Vietnam is elite. And I don't know why we spend so much time talking about other coffee. It's Vietnam. I mean, fine. Colombian coffee, a little too sour for me. Vietnamese coffee, I can talk about it forever. Anyways, the coffee culture is incredible. The food is incredible. You can stay at these gorgeous five-star hotels for like 30 bucks a night. And then from Hanoi you can travel. Like there's so many experiences that you can have from the city. I mean, I did Hạ Long Bay.

Matt Bowles: Talk about that. For people that have never heard of Hạ Long Bay, can you describe what the experience is?

Elsie Paulino: Oh my God. So how long Bay is like something you'll never see in your life. So, they're known for these massive lime limestone rocks mountains and they're on the water. You're surrounded by these limestone mountains, and you have to go on a cruise. But what I'm going to say for the long Bay haters, they're just not doing it right. You spend a couple more dollars and go on a cruise that's maybe higher ranking. You're going to have an incredible experience. You choose to spend \$10 a night, listen, that's on you. You can't then complain that it was crowded, and it wasn't the best experience, but the experience that I had was 10 out of 10. And that was from Hanoi.

Matt Bowles: Elsie. All right, we are now at the point of this interview where we are ready to talk about France. So, we've been drinking this from Provence all the way up until now. And I got to say, I was going through your content, and I was flipping through your stuff, and I was like, oh, that's cool. She's been there. Oh, that's cool. She's been there. Oh, that's cool. She's been there. And then I get to the Paris Olympics, 2024, and I'm like, what? Okay, start from wherever you want to start from. How did this happen? How did you get there? What did you attend? How was this decision made? And then what was the experience like?

Elsie Paulino: So, Paris is a city that keeps calling me back. I am a chronic destination repeater. I am not one of those people who go somewhere and they're like, oh, I have to prioritize another place, because I've already. No, I love Paris. I will continue to go. I love Mexico City. I will continue to go. I love that because it allows me to really, truly enjoy a place that I love. Because I'll be back. It's all good. So, on that particular trip, Paris Olympics, I was going to Budapest, and I realized I put my PTO in wrong. I gave myself more days. So, it was the last weekend of the Olympics, and I'm like, fuck it. I'm going to change my flight, and I'm going to get to spend, I think it was two or three nights in Paris. And so, unfortunately, it was too late to get tickets to anything. But I did go to the viewing parties, which felt so special. And I particularly went to the ones that it was France versus America, the USA, because I'm like, all right, it's. This is how we have to do it. And so that was a lot of fun. But then I looked up the closing ceremony tickets, and I'm like, holy shit, there are tickets. There's very few, but there are. So, I snatched them. And. And it was unreal. You almost felt like you were in a movie.

Matt Bowles: I was watching the closing ceremony on television, and I felt it was unreal watching it on television. I cannot even imagine what it would be like to be there in person. I have seen your content that

you filmed from it. And I was just like, I can't believe she's there in person. It must have been completely insane.

Elsie Paulino: Oh, the energy. I mean, you have all of the athletes, and you feel their energy. They've done the thing, right? Like, they can just relax and enjoy and celebrate. Celebrate this moment that they've just gone through. And then for whatever reason, Tom Cruise was jumping off of yet another building. I'm like, tom, what are you doing? But it was fun. And then LA is going to host the next Olympics. And so having her perform and having the LA mayor there, getting the baton, that was just so special to have witnessed in person. And then all the singing and all the. You just felt like you were one. And those moments you rarely get, especially in everything that we're seeing in the world. That moment of just we're truly one, even if it's just for a couple hours, was very much felt. And I cherish it.

Matt Bowles: So, I as well, am someone who loves Paris. Keeps going back to Paris. For everybody that says Paris is overrated, I do not understand. I keep going back. I was just there in December, and I have huge love for the city of Paris. I think it deserves the hype that it gets. What do you love about Paris? Why does it keep calling you back?

Elsie Paulino: The city is beautiful. The city is absolutely beautiful. It's massive, but you still feel like it. It's quaint enough to feel comfortable there. I have friends in Paris that I met in Vienna. And so being able to see them, it's always this big reunion and the city just has this energy about it. And listen, I understand that I personally haven't had the best meals in my life in Paris, but that is okay because there's also a lot of diversity. People go to Paris and try to eat French food. Go to Paris and have Asian food. There's so much diversity. You can even find Colombian food in Paris; you can find anything. And those are the restaurants that have good eats. You know, like, stop going to these French restaurants. Stop chasing the duck and tell me you didn't have a good meal.

Matt Bowles: That's what's up. And hang out with the immigrant communities in Paris. Go to the Little Africa section of Arrondissement suite and hang out with all the Senegalese folks and see these markets that are set up just like they are on the continent. And the real diversity of Paris is just spectacular. If you actually get out there and go beyond the main tourist attractions.

Elsie Paulino: Yes, there's a huge Arab community. One of the best meals I had it was in one of those neighborhoods. It was like Middle Eastern restaurant where you got to pick your meat and tell them how you wanted it cooked. I mean incredible food.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I love Paris as well. Okay, I do have to ask you about one place in France that I have not been, that you have been, which is Strasbourg. And I want to ask you about the Christmas market. So, I am a Christmas market fan also, and I was in Paris in December. So, I got to see the Christmas markets in Paris. And then I went up. My sister and I actually did a brother sister trip through the Baltic region because neither of us had ever been to Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia. And so, we're like, let's just go and go through the Christmas markets in all these places. Take the boat across, go to Helsinki. And so, we did that trip just this past December. I am a huge Christmas market fan. It was amazing. It was delightful. But then I'm flipping through your content and I'm seeing Strasbourg, and you're talking about Teddy Bear Street. Tell me about this for people that have never heard of this.

Elsie Paulino: First of all, Matt, we just became real friends because I am freaking love Christmas markets and I need your itinerary because I haven't done that trip. And every year I will do a trip to see different

Christmas markets around Europe. I absolutely can't get enough. Love it. Stroudsburg. Stroudsburg is the cutest freaking place you'll ever visit. I mean, it is literally out of a fairy tale. Literally. There is a Teddy Bear Street filled with teddy bears all over the place. And it's just decorated. It's just. It's so cute, it was the best way that I can describe it. It's freaking adorable. And then you go to Karma and it's even cuter, and you're just overwhelmed by cuteness the entire time that you're there. And. Oh, my God. Yeah. No, Their Christmas market is elite. One of the best ones I've seen, and I've been to quite a few.

Matt Bowles: Well, I will definitely hit you up with this itinerary because it was uniquely spectacular. Like, it exceeded our expectations on a variety of levels. So, yes, you now have VIP access to all of my itineraries, Elsie. Well, another place that you had mentioned in passing that has drawn you back over the years is Mexico City. I know you have been to a number of different places in Mexico now, and I want to ask you about your evolving relationship with and connection to Mexico. Can you share a little bit about your journey through Mexico?

Elsie Paulino: I mean, it started like a lot of people's first introduction to Mexico. So, it was Cancun, it was Tulum. I actually did really love Tulum, even though it's become insanely expensive now. I stayed in the old town Tulum, and staying in the old town Tulum is probably what made me explore more, actually, because I didn't stay in that beach Tulum area. I got to explore a more local area in Mexico, and I loved it. So that made me want to explore more of Mexico. And then I went to Mexico City, and I absolutely fell in love. First of all, the city is massive. I had no idea. You have parks, you have beautiful landscapes, you have beautiful buildings, you have incredible food. I mean, Mexican food is. It is the top three for me. So, you can imagine how happy I am when I visit. And then from there, I wanted to see more. I just became obsessed. I almost became like a junkie. So, I've been to Mexico City now three times, and now I've been to Puerto Escondido, which is super underrated. It's a beach town is the best way that I can describe it. So, I highly, highly recommend it. There's so much to do, especially as it relates to nature. And then I went to Oaxaca for Dia de los Muertos, and that was a bucket list experience for me.

Matt Bowles: So, describe this for folks, anybody that may not know what Dia de los Muertos is. Can you describe the context and the cultural significance of that? And then what was your experience like attending it in Oaxaca?

Elsie Paulino: Yes. So, Dia de los Muertos is Day of the Dead. So, if you've seen Coco, it really is a great depiction of the celebration. And so, it's a time where the country celebrates those who have passed. And it's such a beautiful take on death because they truly celebrate their lives. And they celebrate it with spending time at the cemeteries, and they decorate the cemetery. I mean, it's incredible. And they also have things like their favorite foods and their favorite people, and they just spend the entire night just remembering them and celebrating them, and it's beautiful.

So, I got to go to Oaxaca City, which is the place to experience Dia de los Muertos. And at first, I'll be honest, it felt invasive. It almost felt like because I did go to those cemeteries, because I wanted to see it and I wanted to experience it for myself. But when I got there, I just asked questions of the families that were there and understood the significance to them. And every time I approached someone, they were so friendly and welcoming, and they were happy. It was such a joyous moment for them and their families and their friends and their loved ones and the care that they take to decorate and the detail of these seven. I mean, it. It's like something you'll never experience. It felt so special. It definitely changed my perspective on death and was beautiful.

Matt Bowles: All right, we're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. For direct links to everything we have discussed in this episode, including all the ways to find, follow and connect with Elsie, just go to the show notes at themaverickshow.com and go to the show notes for this episode. And if you would like to hang out with me and Elsie Chelsea in person and hear her speak at the upcoming [Latino Travel Fest](#) that's going to be June 20th to 22nd, 2025 in Chicago, Illinois. And you can get a special 15% discount. So just go to themaverickshow.com/latino and then at checkout use the code **Maverick15** and that will get you your 15% discount off of your ticket. And then I will see you in Chicago. So be sure if you do get a ticket to send me a DM on [Instagram](#) @maverickshowpod and that way you can let me know that you're coming and we can plan to link up at the event. There will be a bunch of other Maverick Show guests there as well, so it's going to be an amazing crowd. Come through if you can and hang out. Once Again, go to themaverickshow.com/latino know and use the code **Maverick15** at checkout for your discount and I will see you in Chicago. Everything else will be in [the show notes](#) and be sure to tune in to the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Elsie Paulino. Good night, everybody.