

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Rosie Bell. She is an international travel writer and location independence educator. She's been published in Conde Nast Traveler, Forbes Travel Guide, BBC Travel, BBC Work Life, Lonely Planet, and many other publications. She teaches people how to travel and work online through courses, books, and mentoring. She is also the author of [The Art and Business of Travel Writing](#). And the author of [Escape to Self](#), originally from Nigeria. She has been a digital nomad for seven years and has now traveled to over 40 countries.

Rosie, welcome to the show.

Rosie Bell: Hi. Thank you so much. So much for having me. It's such a pleasure to be here. You have no idea.

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to have you here. We just need to set the scene and talk about where we are recording from because you and I are in person today and we are in the Canary Islands.

Rosie Bell: Indeed. The weather is glorious. I'm very happy. I came from London. It's much warmer here.

Matt Bowles: Yes. And we normally might do a wine night, but you're not a wine person and so we are doing instead a beer night.

Rosie Bell: Thank you for that. Thank you so much. So, accommodating. Matt,

Matt Bowles: Listen, whatever the criteria is, The Maverick Show can accommodate. So, we have a six-pack of beer windup and uh, we'll likely be drinking through that throughout the course of this interview.

Can you share a little bit just for folks about what it has been like here, we are on the island of Tenerife for people who have never been. What is it like?

Rosie Bell: The weather is amazing. We've just had this lovely dinner. People are sitting all fresco. It's just like that lovely low-key laid-back Spanish life. It's wonderful. I love it. It's my second time here.

Matt Bowles: It's amazing. Late night dinners, go out for a dinner around 10, have an unbelievable entree of any kind. If you like seafood, it's spectacular here. Just had some tonight together and wine is insane. If you are a wine drinker, really delightful.

You have both the mountains and the beaches here. I feel like a lot of times people feel they need to choose between a mountain location and a beach location, but you come here, and you get both.

Rosie Bell: Exactly. You don't need to decide if you're an introvert or an extrovert, you know, because they say extroverts love the beach and introverts love the mountains. So, you can just do it all here.

Matt Bowles: Truth. And you and I are about to depart together on the [Nomad Cruise](#). And you have been on a [Nomad Cruise](#) before. I as well have been on multiple Nomad Cruises before, but for people that have never been on a [Nomad Cruise](#), what was your experience like last time? And why did you choose to come back on another [Nomad Cruise](#)?

Rosie Bell: I really loved my last experience. I went on the very last sailing between Italy and Greece, and I was skeptical of joining it for a couple of years. I don't know, I'd heard that people said that it can be a little bit full on. There were so many people. There are so many things to do. You never really know.

There are just too many choices essentially. I'm so happy I did. I genuinely feel without being a lot too elaborate that it changed me in certain ways. It was really nice to just immerse myself in this community and I met so many people who have inspired me tremendously. Professionally, I've met people who are just so inspiring and accomplished and yet still so humble.

I think that's one of the amazing things about this community. And everyone's just giving back, you know, all the speakers, the workshops, the masterminds, everything. People are just giving their time. And there is honestly nothing more precious than that.

Matt Bowles: Well, you are one of those keynote speakers on this cruise. I am super excited to attend your talk. I have already booked it in my calendar, and I will be in the front row. Can you share a little bit about what you will be speaking about on this upcoming [Nomad Cruise](#)?

Rosie Bell: I'm also looking forward to your talk and I'll also be there at yours. My workshop will be about how to get free publicity for your online business.

So, since it is a [Nomad Cruise](#), I imagine there'll be a lot of people who are location dependent or want to be location independent. And so, I'm essentially going to be imparting information about things that I wish I knew when I first started my first online business in general, but also my first online business, you know, ways to make the media, your friend. And since I am a journalist, I do have some information about that. So, I'm going to be talking to people about how they can harness the media, get those big-name publications and ultimately grow their businesses.

Matt Bowles: I am going to be there #1, obviously to support you, but also to be taking notes for myself. I am super excited about your talk. And then we will be on this cruise. We are crossing the Atlantic and we are going to end up in Salvador de Bahia in Brazil, which you and I both, I think, share a uniquely profound love for Brazil. I am regularly asked about favorite countries and I'm like, I don't have a favorite country.

That's why I'm a nomad. I travel all over the world. Like, come on, what is it really? I'm like, fine it's Brazil. And I feel like you and I have bonded over our love for Brazil. Can you share a little bit about some of your previous experiences in Brazil and what was so uniquely endearing and compelling to you about Brazil?

Rosie Bell: How much time do we have? Because I could go on all day, all night. It's almost impossible to quantify. I think I've shared with you a little bit about, first of all, just Rio, just from an aesthetic point of view, how its beauty is genuinely unfair to every other city in existence. It's just natural beauty.

Matt Bowles: It's insane.

Rosie Bell: Another place that has the beach and the mountains, but you know, you want waterfalls, you want beaches, you want culture. You want the music. And just, I think my love affair with Brazil started because I was sort of mildly indoctrinated by my mother who loved Brazil. She grew up loving Brazil. She'd never been there, but it was just this place that had a presence in our home. And when I went there, it was a very sort of strange homecoming. Also, my family's Nigerian and I. Found a lot of very similar food there. I just loved the combination of cultures, and the music, the music really does something for me.

Everyone's always moving, and people just break out into samba dancing, you know, on the street, just like casually at 5 PM. And the longest place I've ever lived was London, which is very different to that. No, one's really just sort of dancing in the afternoon without any beverages, anyway. There's just so much to love about Brazil and it's just a massive country.

And not even just the beauty in Rio as well. I then went to the Northeast, I went to Jericoacoara as well. You know, these massive dunes overlooking the water. It just doesn't make any sense. It's unfair. And if I could speak Portuguese fluently, I would be there. I would be living there.

Matt Bowles: Listen, I feel very similar. I have been to Brazil three separate times, and I have been to three separate parts of the country as well. My first time in Rio, I was there for two months, and I was like, I don't want to leave Rio for a single day, because how could anything else possibly be better than Rio? I don't want 59 days if I can have 60. I'm not, I'm not seeing any other part of Brazil. I'm not doing it. How could it be better than this?

And then I'm traveling around, and then I meet with other travelers, having the favorite city discussion. And I meet this woman who's more well-traveled than me.

And what's your favorite city without flinching? She goes, Sao Paulo, Brazil. I said, Sao Paulo. She said, Yeah, I said, you've been to Rio. She goes, yep. And you've been to Istanbul and Tokyo. And they say, Yep, yep, yep, yep. Hands down, Sao Paulo.

Rosie Bell: Wow.

Matt Bowles: And I was like, tell me why. And then she starts telling me. And then I'm like, I got to go.

So, then I went back to Brazil by myself just to go and experience Sao Paulo. And it blew my mind in very different ways, some overlapping ways, but also very different ways than Rio. But similar to what you're saying, right? I was there. It was not a festival season. It was not a carnival. It was none of that. It was just a regular Saturday and you're just walking around the streets and there are just block parties like DJs. People have taken over the street. It has arguably the best street art in the entire continent of South America, in Sao Paulo. It is mind-blowing the caliber of street art, which for me is a really endearing element of a city. I love that.

So, I had an entire day long private street art tour went to all these different parts of the city. I mean, it was just, it was unbelievable. The culinary scene in Sao Paulo is perhaps rivaled only by Lima, Peru in the continent, I would say, but after Lima, Sao Paulo is ridiculous in terms of the food scene.

I could go on, but I was just, it was so amazing. And then the third time I went back, like you, I went to those Northern beach towns. I went and spent three weeks in Jericoacoara and it's entirely different from Rio or Sao Paulo, but it's magical and it's amazing. And Each time I go to Brazil, I'm like, why did I ever leave Brazil?

Rosie Bell: Yeah, precisely. Honestly, when I said that it's almost impossible to describe. When I first arrived in Brazil, I actually just broke down in tears. It was just a relief and just a gratitude and joy that I finally made it there. And I have to say, I had many experiences like that there where I was just so overcome with joy and appreciation.

And of course, if you go during carnival, that's a whole other thing in itself. And I did go to the carnival for the first time. I loved my first carnival so much. That I went to the second year by myself. I just went completely alone. I eventually, you know, met a lovely nomad group and we all, these people, didn't even know each other.

I think I just met them five minutes before that. And then we went to the Beatles block party, you know, the Beatles block party during carnival, where all the Beatles songs are Sambafied. It's so amazing. And Hey Jude come on. Hey Jude Sambafied. And all 10 of us are crying, but like those happy tears, those like, what have we just experienced?

Tears that like, no one's talked about since, or we've been able to explain, but it happened, and we were there, and we saw it. And then boom, a rainbow comes out and just what Brazil is just ridiculous.

Matt Bowles: It's ridiculous. And the first time that I went as well, when I stayed in Rio for those two months, I went over Carnival because I wanted to experience Carnival, but I also wanted to experience Rio in non-Carnival time as well.

So that's why I stayed for a full two months. I stayed in two different neighborhoods in Rio because I wanted to have the beach experience, but I also wanted to have the non-Carnival beach experience of Rio and just live in the more kind of artsy Bohemian local kind of areas. So, like, I mean, Rio just, it blew my mind in every single way.

And I'm so excited to go back this time because Salvador has been at the tippy top of my list for so long because so many people have gone there. It is the Epicenter of Afro-Brazilian culture. And everyone that has gone there has just raved about it. So, I am so excited that that's where we're going and you haven't been there either, right?

Rosie Bell: I have not been there. No, it's going to be another amazing bucket list thing for me. I was just in London, I would say two weeks ago, and I went to the travel trade show, the world travel market and I met the Salvador tourism, and this beautiful Bayana gave me this bracelet that I'm wearing, and apparently, I'm not to take it off until it falls off by itself because I've made three wishes and I'm mildly superstitious.

So, I kind of believe in it. So, you know, it doesn't look the best right now, but I'm keeping it on because of what it represents. And it's just, it's that magic. And Brazil is a place that holds magic. And not just for me, it has something. There are so many people who have this saudade feeling, you know, when they leave and they can't really explain it or, you know, and I'm very excited to be going to Bahia.

Matt Bowles: Yes, so am I. And I think your point also is really significant in terms of the West African cultural dynamics that you've noticed there. As you know, I've spent probably about six months in West Africa, which is one of my favorite regions in the world. It's amazing. And I went to Brazil before I went to West Africa.

So, I was almost like, experiencing some of this stuff in reverse. Like I first experienced Brazil and then I experienced West Africa. I was like, oh wow, this is quite something. I feel like that's where we should actually go back now and start with your story from the beginning because you are from the amazing country of Nigeria.

Let's start from the beginning. Can you share a little bit about your experience growing up? Cause part of it was in Nigeria and part of it was in a lot of other places. So, can you sort of take us back and talk about growing up in Nigeria and other places?

Rosie Bell: Thank you for the introduction, Matt. Thank you.

So yes, I was born in Nigeria. I was born in Lagos, and I feel a lot of people know more about Lagos and more about Nigeria now, thanks to the music. You know, which is amazing. So, I was born in Lagos. My dad was a diplomat. And so, we left shortly after that and moved to Namibia. And I lived there for a couple of years. So, Namibia, Southern Africa borders, South Africa. Again, that's a place that when I lived there, a lot of people had never heard of it. And in fact, when I left Namibia and many years later moved to Holland and I would mention it to people, they would say Namibia, Namibia. Maybe that's not a real place. You've made up this fantasy kingdom that you lived in.

And now Namibia is super-hot, and people are like, oh, have you heard of Windhoek? Yes, I've heard of Windhoek actually. Thank you very much. Yes. I am Nigerian and yeah, my experiences there have definitely shaped who I am, even though I left when I was very young, but there are still certain things that I didn't even realize that I had retained.

For instance, Nigerians are quite competitive and very into Scrabble and Scrabble is something that, you know, in my family is like, that's where we argue. That's our thing. And, uh, Nigeria has been the global world champion in Scrabble, I think two or three times. This is something that not many people know.

We are very competitive, you know, as they say, Naija No Dey Carry Last, we are just very competitive. You kind of always have to do better than your parents did. And my dad did quite well. So, I think we always had this idea that, you know, you've got to try, you've got to be better. You've got to do things.

We're always very ambitious. Everybody at Nigerians, we just, we want to do well. We want to look; we want to look good. You know, we want to feel good. We want to sound; we want people to think good about us. Yes. So, I traveled around a lot and those different places that I've lived in have impacted me in different ways, for sure.

Matt Bowles: So where did you go after you went to Nigeria, then you went to Namibia, and then it was back to Nigeria,

Rosie Bell: Yes, indeed.

Matt Bowles: Right? And then from there, what was the rest of that journey like?

Rosie Bell: In Nigeria, it was in Abuja at this time, so not in Lagos, lived there for a couple of years and then moved to the Netherlands or Holland in The Hague.

So, I lived in the Hague ever since I was around 12, 13 and I grew up there. Very idyllic, nice life by the North Sea and then moved to London when I was 17 and that's the longest, I ever lived anywhere. So, with my dad's job, we're very itinerant. So, you know, you do a couple of years abroad, then go back to Nigeria, go a couple of years abroad, come back to Nigeria.

So, I'd never lived anywhere for more than five years up until, you know, my twenties. So that was something that I was interested to deal with because I didn't know how to do that. I didn't actually know how to live in a place where you weren't always preparing to go somewhere else. So, I think that kind of makes sense as to why I'm a nomad now.

It's kind of a no brainer and also a travel journalist where it's literally my job to travel and write about those experiences due to that sort of peripatetic diplomatic upbringing.

Matt Bowles: What would you say was the impact of the experience of being a third culture kid and growing up in that way and having that lens and that view of the world? How did those experiences shape you, would you say?

Rosie Bell: I think it's given me a sort of superpower in a way that third culture kids have. Like, I'm not saying that I'm like Barack Obama, who is somebody I very much respect, but you know, he's a third culture kid as well. He's, you know, he's got these two very different backgrounds.

And when I say superpower it's in the sense that you can fit in anywhere because you're from everywhere and nowhere. You can gain membership to any society, because you have been a chameleon that's, you know, ever since you, that's your *de rigueur*, your status quo is being a chameleon. But then the flip side of that is you never really fully have membership of any one group.

So, this side of your people might question your loyalties during the world cup or the Euro cup or whatever that, you know, I'm boiling it down to something very almost trivial, but. In a way you can go everywhere, but never fully be from anywhere.

Matt Bowles: And so, when you were then based in London, can you talk about your more traditional path that you began to pursue there? Once you got the sedentary life that you hadn't had, and you were interested in trying, and you tried it out, how did that go for you?

Rosie Bell: Well, I think, you know, hindsight is the best, you know, it's 2020. Hindsight is 2020. You see everything clearly when you're looking back. You don't know when you're in it. I lived in London for many years, and I think I, I did the supposed journey, you know, the things that you should do.

So, you graduate from Uni, you know, we call it Uni, not college. You graduate from Uni, you get a good job, you get a couple of promotions, and then you ideally buy a house in London within zones one to five, if you can afford it by the time you're 29. Ideally you should be getting engaged by the time you're like 27, 28, and then definitely be married by 30 and, you know, have risen up the ranks in your company and be a director or whatever, you know, you can see it in front of you, what the things that you're "supposed to do".

And the strange thing is no one actually ever said that. It says, hey, this is what you're supposed to do, but you just know, you just feel it. You get these inferences and societal inferences, and you know, some of them are very tacit, but you just know, and when you're not doing those things, you really doubt yourself and question yourself whether or not you ever really wanted them to begin with in the first place.

But then again, most of us don't really ask ourselves what we want. So, and I'd never really asked myself what I wanted. So, I went to Uni and then I got my dream job, which genuinely was my dream job. I wanted to work in advertising. And that was what I'd worked towards when I was in high school, even internships, university, all of that stuff.

Then I get my dream job straight out of university. Didn't thankfully have to wait that long, because you know, sometimes people would wait a couple of years and they'd get in later. And then they'll realize afterward it's not for them. But for me, it was a baptism of fire sort of situation. I got in and very quickly, it was like, okay, your dream is more of a nightmare and people are very competitive here and I am competitive. Don't get me wrong. I am, you know, my family doesn't play games with me anymore cause I'm that competitive.

That's who I am. But people wanted to compete about anything in this very competitive society. You know, oh, did you make a cup of tea for the team? I made three cups of tea for the team today. But like, I don't really need to be like, that's not, that's not where I want to compete. That's not a good use of my time and my effort and my energy.

I don't want to play political games at work. I don't want to, you know, have to socialize with my colleagues because, you know, enforced socializing is really a thing. If you don't go to the pub afterwards, you're not a team player. And it was just, that's just not what I wanted to do with my life. But again, you have this sort of feeling like, you should be happy because it's an amazing opportunity.

You know, these companies open doors for you. It's, you know, I was starting my career, and you feel like you should be grateful. So, you don't even feel like you have the right to complain about the things that aren't setting your soul on fire.

Matt Bowles: So how during this time did your interest in travel develop?

And obviously when you're moving around as a kid, that's not your choice. And oftentimes you might not even be happy about that because you got to leave your friends. I mean, I moved around when I was a kid and a lot of it was hard because you got to leave your friends and it's sad. You go to different places, and you don't have a choice over that. But then as an adult, how did your interest and choice to internationally traveled the world. How did that develop?

Rosie Bell: Well, even though I was in London, I still sort of always had, I have one of my best friends. We have an annual trip that we've taken without fail for a decade. So that was a thing that we'd put so much effort into to planning that trip and down to our swim, where we're going to take and which booking the hotel, it was so exciting. That was a pivotal part of our lives. And you know, it was just one holiday, but the fact that it was just so joy-inducing, I knew that I wanted that, but I didn't necessarily know how to do that. I didn't know anything about being a nomad or, you know, visas or how to work abroad.

I didn't know any of those things. I didn't know that they were an option. I didn't know if they were possible for me and how, I guess, where the travel in London was ultimately because of like a mild tragedy in a way. I had a breakup one year and I just needed to get out of London. It was so extreme that I was like, I need to get out of here.

I can't breathe. I just need some fresh air. So, I decided to go to Costa Rica for three months. I was going to go and try and live somewhere else. Obviously, I knew that I loved the beach. I had like a hundred bikinis that, you know, we're just collecting dust in London. And I was going to go try to live in Costa Rica.

There are some places that you go to, and you just have this instant love. And I thought that I was going to have that in Costa Rica where I was going to be like, yes, I've left London. I'm at home. Everything's great now. Rainforest, beaches, sloths. And I didn't necessarily quite find that. And then one day I'm just sitting in a hostel, and I see a Lonely Planet guidebook and I'm just flipping through it.

And then, there was Panama in the guidebook and I thought, Oh, okay, I'll go to Panama for five days and check it out and see what it's like. And I booked a bus. I was going to go by bus from, you know, coast from San Jose, Toronto city, stay there. And everything that happened from the second I arrived in Panama Conspired for me to never leave Panama.

I had the best experiences there, and I truly believe that is where my adult life began from that moment, from that day when I ended up in Panama.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing, particularly because I have never been to Panama and our discussions about it have made me put it much higher on my list. Can you share for folks, first of all, how would you describe that initial experience, how fundamentally different it was from your experience in Costa Rica? What was it about Panama that made you fall in love with it so quickly.

Rosie Bell: Well, first of all, weather, coming from London and having lived in London for over a decade, I just needed to be in a place where I could just shed layers, like literal layers, emotional layers. Um, the weather is such an important factor in my life. It was just beautiful. It was the city on the water with these tall buildings. It's tropical and it was safe. It's a city that's very safe. I felt safe there and, you know, traveling solo, man or woman, whoever you are, it's not a given. You don't have that everywhere. Panama City is, I mean, they're going through a bit of stuff now, but it is the safest city in Central America.

It's just the beauty. It's the people I met. I just had these magical experiences where I feel like the universe conspired for me to love it and like it. And if I may tell you one particular story which happened on my second day in Panama City. So, I'm staying in the old town. I'm at this hostel, you know, overlooking the bay and I meet this gentleman from L.A., and I took, spoken to him for all, I don't know, two hours. That's all he knew of me. He'd met me for two hours and he said, oh, well, have you heard of Bocas del Toro? And I said, well, yes, I've heard of it, but you know, I don't have time to go there on this trip. I'm not really sure. I, you know, I'm here for five days.

I've got to go. And he was like, no. You, you have to go to Bocas del Toro. You of all people. And I didn't even really know what he meant. Because I didn't think that he knew me, but he said, trust me you need to go there. And I was like, yeah, well, and he said, stop with the excuses. Give me your passport number. I'm going to buy you a flight.

Matt Bowles: Wow.

Rosie Bell: And I was like, what? And he said, yeah, I'm going to buy you a flight. You have to go to Boca del Toro. There's this event happening on Saturday. There's this crazy place where there's a trampoline and you just jump into the ocean and there's music and you're going to love it.

And I gave him my passport details and he bought me a flight. And I don't really know that guy. I've never really seen him again since then, but he was just like, you need to be there. And then I went to Bocas del Toro, and I just fell in love. It was love at first sight. And I was said, one day I'm going to move to Panama. And eventually, I did.

Matt Bowles: That is amazing for folks who are not familiar with Bocas del Toro. They've never heard of it. Can you describe what it was like and maybe give some tips or highlights for people who may want to travel there?

Rosie Bell: Bocas del Toro is a gorgeous archipelago in Panama on the Caribbean side, it's just sort of like this ramshackle village that you know it technically its best days were behind it, but it's got these buildings on the water. You're just, your life is on the water and you literally get by a water taxi. Like that's your, that's your mode of transportation. Oh, which paradise island will I live on today?

Oh, do I want that one that looks like this postcard or that one with a rugged postcard? Like where do I want to live today? And you know, you just live your best Pina Colada life and its low key. It's laid back. Get your shorts, get your bikinis, reggae music, live music. There's live music. Every single day, you know, there's this running joke, like many Caribbean islands that, you know, the three lies of Bocas, you know, and one of them is I'm leaving tonight.

Cause no one's ever leaving. No one ever just stays for one night and no one ever visits just once. It's one of those places that just transfixes you from the vibes. And also, just the beauty because it's just one of those places. And it really, it really has my heart. I now write about it for Lonely Planet, which is interesting because Lonely Planet is what got me to Panama in a way, just reading that guidebook.

And now I write the guidebooks myself, which is really interesting, but yes, it's this gorgeous archipelago and you choose your paradise essentially between nine main islands.

Matt Bowles: Well, I know that you also love Panama City. Can you talk a little bit about what is it like in Panama City and what tips or highlights do you have for people that would want to visit?

Rosie Bell: Feeling hot. It's hot. Okay. It's very hot. It can be humid. But the amazing thing about Panama City is you are in a metropolis that it's got all these skyscrapers. It's essentially two cities in one. And so, the old town is these cobblestone streets and these balconies and the lights and there's rooftops everywhere.

So, you can be at one rooftop and see four other rooftops and decide which rooftop you want to go to. Fresh seafood, music, reggaeton, all of that. That's in the old town. And then you have this beautiful promenade called Cinta Costera and you can walk through there to get to new Panama or like the modern buildings. You know, the skyscrapers, sail-shaped buildings that, you know, look like you're in Dubai or something. You know, the tallest rooftop pool in Central America is there.

So, you're really in this metropolis, which is two cities in one. And then in between both of those places that I mentioned, there's then a tropical rainforest right in the middle of the city where you can wake up in the morning and go for a hike and see toucans if you want, toucan sloths, whatever, what do you want? Take your pick.

Matt Bowles: I got to go there. That's amazing. So you go on the strip, you fall in love with it. And then the next steps in your professional career, how do you transition out of the corporate world?

Rosie Bell: Yes. So, I worked in advertising in London and then I very quickly realized that wasn't for me. And then I realized that I didn't want to do that anymore, but I most importantly wanted to work for myself.

So, I took time off. I did my master's in brands, communication, and culture. And then I realized I wanted to start my brand. But I didn't know what I wanted to do. So, I made a list. I love making lists. I have lists for everything. I'll happily share some of my lists afterwards. So, I made a list of what I liked the most and what wouldn't feel like work.

Cause that's something that's important for me or was important for me. I didn't want something that would feel like work. So, I made a list of what I loved the most. And I've mentioned it already, I think four times in this podcast. this interview today, bikinis, swimwear. I loved swimwear. As I mentioned, I had a ridiculous amount for someone who lived in a city with no palm trees.

And so, I was going to design swimwear. I taught myself everything. I did that for a while. And then again, also realized that fashion wasn't for me. But interestingly, one of the parts that I loved the most from that journey was the marketing that I did, or content marketing on the blog. So, I thought, you know what, I might do the writing. I'm going to try to write, and I was living in Panama. I started writing for a couple of blogs and then I'd just been there for a while to the point where, you know, because I lived there, and I was sort of a local expert. I had, you know, big names coming to me to say, you know, oh, can you go review that fancy hotel for us?

And I was like, I'll happily review all of them for you. Thank you for Shiva guide. Sure. And so, in a sort of roundabout way, I was led to this career, which was also related to being in Panama. I was in a place that I was so passionate about, and you could really read it in everything I ever wrote about Panama.

It was like, I was so thoroughly, madly in love and you could read it. And people started coming to me to just ask about that. And it was, it's passion. I, and it didn't feel like work.

Matt Bowles: Well, I also want to ask you about some of the other places that your travel journey has led you to, especially some places that I have not yet been. First of all, can you talk about your experience in Cuba?

Rosie Bell: Yes. Cuba is such an interesting island. It is, you know, stuck in time in like, such a beautiful way, but there are also some frustrations in Cuba. I had one of those experiences there that, Couldn't have happened anywhere else, probably we were against, that was one of my, that was the first of my annual trips was my best friend that we took every year, this big celebration of like our friendship, which I'm so proud that we've been able to do actually, you know, with like one person that you're like, where are we going this year? We're doing it.

This is our commitment to each other, no matter what else happens in our lives and our families with work, whatever. So, Cuba was our first trip, you know, obviously, you go to the Caribbean and many Caribbean islands are, you know relatively similar in what you can get. You can get a nice hotel, international food, music, festivals, culture, but Cuba is its own very unique entity.

And just, you know, based on the history, the political history, the conditions that still remain now, and something that people aren't even used to is just, you know, doing a digital detox. You will do an enforced detox. digital detox in Cuba. Like they will do it for you. You won't have to turn off your phone because it just won't work there.

It's a very interesting place. And I think it's something that can teach people about how to sort of get out of the modern comforts that you might think that you need, but actually you'll be fine without.

Matt Bowles: Well, I do want to ask you about another place as well that I have not been to. Can you talk about your experience in Bonaire?

Rosie Bell: Bonaire. I love Bonaire.

Matt Bowles: And for folks that don't know about Bonaire, where is it? And what was it like?

Rosie Bell: Bonaire is one of the Dutch Caribbean islands. It's one of the ABC islands, so Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao. Aruba definitely gets the lion's share of column inches and visitors, and each of them have their own different flair.

Bonaire is the one that's biggest with divers because the water is absolutely pristine. The entire island is a protected marine park, so they're thoroughly serious about conservation there. You don't even need snorkel gear, gear. You can, you can just see everything. It's just impeccably clean.

And one thing that I loved about it that just took my breath away was that again, because I'm a third culture kid and I grew up in this environment where you're moving around and you're around all these languages. Everybody in Bonaire is so effortlessly multilingual, everybody speaks at least four languages, and they just switch between them just like that.

There is nothing strange about that. It's just almost everyone's sort of this very multicultural, you know, you're listening to salsa music from the Dominican Republic and then you go to a place and then you order in Dutch, and then someone speaks to you in Spanish. It's just this world to it's like on its own, which almost nobody knows about.

Most people have never heard of Bonaire. In fact, when I was flying there, I flew from Mexico, and I stopped in Miami, and nobody had heard of it at the airport. The immigration officers didn't know where I was going. And they said, "Where you're doing what?" So, it's just this very unique place that is, you know, yours to take if you want somewhere that probably nobody else has been to. Nobody knows anything about it. And there is much more to it than just diving, but the waters were just pristine. And if you like snorkeling, if you love swimming, if you love diving, um, even if you don't, if you just want like that taste of Caribbean culture, that's just, yeah, I'm transfixed.

Matt Bowles: Well, I do also want to ask you about Mexico. I know that is a place that you have spent a lot of time in is very near and dear to your heart as it is to mine. You and I have talked a lot about our love of Mexico. I was just in CDMX about a month ago and I try to go as often as I can. It is just such a special place, but what have your experiences been like in Mexico and some of the highlights and things that you love about it?

Rosie Bell: Ooh, this is one of those other ones where it's like, where do I begin? I think a really easy starting point, which most people will be able to understand, is the food. If you don't like the food in the place, if I don't like the food in a place, I find it hard to feel comfortable there. I don't know about you, but my sister jokes that every time she calls me, she says, oh, you're eating tacos again.

Oh, more tacos. You really love your tacos. There are tacos with every variety, but obviously, it's much more than just tacos, just, the change in culture from this place to that place. And you go to Oaxaca, and they have this festival, and you go there and that's how they do day of the dead. There's just so much to learn.

And I feel in a way I feel sadness about that because I feel like I actually grew up most of my life only hearing bad things about Mexico. And then I went there in my mid-twenties, and I was just blown away. And I felt like this was a big, bad wave of PR a bad PR that they had, but I genuinely feel so at home in Mexico. And a big part of that is the people are really a big part of that as the people. They're just so welcoming. I just, you know, invite you into their house. They, you, they cook for you. They show you. They're also so open to tell you about. Your cultures to tell you about how their abuela did this.

I've just felt such an incredible level of warmth there. They really invite you in. They allow you to feel comfortable in their home, which is obviously not something that you have everywhere. It's also just such a scenic place. Just a physically scenic country with everything that you want, every climate you want, every comida you want.

Matt Bowles: I agree with you on all of those things. I mean, the food, for starters, is insane. And if you think you've had tacos or you think you've had good tacos, go to Mexico. I aim to eat as many tacos as I can. I'll eat them with you. I aim to end each evening eating late-night tacos, no matter what I'm doing, if I'm out of this or if I'm out of that or whatever it is, on the way home.

At any hour, if it's an early night, if it's a super late night, doesn't matter. Go buy a taco stand and have late-night tacos. And it is just an emotional experience. It's that good. It's incredible. So, the food is nuts. It's just wild how good it is. And then, yeah, it's just a, it's just a wonderfully special place.

It's interesting to me that you were also experiencing negative socialization about Mexico, because I feel like Americans get that very heavily because we border Mexico and there's all of this media about everything from like anti-immigrant rhetoric to the stuff about the cartels and violence and like, it's very heavy in the United States.

But that's interesting to me that also outside the United States that you also had some of that negative socialization about Mexico before you went?

Rosie Bell: Oh, absolutely, whether it was, you know, cartel-based movies or shows or whatever, or in the news, I feel like I genuinely never really heard anything positive about Mexico until I went there.

My most positive experiences were at the restaurant Loco Mexicano that my sister and I used to go to, and they'd give you hats and whatever, and you could drink in the culture that way. But I felt like the most of the positive rhetoric was around food. It still is for me. I, we all know why, but yeah, I never really heard a lot of good things.

So, I was really blown away. And, you know, sometimes you go somewhere, and you have these lofty expectations, but I didn't have any. So, every day was just gaining deeper affection and love. And of course, cartel stuff exists. I mean, we can't deny that, you know, wherever you've been, maybe you've heard stuff or there's been a news report, or a place closed down because of a shooting, like that's real.

So, no one's denying that. That element doesn't exist as well, but a whole country can't be boiled down to a certain thing that's happening with a certain group of people.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. And I think that is the case with a lot of places in the world. And I think that is an excellent travel lesson that can be applied to many other places.

Does anything come to mind in terms of any other places that you visited where there were, there's negative socialization in advance and then you went and it was just something entirely different.

Rosie Bell: Absolutely. Buenos Aires, I had a very strong feeling that I would love it. But even up until the day before I went, you know, someone said to me, oh, are you sure you want to go? It's so dangerous. You're, you know, you're going to get mugged. And I've had friends as well who told me about, you know, some sort of harassment stuff, people being rude, all of that stuff.

And I'm not denying that those things happen to those people or continue to happen or will happen. But Buenos Aires on its own has now become one of my favorite cities in the world. I absolutely adore Buenos Aires and I'm so happy that I didn't listen because if I didn't, I would have robbed myself of some of the most beautiful months that I've ever spent in Latin America. So, I think if there's an adult travel lesson that you could take is take travel advice with a pinch of salt.

Matt Bowles: Yeah. Listen, I mean, I get that all the time. There are so many places that I go where people say so many things, your home country, one of them.

Rosie Bell: I bet.

Matt Bowles: Excellent example. The first time that I was going to Lagos, Nigeria for a month, people were like, oh my God. And they were, you know, people were saying all kinds of stuff.

And I went and I had the most delightful experience in my very first week, the first couple of days in Lagos. I go out and I find a local coffee shop and I order my coffee and my stuff and I'm getting ready to leave. And I go to pay, and my credit card doesn't work because there's a lot of this American credit card companies thinking that Nigerian based attempts to charge things are a scam and all this other stuff.

And they don't allow the credit charge to go through. So, then I'm like, oh man, my credit card doesn't work. I don't have cash. We need to go to the ATM. So, I, the guy says, Oh, no problem. I'll walk you over. I'll show you where the ATM is. So, he walked me over to the ATM. I'm putting my card in.

And this local guy walks up next to me and he's using the ATM next to me. And my ATM card doesn't work either. So now the guy's standing there with my bill. My credit card doesn't work, and I can't get any cash with the ATM. I have no way to pay this guy. And the local Nigerian guy who's at the machine next to me, he looks over, he sees what's going on.

He goes, what's up, man. Your card's not working? I was like, no, it's not working, man. And he goes, you need to pay this bill. And I was like, Yeah, I do. And he says, oh, bro, what's, how much is the bill? He asked the waiter, and the waiter tells him, and he just pulls out money from his pocket and he pays the waiter and gives him a tip and then goes and walks to get back into his car.

And I was like, bro, thank you. But how do I get you back for that? And he was like, oh, don't worry about it, bro. I got you. Welcome to Nigeria. I was like, Oh my gosh. And so, this was my experience one after another, after another, like it was all loving the whole month. And so, I like to tell those stories, you know, because people have impressions of places that they haven't been. And there's all of this negative socialization for all sorts of reasons in a lot of places in the world. And then you go there. And people are amazing.

Rosie Bell: And that experience that you had in Nigeria sounds so beautiful. And you know, those experiences that just make you happy that you travel, because the more you travel, I think it exposes you to the beauty of the world and the kindness of people.

You know, you trust somebody when they invite you into their home. Like you're trusting that they are who they say they are. They have good intentions. And I don't know, I think you kind of have to in life and the more you travel, at least the more I've traveled, I find that the more you realize that we all just want the same thing. We all want the same things.

Matt Bowles: All right. We're going to pause here and call that the end of part one. Everything we discussed in this episode is going to be in [the show notes](#). So, you can go to one place at themaverickshow.com and go to the show notes for this episode. There you will find links to everything we have discussed and remember to tune into the next episode to hear the conclusion of my interview with Rosie. Good night, everybody.